



**National
Prosecuting
Authority**
of South Africa

**MEDIA ADVISORY
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**MPUMALANGA BUSINESSMAN TO BE SENTENCED FOR ATTEMPTING TO BRIBE SIU
INVESTIGATOR TO MAKE COVID-19 INVESTIGATION DISAPPEAR**

Sentencing proceedings for Mpumalanga businessman, Sipho Mapalala, will begin on Thursday, 23 March 2023 at Mbombela Magistrates' Court at 09h00.

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) secured a guilty plea from Mapalala in January 2023 on charges of corruption and bribery for attempting to bribe the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) investigator to make a Covid-19 procurement investigation against Gugu Bulunga go away. Mapalala was arrested in August 2021 during a joint operation with the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (Hawks) when he was delivering a bribe of R50 000 to the SIU investigator.

The attempted bribe follows an SIU investigation in the affairs of the Mpumalanga Department of Public Works, Roads, and Transport, under Proclamation R23 of 2020, which uncovered procurement irregularities.

The SIU investigations revealed that the Department contracted a service provider in the 2017/18 financial year for pest control services. However, when a National State of Disaster was declared, the Department varied the contract to include disinfection services in the Ehlanzeni District. The disinfection services were for buildings owned and managed by the Mpumalanga Provincial Government in the said District. After the disinfection, the service provider received multiple payments amounting to R4.8 million. The first payment was R1,3 million in July 2020 and was followed by several payments amounting to R3.5 million.

The SIU investigations also revealed that immediately after the first payment, the service provider started transferring large amounts of money to various entities and individuals. One of the entities that received money then made various payments which were traced to a Mpumalanga based law firm and two employees of the Department. The law firm bought a property to the value of R2.2 million and registered it in the name of a daughter of one of the two departmental officials.

On 05 August 2021, the SIU interviewed Bulunga, a director of Mbombela Integrated, and Thandolwani Transport and Properties. Bulunga was questioned about payments made to government officials and properties bought for government officials. Bulunga denied the allegations. Hours after the interview, Mapalala called an SIU investigator to declare that he is prepared to do anything to make the matter against Bulunga to go away.

In his guilty plea statement, Mapalala admits that his actions are against the law.

“I knew it was wrong to provide money/payment to investigator, as she was an official of the SIU and I gave this money to the SIU investigator to compensate the investigator and the "other" people the investigator referred to, to compensate them to crush the involvement of Gugu Bulunga.

“I wanted to help Gugu to get out of the mess which caused her severe anxiety and the threat to her life. I therefore admit that I corrupted SIU investigator and that my actions were unlawful and punishable,” Mapalala wrote in his guilty plea.

END.

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