

Media Statement



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TO: ALL MEDIA

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RE: TRADITIONAL HEALER GETS FIVE YEARS FOR VIOLATION OF A CORPSE

A 42 year-old sangoma from Clocolan in the Free State was yesterday sentenced to an effective five years imprisonment by Clocolan Magistrate's Court after he pleaded guilty to three counts including violation of a corpse. Magistrate Petro Jacobs sentenced Mpho Mokhethi to 12 months for violation of the grave, four years for violation of a corpse and six months imprisonment for contravention of Immigration Act.

The court heard that on 26 May 2017, a community member came across a grave that had been tampered with as he was visiting the graveyard. The deceased's family was informed and they discovered that their relative's grave had been partially opened and the lid of the coffin moved. The police were called and they discovered the head was missing.

The family had to reburial the deceased with the head missing. The investigation led the police to the house of Mokhethi, a well-known sangoma in Clocolan, where they dug out the head in front of the door of Mokhethi's house. The tongue was cut off. It was found in a plastic bag cut in three pieces. The family had to bury the deceased for a third time.

Mokhethi, a Lesotho citizen who does not have proper documentation to be in South Africa, pleaded guilty to all the three charges. In his plea agreement, he stated that he went to the graveyard on 26 May 2017, identified a grave which he dug up, opened the coffin and cut off the head. He put the head inside the plastic bag and took it home with the purpose of using it for his business to flourish. Upon arriving at home, he cut off the tongue from the head with the sole intent of using it for medical purposes.

Arguing in aggravation of sentence, State Prosecutor, Joyce Mokoena presented a victim impact statement facilitated by Tshepang Moeti in which the niece of the deceased

stated that the incident had traumatised the family because they had to bury their uncle three times. She further stated that the family had to ask for assistance from their local municipality to bury the deceased as they could not afford to bury him for a second and third time.

Mokoena further stated that the accused did not consider the family when he dug up the grave because he cut off the head for his benefit and the tongue for medical purposes.

“The court must not consider only the family but the whole community because this incident brings fear that it could happen to any family. He did not only traumatise the family but he also tainted the dignity of traditional healers”, said Mokoena.

In sentencing Mokhethi, Magistrate Jacobs said that the court had to consider all the possible sentences but she comes to a decision that the only appropriate sentence is direct imprisonment. She subsequently sentenced Mokhethi to 12 months for violation of the grave, four years for violation of the corpse and six months for being in South Africa illegal.

Mokhethi will effectively spend five years in jail after the magistrate ordered the six month sentence to run concurrently with the 12 months sentence imposed for violation of the grave.

Kind Regards,

Phaladi Shuping

Regional Spokesperson: DPP Free State

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