

# AmaBhungane condemns BLF disruption at #GuptaLeaks media gathering

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28 Jul 2017

The amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism on Friday condemned an interruption by the lobby group Black First Land First (BLF) at their town hall event in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, on Thursday.

AmaBhungane said it was outraged at BLF leader Andile Mngxitama and the BLF's continued attack on freedom of the media and speech, both of which are protected by the constitution.

"We shall continue to bring our findings on the #GuptaLeaks and any other matter of public interest to public attention via our reporting and any platform of our choosing.

"We note claims by Mngxitama and the BLF that he was 'attacked by a white man at the amaBhungane event' and that he had laid charges with the police," said amaBhungane.

The South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) urged editors to lay a complaint with the police against the BLF.

It was reported that Mngxitama led the interruption aimed at intimidating journalists, who had gathered to discuss issues around state capture.

Sanef chairperson Mahlatse Gallens said the actions of the BLF were in violation of an interdict meant to stop the movement from intimidating and attacking journalists reporting on state capture.

"We have asked our members, especially those who were at the event, to go to the police and lay a complaint against the BLF. The court interdict was clear that the BLF should stop intimidating, harassing, or threatening journalists, or going to their homes, so we are hoping to see police action on this," said Gallens.

Gallens said the public space should be protected for the sake of freedom of expression.

"Andile and the BLF are attempting to close down these conversations," she said.

The court interdict, requested at the High Court in Johannesburg, was sought by Sanef after the BLF held a demonstration outside the private home of journalist and Tiso Blackstar editor-at-large Peter Bruce and assaulted Business Day editor Tim Cohen a month ago.

Mark Heywood, the executive director of the human rights organisation Section27, said the BLF members who interrupted the event looked drunk.

"I saw a group of drunken people shouting and screaming, some of them didn't look like they knew why they were there. Andile looked like he had taken substances and he had bloodshot eyes; I was just a feet away from him. Their behaviour was highly threatening and strange.

"We live in a democratic country and what they did was undemocratic. In discussions one can simply ask, oppose, or criticise if they don't hold the same view, and not become violent. The situation could have easily gone out of control," said Heywood.

Heywood is of the view that BLF should be brought before a court of law for its actions.

"Charges should be laid and they should answer for their actions. Their violent approach intended at intimidating journalists is not acceptable," he added.

Speaking to eNCA on Friday, Mngxitama denied the accusations and said that he was attacked by white monopoly apologists.

"I came to the event as a member of the public who's interested, I don't know who the people are who arrived singing but this white man, because they are racist against any black person who takes an action that they believe is wrong, they will pin that on us because of course they need to silence Black First Land First. Because we've been challenging white monopoly capital," said Mngxitama.

**Source:** BDpro

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