

# KZN drug mules' families shocked by allegations

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*File picture*

Durban - The families of the three Durban women arrested in Miami in the US on allegations of drug dealing are struggling to understand how their children got involved in smuggling.

Londiwe Shange, 27, Wandile Mhlongo, 29, and Thembeke Sokhulu, 36, all from Durban, were arrested with Viwe Tshaka, 23, from Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape, last month.

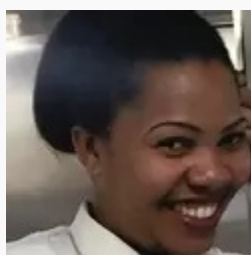
The four, who worked for MSC Cruises, were arrested during a drug raid of the cruise ship Seaside on November 17.

According to reports, US Customs and Border Protection found six crew with 7kg of cocaine in their possession.

If found guilty, they could be sentenced to between 10 years and life imprisonment.

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Ntokozo Mlambo, Mhlongo's cousin, said she was the first to get a call about the arrest and had to break the painful news to Mhlongo's mother.

Mhlongo, from Chesterville, was on her third contract with MSC.

The contracts are nine months long, and her previous contracts were in Europe. She left around June for this latest trip.

"Her mother is struggling with the ordeal. She tries to be strong, but when you are sitting with her she sometimes 'spaces out' and you can see her mind is not here," said Mlambo.

She said the family was battling to understand how Mhlongo, if she did, got involved with drug smuggling.

"We had no idea she could be involved with drugs. When I first heard the news, I thought maybe it was a small quantity that she had been using.

"But she is asthmatic and she stays away from anything that might damage her health.

"It was only when I heard the extent of the allegations that I realised this was serious."

She said the family could not afford to travel to the US: "An even bigger problem is that her mother has never been to the US and you can't just go now. Where would she go?"

Sokhulu's brother, Lindokuhle Sokhulu, declined to speak to The Mercury.

"We are still shocked. We saw this in newspapers and the family had not been spoken to. At this stage we have nothing to say."

Shange's mother, who did not give her name, declined to comment, saying she could not speak on something she saw in newspapers.

"I am waiting for people in her office to call me."

Ndivhuwo Mabaya, spokesperson for the Department of International Relations and Co-operation, said it had been in touch with the women through its unit's consular services.

"That unit is there to offer non-financial services to all South Africans in distress," he said.

**The Mercury**

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