

Media Statement



Tel: +27 12 845 6000

Email:
media@npa.gov.za

Victoria & Griffiths
Mxenge Building
123 Westlake Avenue
Weavind Park
Silverton
Pretoria

www.npa.gov.za

TO: ALL MEDIA

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**RE: DATING SCAM FRAUDSTER SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS
IMPRISONMENT**

The Bellville Commercial Crimes Court sentenced fraudster, Chinonso Pascal Eze to 20 years imprisonment after he duped three desperate women pretending to be a hunk.

He swindled them of more than a million rands which they deposited into different bank accounts. Eze was charged and found guilty on 23 counts of fraud and nine counts of money laundering.

In a plea and sentencing agreement with the state yesterday morning, Eze confessed that he was part of a syndicate that operated an online dating scheme.

The 36-year-old father of two told the court that the ultimate goal was to fraudulently secure large amounts of money from their unsuspecting victims. He and members of the syndicate started reaching out to the victims through dating sites. He groomed the women, building their trust and thereafter requested money from them allegedly for emergencies.

The syndicate then created fake personalities of Marcos Ivan, Michael Brandy Smart and Craig Thompson. This deliberately created a false sense of security with the victims in that the fake personalities were portrayed as being wealthy and in a position to repay the monies that were advanced by the victims.

He pretended to the first victim to be a Marcos Ivan. He communicated with her via a profile created on the internet dating site and sent her photos of himself. As a result of this deception, the victim deposited a total of R 314 950 between November 2017 and January 2018.

The second victim believed that she was dealing with Michael Brandy Smart. Eze used the same modus operandi and deceived the woman into depositing R186 080 into different bank accounts held by four different people.

The third victim was the worst victim as she deposited more than the other two. She believed she was assisting Craig Thompson and deposited R534 000 in different bank accounts also held by different people. In total, the victims deposited R1 035 030. Hundreds of thousands of rands were transferred and withdrawn on bank accounts held by Yolanda Mange, R Mapheelle, Hako XB, LC Sihopo, Global Shipping, LF Coe, O. Dlikilili and P Mendrew. This formed the basis of the nine counts of money laundering.

Senior State Advocate, Lucinda Mcani told the court that the three personas were created for fraudulent purposes. The personas were not the people depicted in the created profiles on the internet dating sites and all the photos and descriptions in the online communication were made in a dishonest manner to bolster the personas.

"It was a scam to win the trust of the complainants to ensure that they made the payments as described totalling R1 035 030. The offences committed contain elements of premeditation on the part of Eze. They have a substantial element of dishonesty and the nature and the gravity of the offences are serious," she argued.

The court sentenced Eze to 10 years imprisonment for the 23 counts of fraud of which four years is suspended for a period of five years on condition that the accused is not found guilty of fraud. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for money laundering of which five years is suspended for a period of five years on condition that he is also not found guilty of money laundering. The court then ordered that both sentences run concurrently, effectively sentencing Eze to six years imprisonment. The court declared him unfit to possess a firearm.

The NPA welcomed the sentence.

Eric Ntabazalila
National Prosecuting Authority
Regional Communications Manager
Western Cape
Tel: (021) 487 7308 Mobile: 073 062 1222
Email: entabazalila@npa.gov.za