

Land fraud case: further arrests due

Cops set to swoop on Joburg council, deeds office staff

HANTLOTTO
COURT REPORTER

PERSONNEL at the Pretoria deeds office and the Johannesburg City Council may soon be arrested for their alleged involvement in a fraud syndicate which includes two attorneys.

As a result, the State opposed bail for Pretoria lawyer Peet Viljoen and his Joburg counterpart Edwin Risimate Maringa, 40, in the Pretoria Regional Court yesterday.

While both men indicated that they would plead not guilty, State witnesses insisted that the men were flight risk.

They were arrested by the Hawks on the night of August 12 this year. The next morning Dorah Madiso, 49, a property manager at the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) responsible for the transfer of council land, was arrested.

That same morning Ronel van Vuuren, 43, and Anelene van der Berg, 49, both employed by Viljoen, reported to the Brooklyn police station where they were arrested.

The three women were released on bail of R5 000 each. They all face two charges of racketeering and 29 of fraud.

According to a statement by investigating officer Captain Jan

Judeel the total amount involved is R39 million.

He said property of the City of Johannesburg's JPC was identified by the syndicate. Fraudulent documents, including certificates, were created.

Maringa allegedly has 100% shares in a company and interests in a close corporation. His office assistant, Wayne Ernest Africa, was the only "director" of this CC.

The fraudulent documentation would state that JPC properties had been sold to this company or CC. A bona fide buyer would then be found and a selling contract would be signed by the buyer, unknowingly, and the company/CC.

"Payment for the property would go into Viljoen's trust account, who also acted as conveyance attorney. The property would then be transported to the seller in a fraudulent manner through the deeds office in Pretoria," the statement read.

The market value of these properties is more than R100 million.

"We are investigating the involvement of personnel at the deeds office and Johannesburg City Council and more arrests will follow," Judeel stated.

He said Viljoen and Maringa knew who their contacts were and, if granted bail, they could destroy evidence.

Saying that Africa would be used as a State witness, and was fired after this became known, Judeel referred to incidents in which some witnesses were allegedly intimidated.

In addition, Viljoen was in financial trouble, as the bank had obtained an order against his properties to the value of R16.9m.

"This increases his chances to flee. Viljoen might also commit other fraud and theft in an attempt to get out of his financial dilemma," the investigator said.

He pointed out that there was a case of theft and fraud against Viljoen opened in 2009. Sars had a case against him for failing to pay tax of R600 000 and a former client had also opened a case of theft against the lawyer.

Viljoen, 41, said in an affidavit that he, his wife and three minor children lived at Silver Lakes. He employed 10 people and earned about R230 000 a month.

Referring to allegations of intimidation, Viljoen admitted he had a quarrel with James Dalton about the lawyer's dog on the golf course. He claimed this was settled.

In another incident, a person did apply for an interdict against Viljoen, but this was because he feared the lawyer might leak information, Viljoen said.

