

## **SSA continues to try and shirk oversight**

*By Dianne Kohler Barnard MP – DA Shadow Minister of State Security*

There is only one question really: How much longer are South Africans prepared to wait?

It took years to complete the High-Level Review Panel Report in which it we finally saw confirmation of the open secret of the looting via the State Security Agency.

And here we are four years and a Zondo commission later, and... nothing. Where is our money? We need it. Our schools, clinics, hospitals, police stations, roads, bridges – it is all collapsing and not a cent of those billions has been recovered.

As far as I've ascertained the only criminal charges that have been laid in my particular arena are those I logged at the Cape Town Central police station on 3 March this year. These were against one Arthur Fraser.

It was under his watch as Deputy Director for Operations at the SSA that the Principle Agent Network was established. Millions, if not billions of Rands were reportedly siphoned off or spent irregularly, and the DA has requested SAPS to investigate possible criminal offences. If ever there was a treasonous act, this would be it.

We also laid charges regarding Fraser's possible involvement with the recording of the 'spy tapes' – in 2009, and John Steenhuisen as the then Chief Whip of the DA, did too in 2017. Both cases disappeared without trace.

Given the political climate of the day, and the zero tolerance stance South Africans are now apparently taking against corruption and political interference, I'm hoping that SAPS will do its utmost in investigating these and so many other charges against Fraser. The revelations, day after day, at the Zondo commission, confirmed every word that has ever been written about the State Security Agency – the suitcases of money walking out the door, the so-called robberies of millions as people used the SSA safe as an ATM, the politicians involving themselves in operational matters. Gun on hip 007 wannabes. Despite the HLRP report, despite the Zondo commission, those behind the multi-billion Rand looting have lived fine, rich lives, on huge fat salaries, for years and years and some have retired and are living off of huge fat state pensions – with those extra millions of ours ensuring their retirements are exceedingly comfortable.

After the smoke cleared, the Ministers behind the catastrophic lack of Intelligence before the multi-billion rand ANC-factional coup attempt caused unrest in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng last year, were held to account like this:

1. Left for pastures new;
2. Been promoted; and
3. Left untouched.

The fact that this country was caught with its pants around its ankles has confirmed our global laughing-stock status. The downhill slide which began when the Head of Interpol – our very own Jacki Selebi – was jailed, is now plummeting at warp speed. A 10 year old on the internet would have realised something big was up, but our highly paid intelligence services seemingly didn't look, understand or were so busy with their in-fighting than to protect the citizens of our country. Hundreds of people died and businesses and lives were ruined as a result.

Having worked on the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence for nearly three years, I must say I have never, in my 18 years in Parliament with some five portfolios behind me, seen a committee that appears to be undermined by both officials and Ministers.

I've looked from every angle but have no other option but to conclude that it is deliberate. This committee is a shadow of what it could be and should be. I believe that the fact that meetings are held behind closed doors is the main factor. Would SAPS be late or present an indifferent APP and budget to the police portfolio committee? Never.

Yet the section of SAPS that answers to the JSCI, Crime Intelligence, would.

If the presentations of the State Security Agency were held before television cameras, I've no doubt they would arrive on time, and present along specific, determined Treasury Guidelines.

There are officials – perhaps flaunting that same hoary old chestnut that they earn more than MPs and have permanent jobs unlike MPs – who either can't or won't do the work. More dangerously one has to ask if there is the possibility they deliberately hide information from the JSCI. Certainly no reference is ever made to the Zondo commission revelations.

I have deliberately left Defence Intelligence out, as they deliver quality product on time, despite annual budget cuts.

If the past 28 years taught us anything at all, it is that government – no matter who is at the helm – cannot and should not be allowed to govern without meticulous oversight. Yet doing effective oversight on this committee is like fumbling drunk through a hall of mirrors.

Around the world equivalent agencies are accountable to the Congress and the Senate, or various upper houses. Yet here, not so much. In fact hardly at all.

South Africa simply cannot afford this veil of secrecy over specifically the SSA. It goes against the HLRP report's edicts, but nothing has changed, nothing is out there. Except what is leaked in the spy vs spy dirty linen exposés.

There are those who will argue that if we had a coherent, professional intelligence cluster, we would never have had two Ministers and a Deputy Minister held hostage in Pretoria as they were in October last year. Intelligence should have known that the Struggle War Veterans were going to do something dramatic, and where were the so-called VIP protection personnel?

That three Ministers were put in a position of extreme danger, tells us our Intelligence Services learned nothing from their failures during the riots which, bear in mind, led to the deaths of over 300 people. And the cherry on the top, is that the NPA has simply dropped all charges.

This government's idea of a speedy implementation is make an announcement, then wait four years, then establish a commission, then wait two years, and then hope everyone has lost interest.

Promises are made but just not kept.

Recommendations are made but not implemented, or done so slowly that entire five year Parliamentary terms pass, and so does the expertise and institutional knowledge about the subject matter.

That is how this game is played. That is how MPs are played.

The HLRP report recommended that there be a shift to return the role and philosophy of our democratic intelligence capacity back to their Constitutional origins. It had of course been criminally warped during the Zuma years to serve anything but this country.

Yet we've seen a Minister bring back people on suspension and promote them – some say on the instruction of the President – and now another Minister has popped out the revolving door that sits at the entrance of this Intelligence Ministry, and is trying to clean up that mess. Rinse, wash, repeat. As far as anyone knows, further billions are still streaming out of the SSA via the hands of those employed by that agency and given to people who have no right to it.

Where is the investigation into the involvement of members of the national executive in intelligence operations? Who knows.

Reports emerge, questions are asked, then ignored or shoved under the carpet.

Here's a prime example of carpet stuffing: on the 1 September it was claimed that an ANC MP Dr Xaiomei Harvard was possibly spying for China, sharing classified information about our country with the Chinese Communist Party and this report allegedly comes via a leak from the sieve-like State Security Agency.

So I wrote to the President, who was then the de facto Minister of State Security, asking that this report be released.

After that, radio silence.

Before the Jackie Selebi era which opened the doors to a veritable Tsunami of maladministration, corruption and theft, our intelligence services not only served the nation, but had a fine reputation globally. This committee works hard, and works together in the hopes that we may claw that reputation back from the depths into which it has been plunged.

Frankly, if I'd had my way we would not have debated today, and left these Departments to whistle for their budgets.