

THE NAMIBIAN NEWSPAPER

Telecom CEO suspension shocks Jooste

News - National | 2018-11-26 Page no: 1

by



Leon Jooste

PUBLIC enterprises minister Leon Jooste says he was shocked to learn on social media that the Telecom board had suspended its chief executive, Theo Klein.

The board suspended Klein on Friday after an investigation into how the telecommunications company paid N\$4 million from March 2016 to June 2017 for an allegedly fake N\$12 million tender.

Asked yesterday whether the board had consulted him before suspending Klein, Jooste told *The Namibian*: "Not at all! I'm shocked that I had to learn of this through social media on Friday".

He said there is a directive that all parastatal boards have to get permission from the line minister, in this case the minister of communications, as well as the public enterprises minister before suspending any chief executive or senior manager.

"I find it ludicrous that a board chooses to deliberately ignore such a directive. We will clearly have to enhance our approach regarding our efforts

to limit the damage caused by these suspensions," he stated.

Jooste added that the ministry encourages boards to investigate senior parastatal executives to take appropriate disciplinary action, as required by law.

Alternatively, the boards can report any form of suspected fraud or corruption to the ACC or the police, the minister said.

"But it is very seldom necessary or beneficial to suspend the person/s," the minister said.

This is not the first time that Jooste has taking this approach. He and energy minister Tom Alweendo blocked the Namcor board early this year from suspending their managing director Immanuel Mulunga because of a N\$2,2 million tender.

Jooste said he will not hesitate to activate legal provisions to hold boards accountable for undue financial losses that may result from executives' suspensions.

Acting Telecom chairperson Irene Simeon-Kurtz yesterday said Klein was placed on suspension for disciplinary action based on the outcomes of an investigation.

The investigation was into an alleged fake N\$12 million printing tender between Telecom Namibian and Canocopy (Pty) Limited.

The board suspended the chief executive after considering the "seriousness of the findings and the seniority of the CEO".

Simeon-Kurtz added that the board acted "in accordance with the powers vested in us".

She said the board has important responsibilities to the government, which includes the need to be careful about the truth and the accuracy of statements made to the public.

"This is an internal disciplinary matter now, and only the disciplinary hearing outcomes will determine whether any of the suspended executives are guilty of any wrongdoing," she continued.

She said chief commercial officer Calvin Muniswaswa will be the acting chief executive while the disciplinary action against the CEO is being finalised.

"The board of directors is fully confident in his integrity and leadership capabilities," she added.

Simeon-Kurtz, however, informed the government about Klein's suspension through a letter dated 23 November 2018 sent to Namibia Post and Telecommunications Holdings (NPTH).

NPTH owns Telecom on behalf of the government. The letter further said Klein would be charged within 48 hours, as provided for in the company's disciplinary policy.

Klein was appointed as Telecom's acting CEO in 2014 before he was made substantive chief executive.

Simeon-Kurtz did not answer questions on the fate of the other senior executives – chief financial officer Robert Offner, internal auditor Ben van der Merwe and head of legal services, Jinhah Buys – who were also suspended earlier over the same issue.

The three senior managers were also suspended to pave the way for the investigation, which was done by lawyers Kwala and Company Inc.