

## DCEO Investigates “Corrupt” Fertiliser Tender



By Lesotho Times

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THE Directorate of Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) is investigating a case of corruption in the awarding of the tender to supply the government with fertiliser for the 2022 summer cropping season.

The investigation follows a report by an anonymous whistle blower who suspected corruption after Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Marketing officials inexplicably failed to furnish him with answers as to why his bid had not been accepted despite that he had met the minimum requirements.

Another issue that prompted the probe is a letter said to have penned by frustrated agriculture ministry employees. The letter, which has since gone viral on social media, is addressed to Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro.

The letter reads: “The Right Hon Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro, it is our sincerest plea as officials of the Ministry of Agriculture that you intervene on the corruption that is rampant in our ministry.

“We are being forced to sign contracts for the supply of fertiliser which are highly inflated, and the minister (Keketso Sello) says you have instructed him to give Bishop (David Thakadu) Ramela the tender. He (Ramela) is charging R28 000 per tonne. In total, he is charging R42 million whereas three other suppliers charged R37 million each. All these figures exceed our budget. The same suppliers failed to deliver fertiliser on time in the last season,” the letter states.

It further states that part of the tender was awarded to one Tsunami Ntaote who is said to be aligned to Mr Sello. The workers allege that Mr Ntaote is in cahoots with principal secretaries, Nchakha Makara (Public Service) and Mole Khumalo (agriculture).

They further allege that PS Makara received a Jeep vehicle for his part in facilitating the corrupt deal. They therefore want Dr Majoro to intervene.

DCEO spokesperson, Matlhokomelo Senoko, this week confirmed that the anti-graft body was investigating possible corruption in the procurement of fertiliser which is sold to farmers at subsidised prices to enable them to plant crops every agricultural season.

“These issues are being investigated by the DCEO as they have been brought to our attention. This is after one supplier came to report some irregularities with the tender in question. There was also a letter circulated on social media over the matter last week,” Ms Senoko said.

The awarding of the tender to Bishop Ramela, of the St Paul African Apostolic Church, has got tongues wagging.

A source who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals said the clergyman was probably being rewarded for his role in mediating between Dr Majoro and All Basotho Convention (ABC) leader, Nkaku Kabi.

The two have been involved in a bitter power struggle which threatens to scupper the ruling party’s chances of retaining its majority in government after the elections which are due in October this year.

"This tender could be the prime minister's way of rewarding Bishop Ramela for his role in the ABC talks. It could be that the PM is only using the Bishop as a front as he loots the public purse as he knows that he will not retain his position after the polls even if the ABC wins because he is not the party leader. Maybe the bishop is being used to launder money," the source said.

Contacted for comment, Mr Sello said, "Bishop Ramela has a right to tender like any other businessman and there is nothing sinister with his pricing.

"I am aware of these baseless allegations against me, PSs Khumalo and Makara but only a fool will believe what's being said about us. Worse things have been said about me but I have always held my head high.

"I don't think there is anything wrong with the DCEO investigating this matter as it is their job. I have also started my own investigations and I have even engaged the prime minister as he is privy to the matter.

"It's a lie that the premier directed me to award the tender to Bishop Ramela. He (Majoro) has no say in the awarding of tenders and even if he had, I wouldn't entertain that nonsense.

"We discussed this with the PM because we saw it on social media but there was no formal letter of complaint (by agriculture ministry staffers). Every tender will always be seen as controversial because so many people will be interested in it. I have given this matter the seriousness that it needs and I have even asked some of my staffers what they know about this letter," Mr Sello said.

However, Dr Majoro's press attaché, Buta Moseme, sang a different tune, saying "the prime minister hasn't received any complaint of this nature".

Efforts to obtain comment from PSs Khumalo and Nkone proved fruitless. Mr Khumalo's phone rang without being answered while Mr Nkone failed to get back to this reporter despite promising to do so by yesterday. Bishop Ramela's phone also rang unanswered.

He made headlines last month when he facilitated a face-to-face meeting between Dr Majoro and Mr Kabi. He is said to be close to both politicians.

This publication even saw a leaked picture of Dr Majoro and Mr Kabi sitting next to each other and holding a stick under the watchful eye of the Bishop. According to sources close to both politicians, they were made to hold the stick by the Bishop and recite a pledge to work together to iron out their differences. Mr Kabi this week said he and the premier had since buried the hatchet.



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