

PRESS STATEMENT: Tshwane metro officer convicted of kidnapping and assault of Zimbabwean street traders

The Tshwane metro police officer, accused of the kidnapping and assault of six Zimbabwean nationals in 2010, has been convicted in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court.

Steven Ndou changed his plea from not guilty to guilty on Friday before being convicted of the 2010 kidnapping and assault of three of the victims. The case has been postponed to 28 February for the purposes of a pre-sentencing report.

"We're happy with today's conviction but there are still many unanswered questions. We hope that the Tshwane metro police take such allegations seriously so that there will be no further abuse of informal traders and other vulnerable groups," said Lawyers for Human Rights' David Cote.

Two Tshwane metro police officers were initially arrested for the kidnapping and assault that led to the disappearance of Zimbabwean teenager Leon Chimuta but only Ndou was convicted.

The men had been selling cigarettes outside a nightclub when they were arrested. They were then taken to metro police offices in Madiba Street where they were taunted and physically abused for over two hours. Chimuta's brother, James, was also assaulted when he showed up at the station and tried to intervene. The men were then dropped off one-by-one along the R21 highway outside of Pretoria.

The 17-year-old Chimuta has not been seen since. Efforts by Lawyers for Human Rights and consultant Louis van der Merwe have proved unsuccessful in finding the teenager. He has not returned home and his whereabouts remain unknown.

"This case ties in strongly with the rise in targeting of informal traders around Pretoria and Johannesburg and we hope that this conviction will temper attempts to unfairly discriminate against these business people," Cote added.

Unfortunately, James Chimuta was killed on New Year's Eve before seeing an end to the three-and-a-half year ordeal. His death is under investigation.

LHR would like to thank Louis van der Merwe for his efforts in assisting with this case.

For interviews, please contact LHR's David Cote on 072 628 7698