"CASE ADJOURNED AGAINST BRIT WHO RENTS AND RE-LETS HOUSES"
2 FEBRUARY 2023
MAYGENE DE WEE.

"I ALMOST GOT SCAMMED BY DARREN RUSSELL THE ALLEGED CAPE TOWN AIRBNB SWINDLER" VERNON PILLAY IOL 16.1.23

"**It is not every day that you wake up to the news that you could have been scammed and by the grace of God or some miracle, you escaped losing thousands of rand. Despite doing stories on this very topic, I failed to see that Russel was most probably trying to scam me out of about R10 000. That was the price (give or take) for the night at the breathtaking venue 'Hove Heaven' that he was advertising on AirBnB.**"

The article by Vernon Pillay was based solely and entirely on the articles of Media24. (1) The sole motivation for writing the article—and indeed for thinking he escaped being scammed—was due to Media24's misconduct and the many violations of the Press Code. (2) No doubt, this motivation was fundamentally influenced by the same factors that have made the articles so damaging for me: had they not been written, been so false, the falsehoods so extreme, and the publication itself so well-regarded, Vernon Pillay would never have written his article. (3) That was my theory before I approached him, and that theory was confirmed when I did. (4) As I explained to Mr. Pillay, the article itself presented a somewhat surreal concept, with the emphasis not on actual scamming but on the possibility of "almost" being scammed. (5) This premise required a series of assumptions that, even if based on accurate information, would have been theoretical, subjective, circumstantial, and open to interpretation. (6) Unfortunately, these assumptions were founded on fabricated statements made by WdS (WDS), his clients, and their proxies. (7) Given the already tenuous nature of the premise of someone "almost" being anything, there was a clear obligation to thoroughly verify the facts on which these assumptions were based. Otherwise, there was a real risk of straying from conjecture into fiction. (8) To illustrate, you would not write an article titled "I was almost shot by Trump's assassin" just because you had plans to visit Pennsylvania that week. Nor would you publish an article claiming you nearly drowned because you had planned a vacation in Thailand the same year a tsunami struck. In this case, there was no shooting incident or tsunami; the event on which the premise of "almost" is based did not occur. (9) The article is particularly damaging because it lends credibility to a completely false narrative, which is ironic given that the false narrative was the root cause of the assumption and article to begin with. (10) As a result, the article deviates from contemplating and exploring possibilities, instead becoming a false, misleading, and libelous narrative. (11) This article demonstrates the power and impact of the Media24 articles, and (12) the purpose of the placement of those articles in the first place. (13) This article, like the others, was a key feature in the application by Keith Broad in December, and the reason he had me removed by orchestrating an arrest. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (**reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). **REF: [A], [B].**

"When I went back to AirBnB to look at our messages, I was shocked to see that his messages were blocked with this message by AirBnB: 'This message has been hidden because the person no longer has access to AirBnB.'"

It is fair to say that if a highly competent, professional, and intelligent journalist can be so convinced that he pens an article, then the wider public will be equally and unequivocally convinced. (1) While this does not excuse the violations of the Press Code, it does explain them. (2) Unlike Media24, when I approached Vernon Pillay, he did not reject my approaches or give false reasons for not engaging. (3) He engaged, was professional, constructive, and agreed to issue an apology, retraction, and correction. (4) As I explained to him, my primary wish is for him and others to publish the truth. It has never been to punish people who were deceived. (5) While the article was a serious misjudgement, I do not believe there was any malice, and I do believe Mr. Pillay takes his responsibilities as a journalist and his journalistic integrity seriously. (6) Media24, however, has shown the opposite. (7) Had they taken a similar approach when I contacted them, there would be less needed to question their motivation, agenda, or the nature of their relationship with WDS. (8) Unfortunately, their articles, the timing of the articles, the extreme content, the fact that 95%+ of the content is false or fabricated, their wholesale swallowing and printing of the allegations from WDS, their failure to do any due

diligence or research of their own, their false reporting of some of the most fundamental aspects of the cases, their failure to contact me for comment or information before or after any of the five articles, and most especially their rejection of my approach, and the false reasons for that rejection, all demonstrate that these serious violations—of which there are hundreds—have a very sinister undertone and backstory. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B], [E].**

"What I can see is that there were major red flags even from my messages. The most jarring was that there was an issue while I was booking the venue with AirBnB. I saw that when I was doing the booking, he had sent me a link to book via Instagram."

No bookings were ever made via Instagram; Instagram links were used only for showcasing property images. (1) The notion that this was suspicious is directly linked to the skewed narrative from News24's false reporting. (2) Put simply, had Vernon Pillay not read the four detailed News24 articles by the time he wrote this piece, he would not have had any issues with his interaction with me. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [F], [G].**

The Flawed Premise of the Article:

Vernon Pillay's enquiry concerned a booking from September 2021, yet he draws conclusions about potential fraud based on the false narrative from the Media24 articles and their defamatory content. (1) As detailed, the August charges had no connection to fraud, scamming, or defrauding property owners. (2) However, Pillay falsely concluded that this was their basis due to the fabricated articles. (3) The December charges related to three alleged diary clashes from Christmas Day 2021, which also had no connection to fraud. (4) At the point of Mr. Pillay's enquiry and in the 3+ months before and after that date, no guests had been defrauded or expressed dissatisfaction—except for claims made by WDS. (5) Even if the hypothesis presented in the article were based on sound information (which it wasn't), to conclude that someone was almost scammed when no verifiable complaints or issues had been raised before, during, or after the enquiry makes the entire premise of the article flawed. (6) Moreover, the basis for the "almost scammed" narrative was built entirely on assumptions that were neither verified nor tested. (7) The charges discussed in the Media24 articles had been thrown out or were proven false. (8) Therefore, it is clear that the article by Mr. Pillay was founded on faulty assumptions, exaggerated claims, and fabrications fed by WDS. **This fundamentally undermines the article's premise. PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

The Arrest Narrative:

Sergeant Stevens arrested me over the Christmas 2021 diary clashes, yet there has never been a single occasion where a business or individual has been charged with fraud for incidents representing less than 1% of their total transactions. (1) In 2021, we hosted hundreds of guests without a single complaint or issue, and in 2022, we welcomed thousands more, all equally satisfied. (2) The six large residences, totalling 32 bedrooms, accommodated approximately 50 bookings each month, equating to 600 guests a year. (3) This resulted in around 100 check-ins and check-outs, over 100 meet-and-greets, and welcome packs, all managed by a full-time team of a dozen housekeepers to ensure seamless service delivery, guest relations, and maintenance of these substantial properties. (4) Our clientele consisted of wealthy and discerning individuals, primarily from America, the UK, Germany, and Japan, who expected—and received—impeccable service and a flawless experience, which matched the large sums they were paying. (5) Clearly, this kind of clientele is hard to please and easy to disappoint, yet we maintained our Superhost status throughout and received universally exceptional reviews. (6) If this had truly been a scam, how do the journalists explain the positive reviews, the industry accreditations, and, most importantly, the complete absence of any negative online content or complaints? **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

On the Issue of Proportionality:

Imagine a hotel that has been welcoming guests for an entire year, with hundreds of happy, satisfied customers, five-star ratings, and numerous 10/10 reviews, along with official industry accreditations. (1) Then, during Christmas, three guests fall ill with food poisoning. (2) While this is undoubtedly a terrible experience for the affected guests and potentially damaging for the hotel's reputation, it would not justify police or media involvement. (3) If over the following year, the hotel continues to serve hundreds of happy guests without incident, the isolated food poisoning case would seem ever more insignificant and a one-off anomaly. (4) In the same way, three booking issues at Christmas 2021, even thirty booking issues, when placed in the context of hundreds of trouble-free bookings before and after, should not have warranted the extreme and disproportionate reaction it received. (5) It should certainly have motivated serious scepticism, questions, and proper investigative journalism. (6) The narrative spun by the Media24 articles attempted to inflate this isolated incident into something far more damaging than it was in reality. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts), and [1.8] (dignity and reputation). REF: [A], [B], [C].**

"On reflection, I can't believe that I was even entertaining this booking process. It is not lost on me that I was making some silly errors in evaluating this booking process. I ask myself why, why would I let myself potentially be bamboozled by such an obvious scam? Looking back, it was clearly too good to be true and I just thank the universe that I booked with a different host."

The price offered for the booking was correct and in line with what all guests were offered at that time. (1) The pricing during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected the realities of the market, and numerous guests before, during, and after Mr. Pillay's dates were charged the same rates. (2) Discounts were offered at the time as standard due to the pandemic. (3) Mr. Pillay's assumption that he avoided a scam was influenced solely by the false narrative set by the Media24 articles, not by any real facts. (4) This assumption

breaches **PRESS CODE:** [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). **REF: [F], [G].**

"Who is Darren Russel? Well, it seems that Russel has been doing this very con with numerous victims over a few years in Cape Town and has finally been arrested."

This statement directly reflects the baseless claims in News24's articles, portraying me as a long-term fraudster without any credible evidence. (1) These claims were entirely fabricated by News24 and were ultimately disproven in court. (2) The charges cited were all thrown out without exception, including the August charges, which had been dismissed three months before this article was written. (3) By repeating these claims, Mr. Pillay further perpetuates a narrative already debunked in court. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

"Russel has been accused of defrauding luxury property owners and tourists on the Atlantic Seaboard for at least two years."

This claim is based entirely on Media24's fabricated articles, which I have addressed. (1) Importantly, I had and have never been charged with defrauding the owners of the properties. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully). REF: [A], [B].**

"It is estimated that the British national made up to R34 million while committing this fraud, according to News24."

The phrase "it is estimated" is entirely misleading. (1) No official body or person ever made this estimate. (2) Nor is there the slightest logic to such a figure. (3) As mentioned, that figure would represent thousands of guests, yet there is no record of any guest making such an accusation across platforms, banks, police, or the internet. (4) This figure was fabricated by WDS and subsequently given credibility by News24. (5) There was never any substantiated evidence to support this wild figure. (6) However, the more this figure and the other allegations are repeated, printed, circulated, and echoed, the greater the damage and the greater the credibility these fabricated allegations enjoy. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (**reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). **REF: [A], [B].**

"It should be noted that Russel has been arrested twice, his first arrest was in 2022 and his second was last week, as more and more victims were coming forward."

This statement is based solely on Media24's articles and the false narrative that my first arrest was for fraud. (1) As detailed, my arrests were based on fabricated charges orchestrated by WDS, none of which involved fraud or scamming. (2) The August charge had been withdrawn three months earlier. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

"Russell faces six criminal and six civil charges."

This is false, based on the content of Media24's articles, and can be easily verified as false by court records. (1) At no point did I face six criminal or civil charges as described. (2) The reporting was irresponsible and factually incorrect. (3) Nor does it mention that every one of those was authored by the landlords, in one guise or another. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

A PETITION.

According to a Change.org petition entitled, "Let's STOP Darren Russell de Rodez aka La Collection The Holiday SCAMMER", Russel has a simple modus operandi. Mario Boffa, the person who started the petition, said Russel "takes bookings for properties in Cape Town and then when clients want to take occupation, he doesn't open up or has double-booked them". Boffa writes that "he runs property listings of properties he does not own nor does he have legal agreements to let them on duplicated platforms, using multiple profiles." The motivation for the petition is crucial here. (1) WDS, Denis Dalton (present at both the official arrest and secret illegal arrest), and Johan Schalkwyk worked closely with Mario Boffa. (2) As the evidence shows, they plotted to steal the contents of the bank accounts, embezzled R1.2 million, and colluded to steal the villas and their contents. (3) The petition was a natural and logical addition to the defamatory Media24 articles, designed to bolster their false narrative and provide cover for their own criminal actions. (4) An application has been submitted earlier this month for its removal, and while this is notoriously difficult with Change.org, we anticipate a positive outcome given the petition's direct links to serious crime. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [A], [B].**

"Here is a list of the platforms he used: Airbnb, Your.Rentals, Booking.com, Agoda, Expedia, VRBO."

This claim is easy to verify as false. (1) The only platforms we used were Airbnb and Booking.com, nothing more. (2) The notion of multiple platforms, and especially using platforms we had no dealings with, is entirely false and can be verified. (3) This section is based on the defamatory and false petition of Mr. Boffa, rather than on facts. (4) In all the time I was managing the villas, I never had profiles or accounts with Your.Rentals, Agoda, Expedia, or VRBO. **PRESS CODE: [1.0] (reporting truthfully), [1.1] (verifying facts). REF: [F], [G].**