

Cwele granted R100 000 bail

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Pietermaritzburg - Sheryl Cwele, the wife of State Security Minister Siyabonga Cwele, was granted bail of R100 000 by the KwaZulu-Natal High Court on Friday.

After hearing arguments from Cwele's lawyer and the State prosecutor, Judge Sharmaine Balton said she was satisfied the minister's wife would not evade trial or interfere with the State witnesses.

"I am very concerned about the period that she will have to wait. It's unacceptable that the applicant should languish in prison too long before the start of the trial," she said.

The State had earlier indicated it would be ready for trial in October.

There were scenes of joy among Cwele's family and friends when it was announced she would be released on bail.

The bail application hearing was attended by Minister Cwele and many friends and relatives.

The minister's appearance came as a surprise as it was mentioned in the court papers that the Cweles had been estranged for five years.

"The allegation is a lie. It does not exist. They spent the holiday together in Mozambique in December," said Cwele's lawyer, Mvuseni Ngubane.

Witnesses

Sheryl Cwele and Frank Nabolisa, a Nigerian arrested last month, face three charges.

These are: dealing or conspiring to deal in drugs; procuring a woman called Charmaine Moss to collect drugs in Turkey; and procuring another woman, Tessa Beetge, to smuggle nine kilogrammes of cocaine from South America.

Brazilian police arrested Beetge in Sao Paulo on June 13 2008.

They found 9.2kg of cocaine concealed in her baggage. She was currently serving an eight-year jail sentence in Sao Paulo for drug trafficking.

The judge said although Cwele knew about the investigation as far back as March 2009, there is no evidence she tried to influence the State witnesses or flee the country.

"The applicant knew that she was likely to be indicted after accused number two (Nabolisa) was arrested in December but she did not leave the country," she said.

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She said the court had taken into consideration that Cwele was married in community of property which meant she shared half of her husband' estate.

Cwele's bail conditions do not allow her to leave the Port Shepstone magisterial district without the permission of the investigating officer and she had to surrender all her passports.

She would also have to report to Port Shepstone Police Station every Monday.

Inspect

Giving reasons why Cwele should not be granted bail, State prosecutor Ian Cooke said he was concerned that the accused had been out of the country 16 times in less than a year and had three passports.

Ngubane said his client deserved bail, as the State had a weak case.

“The State does not have the cocaine that it alleges was smuggled by my client. We will request the State to furnish us with the cocaine so that we can inspect it.”

National Prosecuting Authority spokesperson Mthunzi Mhaga said the authority accepted the ruling and expected Cwele to observe all bail conditions.

“We also believe that she would allow us to finish our investigation,” he said.

Meanwhile, Cwele's future as the director of health and community safety for the Hibiscus municipality hangs in the balance.

- SAPA

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