

MEDIA STATEMENT
ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF PHDS
21 NOVEMBER 2024

**SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF PHDS WELCOMES JUDGEMENT ON
QUALIFICATION FRAUD**

The South African Association of PhDs (SAAPhDs) wholeheartedly welcomes the fine imposed by the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) against Ms. Thabi Leoka of R500,000 for falsifying her doctoral qualification. This is a significant and much-needed ruling that sends a strong and clear message to all those who may consider falsifying their academic qualifications for personal or professional gain.

Ms. Leoka claimed she held a PhD in Economics from the London School of Economics, which was included in her CV and official declarations. This information was then published by companies she served as a director, such as Remgro, Netcare, and Anglo American Platinum.

The JSE found that Ms. Leoka violated the JSE's Listings Requirements by making false statements about her qualifications. This misconduct undermines investor confidence and the principles of good corporate governance. Because of her actions, the JSE has issued Ms. Leoka a public censure, fined her **R500,000**, and imposed a five-year ban from serving as a director or officer of any JSE-listed company.

The integrity of academic credentials is foundational to the credibility of our education system and the trust that society places in the qualifications obtained by graduates. We, as an association, firmly believe that those who engage in fraudulent activities that undermine the value of legitimate academic achievements must face the full force of the law.

We commend the JSE for their decisive action in this case, which sets an important precedent for the future. We are confident that this judgment will act as a deterrent to others who may be tempted to misrepresent their qualifications, and it underscores the fact that there are serious consequences for those who engage in academic dishonesty.

In South Africa, the **Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008**, along with the **Higher Education Act 101 of 1997**, provides a legal basis for the verification and validation of academic qualifications. The Act stipulates penalties for individuals who misrepresent their qualifications, and this case highlights the seriousness with which such offenses are regarded in our legal system.

It is also important to note that in recent years, other individuals who have been caught falsifying qualifications have faced similar consequences, including criminal charges and significant reputational damage. These cases, including that of Ms. Thabi Leoka, reflect the commitment of our nation to uphold academic integrity and ensure that those who seek to deceive the public are held accountable.

The South African Association of PhDs remains resolute in its mission to protect the integrity of academic qualifications and to ensure that the hard work and genuine achievements of doctoral graduates are respected and valued. We will continue to support efforts to combat qualification fraud and to advocate for stricter enforcement of laws that safeguard the reputation of South Africa's educational system.

To all individuals considering similar actions, we send a strong and unequivocal message: there is no place in South Africa for those who seek to mislead employers, institutions, or the public by falsifying academic credentials. We encourage employers and educational institutions to remain vigilant and to rigorously verify academic qualifications to ensure that the integrity of our education system is upheld.

Issued by:

Dr. Bongani Nkala
Secretary General
South African Association of PhDs