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Media Statement:

COPE Welcomes Forensic Report on Corruption in Polokwane Municipality

For immediate release:

The Congress of the People (COPE) expresses its profound relief with the long-overdue release of the Bowman-Gilfillan forensic report, which shines a light on the rampant corruption and maladministration within the Polokwane Municipality.

COPE feels vindicated now that the truth is finally being exposed, as these revelations are crucial in protecting the public purse from what can only be described as a well-structured white-collar heist.

The report details shocking findings, including the revelation that 300 municipal workers received an astonishing R128 million for excessive overtime claims, some of which were made while employees were on leave. Noting that the investigation only sampled, one wonders how many more are still enriching themselves out of the public purse.

The investigation has uncovered that 44 fictitious employees were listed on the payroll, and numerous staff members held multiple positions, drawing multiple salaries.

The city has lost over R40 million in fraud and corruption during the construction of the Mankweng stadium and it is further alleged that the tender committee and senior managers inflated the initial amount of the construction with an extra R40 million.

The findings of the forensic report reveal:

- Relevant authorities did not approve or sign off on projects, plans, and costs as required by municipal legislation.
- The Expanded Public Works Programme guidelines were not followed, with some workers employed for longer than the allowed six-month period.
- The former legal department manager, Mr. Ruben Maleta, was employed for ten years despite using a false ID and lacking the necessary qualifications.

What steps should be taken to improve internal controls and financial management systems to avoid similar scandals in the future?

COPE emphasises the urgent need for reforms in the municipality's internal controls and financial management systems to prevent similar scandals in the future. It is disheartening that a municipality aspiring for metro status still relies on outdated manual administrative systems, which are susceptible to manipulation.

To rectify this, COPE advocates for the following immediate implementation:

An electronic administrative system that is integrated with the Department of Home Affairs for seamless verification of employee records.

Employing artificial intelligence in these systems will not only eliminate the potential for duplicate payments but also put an end to ghost employee scandals.

How should the municipality address the potential impact of this corruption on service delivery and the well-being of residents?

COPE emphasises the need for disciplinary actions against current employees involved in corruption. For those who have left the municipality, it's essential that law enforcement, including the Hawks, pursue them to ensure they are held accountable.

Most importantly, the money that was stolen must be recouped to benefit the residents of Polokwane, who deserve better services.

The findings in the Bowman-Gilfillan report are just the beginning of uncovering the corruption in the Polokwane Municipality. COPE is dedicated to working with all opposition parties to reveal the full extent of this issue and restore integrity in local governance.

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