

MEDIA STATEMENT

TO: All media

ATTENTION: News Editors/ Reports

For Immediate use:

MINISTER NZIMANDE DISMISSES THE CLAIMS OF ABUSE OF POWER BY SUSPENDED DIRECTOR- GENERAL QONDE

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, dismisses with contempt claims by the Director General (DG) of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Mr Gwebinkundla Qonde, that the Minister wanted him out of the department since 2019.

The decision to place DG Qonde under precautionary suspension emanates from an adverse audit report by the Auditor-General's of South Africa (AGSA). The AGSA found that much of a total amount of just under R5 billion could not be properly accounted for over two financial years by the National Skills Fund (NSF).

These are indeed huge sums of money that the AGSA found they could not have been properly accounted for.

The DG of the DHET, by virtue of this position, is also the Accounting Authority of the NSF. He therefore has the responsibility for all the funds and their expenditure.

Whilst DG Qonde has not as yet been found guilty, a precautionary suspension is necessary so that a comprehensive forensic investigation into the NSF can be done. The need for such an investigation has also been called for by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA).

It is therefore a smokescreen that the suspension of DG Qonde is for any other reason than for conducting an investigation into this serious matter.

Minister Nzimande also notes with concern the continued reporting by some sections of the media on this matter in a manner that completely ignores these very serious audit findings.

It seems the media thus far has been reporting without even bothering to engage with the AG findings and their implications.

Media reportage thus far has also not even bothered to study the Standing Committee on public Accounts (SCOPA) hearings, findings and recommendations on the same matter.

"I do not express an opinion on the financial statements of the public entity because of the significance of the matters described in the basis for disclaimer of opinion section of this auditor's report. I was unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit

evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion on these financial statements,” said the Auditor-General.

On the other hand, during the National Skills Fund 2019/20 audit disclaimer hearing held on the 18 May 2021, the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) said that the Committee is wholly unsatisfied with the responses provided. “The Committee proposes a full-scale forensic investigation into NSF for the past three years. Further the Minister must provide a roadmap within 30 days on the process and structure of a forensic investigation, including its potential collaboration with the SIU”.

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