

## Heavy fine imposed on Durban company

No company should ever think it can operate in South Africa and not comply with the labour laws that have been designed to protect both workers and employers.



Image source: Getty Images

This was a warning from the Minister of Employment and Labour, Thulas Nxesi, issued after the conclusion of a trial of a company that was fined for being in breach of the labour laws and disregarded Covid-19 pandemic regulations.

The Chen Lu Fragrance Company appeared in the Durban Specialised Criminal Court last Thursday for various charges, including locking in 14 employees in the Durban factory, to ensure that they met the target of producing surgical masks.

The company was accused of using the lockdown fears of unemployment to force workers into long hours and was fined R20,000, of which R15,000 was suspended for five years.

The company was also fined R50,000, of which R35,000 was suspended for five years, for failure to trade under lockdown with a required licence.

The company was further ordered by the Chinese Consulate to donate masks worth R200,000 to the South African Police

Service and the office of the KwaZulu-Natal Premier.

Nxesi welcomed the court's heavy fine against the company, noting that during this time of Covid-19, it is important for the workers to stand up for their rights and report abuse, as workers in Chen Lu Fragrances CC did.

"Our Inspection and Enforcement Services does a good service but working hand in hand with workers, it is possible to end workplace exploitation. We appeal to workers to report abusive behaviour at work.

"The operations of the company were in direct conflict with the Covid-19 regulations. They did not even provide for physical distancing and thus put lives of many workers and their extended families at risk," Nxesi said.

## **Over 1,000 claims received from Compensation Fund**

The Minister said the department is also aware that there are companies that have taken advantage of the emergency nature of work during the pandemic, and are using it as an excuse to exploit workers.

"Every day the Compensation Fund is receiving claims of workers, who have contracted the virus for being exposed at work. A total of 1,215 claims have been received so far and it is actions of companies like this that expose workers to fatal dangers of the pandemic.

"At least 98 claims have been received from KwaZulu-Natal and it is our plea that companies need to do right by their employees who remain their most valuable asset and not expose them unnecessarily to danger," the Minister said.

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