

**2008**

### **Ex SARS employees sentenced to 15 years imprisonment**

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Four people - two of them former SARS employees – were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in the Pretoria Regional Court yesterday for defrauding SARS of approximately R500 000.

Regional Court Magistrate Leavit Mukansi said the group operated like a well-oiled machine, the crimes were premeditated and it was committed out of “nothing but greed”.

Majorie Chidi (30) and Mercy Papo (32) both from Atteridgeville, Gorette du Plessis (36) of Mountain View and Edmund Maloba (35) of Sunnyside were found guilty on ten counts of VAT fraud in May. Maloba and Du Plessis are former SARS employees who previously worked in the VAT section of the Pretoria Receiver of Revenue office. Chidi and Papo are both former girlfriends of Maloba.

Du Plessis unlawfully re-activated ten dormant closed corporations (CCs) on SARS' systems and changed the name of the representing officer, the bank account details and the postal addresses of these CCs'.

She then used her secret password and VAT refund authorisation code to generate the electronic transfer of fraudulent VAT refunds into accounts of Chidi and Popo, before she made the CC's “dormant” again.

SARS was defrauded of approximately R 470 000 in this way. Although there was no evidence of any benefit to Du Plessis, all ten fraudulent VAT refunds were traced back to her pass word and authorisation code. All the money were paid into accounts of Chidi and Papo, who made it available to Maloba when and how he requested it.

Magistrate Mukansi pointed out that the courts view white collar crime as serious misdeeds which pose a risk to society if it goes unpunished. “White collar crime is as serious as violent crimes,” he said.

He said he had a duty to demonstrate to society the court's contempt of the “pre-meditated act of corruption to steal money belonging to the taxpayers of South Africa”.

“Maloba and Du Plessis were in a position of trust. The crimes were committed on several occasions. They had ample time to reconsider, but instead they perpetuated their crimes and diverted attention from themselves by using other people's accounts in this well-oiled scheme to defraud SARS,” he said.

He took personal circumstances of the accused into account, including the fact that Du Plessis has cancer and receives chemo therapy, and that Chidi and Papo are mothers of young children.

He turned down an application for leave to appeal because he was convinced no other court would have come to a different conclusion, and rejected argument by defense counsel that the sentence was inhumane and grossly inappropriate”.