

Judge Blasts Ministers Over Museum Arrests

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Saturday, 14 March 2009 00:21 -



A Gauteng High Court judge has criticised the ministers of defence and of safety and security after finding that the police wrongfully arrested three staff of the South African National Museum of Military History in Saxonwold.

John Keene, Richard Henry and Susanne Blendulf were arrested in January 2005 for allegedly possessing stolen armoured vehicles.

Moray Hathorn, head of the pro bono department at Webber Wentzel said on Wednesday that the three had been exonerated and would receive a full settlement from the ministers.

"From Mr Henry's evidence it was clear that the museum's acquisition of military vehicles and artillery pieces was fully documented and accounted for and that the investigating officers had been fully apprised of this during their investigation," said Hathorn.

The three, all curators, were arrested after an investigation by a Captain Molapo of the SA Police Services and a Flight-Sergeant Banda of the defence force.

Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan and top delegates of his department were present when the police and military police descended on the museum.

The museum, widely regarded as one of the best of its type in the world, collects items of military heritage and history and maintains these for exhibition to the public for educational purposes.

After their arrest the three curators were taken to Kameeldrift Police Station, where they were held overnight, and released the next morning after being told that the state had declined to prosecute.

Keene, who had had an operation on 12 January to repair a detached retina, had to undergo a further emergency operation on 14 January 2005 after his retina re-detached during his detention.

He was kept shackled to the stretcher when taken to the Pretoria Eye Institute in the early hours of 14 January for an emergency operation. Blendulf was found to have suffered acute post traumatic stress after the incident.

The trial commenced in The North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria last Wednesday before Acting Pretoria High Court Judge Stanley Sapire. It was completed on Tuesday.

"At the conclusion of Henry's evidence the Ministers of Safety and Security and Defence, without leading any of their witnesses, conceded liability," Hathorn said.

The Ministers agreed to pay R475,000 and party to party costs limited to the curators.

Judge Blasts Ministers Over Museum Arrests

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

Saturday, 14 March 2009 00:21 -

In his judgment Sapire said an apology by the defendants to Keene, Henry and Blendulf would have been the proper and gentlemanly thing to have been done.

"The judge further expressed his grave disquiet that senior people, including the ministers themselves, had not attended the proceedings in order to apprise themselves at first hand of what had happened."

Source : Sapa /srg/ml

Date : 11 Mar 2009 15:11