

“Pay Back Stolen Money or Face Jail Sentence” Court Tells Former Khanya Employee

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On 13 May 2021, Prince Lehlohonolo Maenetja (29), a former employee of Khanya College, was ordered by Johannesburg Central Magistrate Court to pay back the money he stole (R15 000) from Khanya College on 27 July 2019.

On 26-28 July 2019, Khanya College held a workshop on the budget for Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) from the North West, Free State, Mpumalanga, Gauteng province. Maenetja was part of the Khanya finance team and one of his regular duties was to cash a cheque amount of R15 000 for the workshop. The money was meant to provide food and transport for the 50 CHWs who came to the workshop. But after cashing the cheque Maenetja never returned to Khanya’s offices at the House of Movements again.

When contacted by the College to find out what happened to him, Maenetja denied stealing the money. According to him, the R15 000 was the “repayment of the service rendered to Khanya College.

The College communicated to him that he needs to pay back the money he stole or it would open a criminal case against him. In response, Maenetja went as far as saying that, “If you open a case against me give the officer my contact. I will be ready to clear my name”, he added. Maenetja was not cooperative and proceeded to send his resignation.

After reviewing what Maenetja did, and how it affected and hindered the work that Khanya does with working class communities and social movements, the College came to a decision and a theft case was opened. “Prince ran away with the money [meant for the CHWs workshop], and that is stealing from working class people,” said Khanya College Acting Director, Dr Maria Van Driel.

It took 18 months and 19 days for a judgment to be reached.

On 13 May 2021, the theft case judgement was heard, and Maenetja appeared, still showing no remorse. “You are essentially being dishonest and caused a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to lose money through your actions,” said the Johannesburg Central Magistrate Prosecutor.

In the ruling, the judge said; “Khanya College is doing good work for communities, by providing them with necessary skills to help themselves. The court has found Mr. Maenetja guilty of stealing from an NGO that teaches people about their rights.”

Maenetja was instructed to pay the R15 000 back to Khanya College face 18 months in prison. He must repay R750 every month on the 24th of each month and if he fails to do so, a Khanya College representative must report this to the court with immediate effect. If he pays back the money accordingly, his sentence will be suspended after five years as long as he does not commit any crime, get involved in any criminal activities, or carry a gun with him.

Khanya believes it was important to pursue this case of theft because it is necessary that activists and organisations safeguard and protect the resources of the working class and

of the social movements that are needed to organise, mobilise and wage a struggle against an exploitative and neoliberal system.

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