

**MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES**

**CAUTIONARY NOTE TO ALL MEDIA: THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT**

**07 MARCH 2020**

The Ministry of Public Enterprises must caution the media about news coverage that can be expected in the Sunday Independent newspaper tomorrow, which appears to be part of an ongoing campaign by the newspaper and a group of its so-called ‘investigative journalists’ to again tarnish the reputations and work of good, honest public servants with baseless insinuation.

Late this morning, Ms Nthabiseng Borotho, the Ministry’s Chief of Staff, received the following questions from the Sunday Independent, with a deadline to respond by 5pm today—

“Good morning Ms Nthabiseng Borotho,

My name is Mzilikazi wa Afrika, an investigative journalist with Sunday Independent newspaper and we are intending writing a story about you for our edition tomorrow and I would like you to answer the following questions:

1. Can you confirm or deny that you failed your matric at Fezeka High School in Gugulethu, Western Cape?

2. Can you confirm or deny that you used to work for State Security Agency where you opted to resign when you were being investigated for fraud, corruption and embezzlement of funds?

4. Can you confirm or deny that Nancy Panduva is your half sister?

5. Can you confirm or deny that you orchestrated the appointment of Nancy Panduva by the department of public enterprises?

6. Can you confirm or deny that Debbie Malopa is your long time friend and that the two of you come from the same neighbourhood in Gugulethu?

7. Can you confirm or deny that you orchestrated the appointment of Debbie Malopa by the department of public enterprises?

8. Can you confirm or deny that you drive a state car - a Lexus - with a state issued petrol card?

9. Can you confirm or deny that you are public enterprises minister Pravin Gordhan’s chief of Staff?

10. Can you confirm or deny that you defaulted FNB and that they have a judgment against you?

I would be happy if you can come back to me before my deadline today - March 7, 2020 - at 17:00.

Regards,

Mzilikazi wa Afrika

Investigative Reporter

Sunday Independent

The Ministry respects, supports and encourages media freedom.

However, first, the time given to respond to the above questions is unreasonable, unfair and wholly inadequate.

Second, Ms Borotho and the Ministry emphatically reject and deny these allegations and any insinuation in the newspaper’s reporting that may arise from them.

Ms Borotho matriculated in 1997.

She has never worked for the State Security Agency, or other intelligence agency. She has never been the subject of any investigation or disciplinary process with respect to ‘fraud, corruption and embezzlement of funds’.

The appointment of Ministerial staff is not done solely on Ms Borotho’s discretion as Chief of Staff. It is done through the normal administrative processes in which several individuals participate in the manner that applies to any Ministry.

She drives her own vehicle and has, like other Ministerial staff, on occasion used a vehicle of the Ministry for her official duties.

Ms Borotho’s personal financial affairs are a private matter.

These questions follow a well established method used by Mr Wa Afrika and others at the Sunday Independent, such as Mr Piet Rampedi, to malign and destroy the careers of honest, dedicated public officials and to undermine public institutions. The owner of the newspaper, Dr Iqbal Surve, also appears to be engaged in a public campaign against the Ministry and the Department.

This method began at their previous employer, the Sunday Times, where, for years they persisted in a ‘fake news’ campaign that sought to link Minister Pravin Gordhan to the fictitious so-called ‘rogue unit’ at the South African Revenue Service (SARS).

Similar to one of the allegations above, from 2014 onwards, they also falsely reported that Mr Ivan Pillay, the former Deputy Commissioner of SARS, did not matriculate.

As found by the Nugent Commission of Inquiry, the destruction of SARS and decimation of its revenue-generating and investigative capability was enabled through this kind of ‘fake news’ campaign.

The Sunday Times ultimately retracted and apologised for the reporting of Wa Afrika and Rampedi with respect to SARS.

The true impact of their actions as journalists, however, has never sufficiently been interrogated nor accounted for.

\*Since the Sunday Independent and all titles of the Independent Media group have elected to end their membership of the South African National Editor’s Forum and to no longer subject themselves to the national Press Code, or the authority of the Press Ombud, their news reporting can no longer be objectively challenged or adjudicated upon, other than before court. This has necessitated this cautionary note to all other media.

ENDS.

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