

Xingwana aims to clarify New York trip expenditure

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The Department for Women, Children and People with Disabilities has refuted claims that it spent over R6m for a delegation to undertake a trip to New York last year.



(Image: GCIS)

Aiming to set the record straight on Tuesday, Minister Lulu Xingwana said during the trip, the department's delegation comprised of seven officials at a cost of about R1.1m, "contrary to the amount of R6.8m".

According to a submission made to the South African Human Rights Commission today, the Democratic Alliance has claimed that in February 2011, the department paid approximately R6.8m for a two-week trip to New York for a delegation of 49 officials.

Xingwana disputed this, saying the rest of the delegation was from Parliament, NGOs and other government departments or entities who covered their own expenses.

"The expenditure used for this purpose was not from the disability budget," said Xingwana.

Xingwana said the trip was related to the country honouring its international obligations. The department, on behalf of South Africa, has to report to the United Nations from time to time as a signatory to the UN Conventions relating to women, children and people with disabilities.

Spending on travel, subsistence only 'appeared' to be high

"Our international commitments mean that the department, in discharging its mandate, will have to travel to the United Nations, Geneva and SADC countries to report on the progress we are making in advancing the goals reflected in various conventions protocols to which we are signatories... failure to do so amounts to a dereliction of duty," Xingwana said.

In February 2011, the department attended the United Nations 55th Session on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in New York.

Responding to the report of the department's mismanagement and skewed spending, Xingwana said the department was recording an increase in spending pattern that led to the fact that the 2012/13 budget for travel and subsistence appeared to be high.

"The fact of the matter is that our mandate requires that we travel to provinces, engage various stakeholders, and monitor various service delivery points... Our co-ordination and monitoring work has an impact on our travelling budget," she said.

She also noted that as much as the department was working closely with the machineries established at provincial and local government, the department had a responsibility to strengthen the capacity of these machineries through their institutional capacity programme.

She said the nature of their work with children, women and people with disabilities, most of whom were unemployed, meant the department had to subsidise them when they travelled for official meetings.

The department received an unqualified audit during the 2010/11 financial year.

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