

Dear Fanie Groenewald

Re: Complaints of 22 August and 12 November 2024

I hope this message finds you well.

I hope the amended complaint submitted 12 November meets your expectations and provides everything that may be needed. I dedicated every day for a month entirely to reworking the complaint, condensing it to as few pages as possible while maintaining its substance. As you may have seen, the complaint references multiple articles—approximately half a dozen original pieces that were subsequently replicated, adapted, or repeated across six widely read Media24 platforms (Netwerk24, Die Burger, Beeld, Volksblad, Rapport, and News24). These publications collectively account for 21 instances of publication, increasing to 24 when articles based on Media24's reporting are included. Spanning a six-month period, these articles encompass over 7,000 words (excluding the repeats and adaptations), approximately 75% of which consists of false or fabricated content. This translates to 120 false and fabricated statements (repeated across all 20 instances) and representing over 320 breaches of the Press Code. Further complicated by not knowing exactly how much information and evidence is necessary to substantiate my claims. The unprecedented nature of the complaint is reflective of the unprecedented nature of the breaches and defamation.

To ensure digestibility, I structured the complaint into sections, allowing the reader to access its component parts as needed. The core complaint is outlined as follows: 1. **Introduction** (Pages 1–3), 2. **Violations of the Press Code** (Pages 3–9), 3. **News24 Communications** (Pages 9–10), 4. **Evidence** (Pages 10–14).

Based on my research and advice received, Media24's conduct represents one of the most egregious breaches of the Press Code, journalistic integrity, and ethics in recent years. These actions also potentially breach common law principles, and were criminal defamation still recognized under South African law, it would very likely apply here. Given Media24's dominance and reputation, these articles exemplify an abuse of power and a profound betrayal of reader trust.

So far, in addition to the full month, working 12-hour days compiling the new complaint, the original complaint required twice that effort, in all over one and a half thousand hours of work. With both only possible because of the year and a half of relentless work researching investigating, drafting the campaign as a whole. While at the same time having to start my life from scratch, homeless, my life savings stolen, my reputation ruined, and amidst the significant disadvantage of having my devices, equipment, data, and documents illegally retained by SAPS. Then the extremely challenging process of filing and chasing complaints with the various regulatory bodies. I undertook all of this alone, without financial resources or legal support,

I hope it is evident that when a publication launches a concerted, one-sided, unresearched, and extreme character assassination across five titles, the resulting complaint will naturally reflect the gravity of that misconduct. While I understand the considerable amount of material to digest, it feels as though I am being penalized for Media24's extensive and serious violations of the Press Code.

Unfortunately, I am not an attorney and can only provide a complaint based on the facts before me. Each section of the complaint is a product of the offenses, breaches, and harm caused. The size of the evidence section reflects the enormous volume of evidence I have to substantiate my allegations¹. The Press Code section results from the gravity and sheer number of breaches. The impact section's detail reflects the deep, extreme, and wide-ranging harm I have suffered. The length of the analysis of the articles stems from the 120 fabricated and false statements and the more than 300 Press Code violations that resulted. The context section was necessary because the articles, which should have been entirely unrelated to private vendettas or campaigns, were instead born of them, created by them, and manufactured to assist them. The News24 communications section is extensive because my communication with them was extensive²—making their rejection of my approach all the more shocking. The outcomes section reflects the dozens of attempts to remove me and the universal outcomes in my favour. In short, the length of the complaint mirrors the extreme nature and number of the breaches.

No one wishes more than I that the initial complaint submitted on 21 August had been deemed acceptable. Had that been the case, the matter might already be resolved, and I could begin rebuilding my life. Only I suffer while the articles remain uncorrected, which is why I invested over 300 hours creating a new, more concise submission despite the extensive nature of the violations.

Four years of my life have been taken, lost, or wasted: 2020–2022 spent working tirelessly, night and day, and investing everything I had into building the most exceptional villas, which should have led to a very comfortable semi-retirement. Instead, 2022–2023 was consumed by fighting greedy landlords intent on taking everything away—including spending a third of that year in Pollsmoor. The following year, 2023–2024, has been dedicated to building the evidence and information needed to expose the truth and achieve justice—a process that will likely take another two years. All of this effort is to at best put me back somewhere closer to where I was six years earlier. This final stage is stalled in some cases and, in other cases, cannot even begin until the defamatory articles are removed.

Given the significance of the breaches and the extraordinary damage done, as well as the many significant reasons behind the timing, I do not believe timing should be a reason to give any publication immunity from its egregious conduct. The purpose of press councils is to uphold ethical journalism and protect individuals from unfair reporting. Allowing late complaints, especially when supported by substantive reasons, aligns with the broader commitment to justice and accountability in media practices. Considering the sheer volume of information, as well as the challenges of finding the evidence without a single device or item of data, in itself explains the time taken. I appreciate that timescales are important for efficiency, but they are not intended to shield publications from addressing legitimate grievances.

¹ What I have provided represents just a fraction of what I have compiled. There are over 400 folders, several thousand files, all indexed if needed.

² It includes copies of my detailed correspondence with the publication, providing them with a very clear account of the defamatory nature of the articles, and included an index document granting access to other significant materials that detailed their severe and significant breaches of the Press Code

I would deeply appreciate it if you could review my submission. While the full material may take a few hours to read fully, the four main sections can be reviewed in under an hour, and I am extremely keen to start and finish the process.

May I also ask if you could provide any guidance on how long the process typically takes? The complaint procedure document mentions a target of settling complaints within 15 days of the respondent receiving them, but I am uncertain what this means for the overall timeline. **I ask this not just because damage and harm continue and grows, but because so much depends on the outcome of this complaint. Until the matter is resolved, many other aspects of my life remain stalled, while other aspects remain in growing jeopardy, for example:**

My immigration status: As I have mentioned before, Media24's articles have severely affected my efforts to normalize my visa and immigration status. While immigration attorneys are optimistic about the success of an application, they have cautioned that the articles pose a significant obstacle. My case requires escalation to the Director General of Home Affairs through a Letter of Good Cause, which involves a discretionary decision made by a senior official. In such cases, politics and optics play a significant role. Even with substantial evidence supporting my application, references to these articles could, and likely would, result in rejection. While I could provide a copy of the Press Council complaint, the officials involved are unlikely to invest the time to read it and would naturally be interested in the outcome rather than the complaint itself. That position transforms where those articles have been replaced by the truth. There is almost no prospect of normalizing my immigration status until that happens. Nor is this a subject I can revisit—if my application is rejected, it will be fatal for much of what follows.

My mother: My mother, in her seventies, was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2022, a condition exacerbated by the trauma caused by my arrests and Media24's defamatory narrative. I have not seen her since December 2020 when I first came to South Africa. Initially, in 2021, flight restrictions prevented travel, then from early 2022 to mid-2023, the theft and illegal retention of my passport, as well as unlawful arrest and detention, made it impossible. Since then, the need to normalize my sabotaged immigration status has further delayed travel. I am desperate to return to the UK to see her, but this cannot happen until my immigration status is resolved. There is also the devastating possibility that she may pass away before these corrections and retractions are published.

The inability to rebuild, secure a job, or a home: My life remains entirely on hold until the false public narrative created solely by Media24 is corrected. With the articles still published and uncorrected, my chances of re-entering the property sector or any trust-based industry are effectively non-existent. The articles have destroyed all opportunities to re-establish my professional life or rebuild my lost business, creating a relentless barrier to restoring my previous success. I cannot return to the property industry in any capacity. **Nor can I find a job**, and even if I could, it would be impossible to keep it—the moment any employer or client encountered the articles, my position would immediately be jeopardized. **I cannot even rent a home**, as no landlord or agency would consider letting property to someone portrayed by Media24 as the embodiment of a rogue tenant.

My health: Ironically, a significant part of the reason for moving back to Cape Town was to enjoy a more relaxed, healthier pace of life. I had come close to kidney failure on three occasions, resulting in my having a permanent catheter. In 2021, I underwent major surgery to address this issue. However, it requires constant monitoring, blood tests, and the possibility of further surgery. Unlike before the theft of everything I owned, I cannot afford private medical care or the treatment I need. Such care is only available during trips to the UK, which I currently cannot undertake. It has now been two years since my last full check-up. In addition, my father had prostate cancer at my current age, which also requires constant monitoring—another necessity I cannot meet until either (a) I have the ability to generate income again or (b) I can travel to the UK.

My dogs: I am struggling even to afford basic necessities, such as veterinary care for my dogs should they become unwell. I also cannot afford the cost of R70,000 each to transport them to the UK should my visa application fail.

Approaches to attorneys: Media24's portrayal has significantly hindered my ability to secure legal representation. Attorneys have explicitly told me that the first step must be the removal of the false narrative. If I had the financial means to retain attorneys outright, this might not be an issue, but as I am reliant on contingency-based agreements, overcoming this hurdle is essential. Attorneys are a vital component in my efforts to sue the state and the individuals responsible.

Attached is the contact sheet I have been working on. This relates to the multiple attempts to: (a) file formal complaints and motivate investigations into the extensive criminality and corruption, (b) address the many aspects of my life that have been sabotaged or destroyed, (c) recover the millions stolen from me, and (d) ensure those responsible are brought to justice. As you can see, so much now depends on the Press Council, and so much is stalled while awaiting the outcome of this complaint.

Approaches to anti-corruption organizations: Media24's narrative has similarly obstructed my ability to seek assistance from organizations dedicated to exposing corruption and investigating criminality by state employees, such as police officers. Media24's portrayal of me as a con artist, criminal, and international crook discourages these entities from engaging with my claims, undermining my efforts to highlight misconduct. My experience with regulatory bodies in South Africa has shown that, unlike in the UK where submitting a complaint ensures investigation, the default here seems to be looking for reasons not to investigate. It has been made very clear to me that motivating investigations and ensuring they receive adequate resources will remain infinitely more challenging while that public narrative persists.

However, it is worth noting that, despite the universal challenges in initiating and completing investigations, every occasion on which an investigation has been conducted has confirmed my allegations as wholly accurate. Unfortunately, starting or finishing investigations is only part of the process. For those investigations to serve a purpose, those found guilty must be prosecuted and convicted, but the articles make this far less likely and provide the criminals with an effective means to avoid accountability.

Inability to file charges and pursue recovery: Just as I face obstacles in engaging journalists, securing legal representation, and resolving my visa issues, I am similarly hindered in reporting the numerous crimes committed against me. Although I am able to file reports, the events are so extreme that I must already overcome healthy scepticism, which I can do with the facts and evidence. However, while the articles tell a story that is the polar opposite of the truth—painting me as the criminal rather than the real criminals—

there is no possibility of getting a fair hearing or motivating a genuine investigation. Actions I am currently unable to start or progress include but are by no means limited to: (1) Civil and criminal action to recover R4,500,000 worth of possessions from my home at Fisherman's Bend and R1,050,000 worth of possessions from Leirmans Road, both illegally retained by the owners when they had me arrested and removed on 14 December 2022. (2) Civil and criminal action to recover my R15,000,000 jewellery collection, stolen by my then-fiancé during my first detention in Pollsmoor, and R2,500,000 worth of artwork and contents of my London home, taken by a former tenant during my second detention in Pollsmoor. (3) Criminal and civil action against the landlords and the WDS campaign, as well as civil action against the state and the Minister of Police for unlawful arrests and detentions.

In the almost two years since my December arrest—no more than illegal evictions in disguise—those who stole from me are better off by at least R120,000,000 (through rental premiums, capital value increases, and stolen items³). By definition, I am worse off by an even greater sum. The articles grant those responsible near-immunity from investigation, allowing them to deflect scrutiny easily. Worse, they portray what was stolen from me as if it were somehow the product of crime, further complicating my ability to seek justice.

Reward and protection of criminal actions: Media24's articles have effectively shielded those orchestrating the campaign against me. By portraying me as the villain, the media has obscured the actions of my accusers, protecting them from scrutiny and accountability. These articles reward their misconduct and insulate them from consequences.

Constant threat of retaliation: Media24's narrative has emboldened those involved in this campaign and provided them with false credibility. The articles were used to justify and motivate my December arrest and were instrumental in enabling them to steal my property and business while I was unlawfully detained. Until the articles are removed and corrected, I remain as vulnerable to another attack as I was in 2022. This situation will only change when the narratives are corrected, and the real criminals are exposed.

The many actual victims, including post-arrest victims: The impact of Media24's articles extend beyond my situation. Following my arrest, Mr. de Swardt, Keith, and Inge Broad, along with Sergeant Stevens, deliberately kept Booking.com unaware that I no longer managed or occupied the properties. They failed to inform the platform on purpose—a critical step if my arrest had been genuine. Instead, they allowed unsuspecting guests to arrive and discover they had nowhere to stay, only to be told by a waiting Inge Broad or WDS that they had been scammed. This strategy was intended to turn guests into victims and create the appearance of a premeditated scam. After being granted bail, I reached out to every guest who had booked after my arrest. Of those who had not spoken with Keith or Inge, 98% received refunds or alternative accommodations—charges all levied against me. Guests who interacted with Inge or WDS, and were shown the articles, were less fortunate, with nearly all failing even to request refunds. My attempts to guide them toward recovering their funds were met with hostility and distrust. Without these articles, the falsehoods spread by WDS and Inge would have lacked credibility. Instead, the articles gave their lies undue weight, leaving me unable to counter them effectively.

Whether intentional or not, Media24's actions have created additional victims beyond myself. Until the articles are removed, those guests will continue to suffer and continue to believe the lies told by WDS and Inge Broad.

My personal life: Media24's narrative has irreparably damaged my personal relationships. Each attempt to forge new connections is undermined by the articles, readily accessible online, that present a sensationalized and misleading portrayal of my character. The stigma fostered by their reporting has eroded longstanding relationships and deterred potential new ones. Dating has become an inevitable cycle of termination, as any romance dissolves upon exposure to the articles' toxic content. This pattern extends into other areas of my life. For instance, when seeking help to compile the vast amount of information needed for my legal battle, I initially received significant interest from qualified candidates. However, upon mentioning the articles, I was met with silence or outright hostility.

Death threats: I have received several death threats as a result of the articles. In video recordings of Mario Boffa's confessions, he discusses his relationship with Denis Dalton, John Schalkwyk, and theirs with WDS and Ms. Disberry, including their plan to drug and torture me, access and empty my bank accounts, and murder me to disguise the crime. He also admitted to embezzling R1.2 million by transferring guest payments to himself and others. The articles, bolstered by Mario's faux petition, allowed them to deceive those they had stolen from and blame me. Telling them I had done it. This has resulted in multiple threats, including one from a well-connected guest from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who explicitly threatened my life and sent thugs to find me. Until these articles are removed, I remain in very real danger. I have the recording if needed.

My dignity: Media24 has stripped me of my dignity, portraying me as a dangerous, calculated criminal accused of scamming thousands of guests while pocketing millions of Rand. WDS and Sergeant Stevens even orchestrated my public exit after the arrest to maximize media exposure, parading me before the cameras as a trophy.

Relationships with family and friends: Media24's defamatory portrayal has infiltrated nearly every significant relationship in my life.

My attempts to expose the truth: Despite extensive efforts to present credible evidence and correct the record, Media24 has disregarded my attempts to share my side of the story. Their refusal to engage with clear evidence has allowed their narrative to dominate, stifling each attempt to restore my reputation. While some journalists have found my evidence credible and expressed interest in publishing my story, they have felt unable to proceed due to Media24's dominance and the entrenched media narrative. A journalist who recognized the public interest in my story even recommended filing a complaint with the Press Council.

Non-Media24 articles: For example, Vernon Pillay expressed genuine shock upon learning of Media24's articles. He apologized sincerely and offered to correct and report the matters but made it clear he would await the Press Council's outcome before doing so.

In conclusion: The repercussions of Media24's reckless reporting extend far beyond financial losses, casting a pervasive shadow over my life—from my family's well-being to my personal freedom. These false accusations, embedded in the public record, have left me grappling with the nearly impossible task of restoring a life irreparably altered.

³ LdRP & fine jewelry and gem collection - 15,000,000; London home and artwork - 2,500,000; Fisherman's bend possessions - 4,500,000; Leirmans possessions - 1,050,000; Leirmans capital value - 13,000,000; Fisherman's capital value - 18,000,000; Hove capital value - 6,000,000; Monterey capital value - 3,000,000; Fisherman's, Leirmans, Hove and Monterey rental premium - 55,776,000

The Urgency

As previously stated, I am trying to get everything sorted out as soon as possible. In 2022, my mother, in her late seventies, was diagnosed with lung cancer. I have been unable to visit her due to SAPS's sabotage of my visa extension, orchestrated by Mr. de Swardt and his clients. In fact, I have not seen her since I left the UK in December 2020, initially due to travel disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Until the articles are removed and corrected, I stand almost no chance of being able to normalize my immigration status. If significant progress is not made soon, we risk running out of time. My top priority is to secure apologies, unreserved retractions, and, most importantly, full corrections of the libelous articles published in 2022 and 2023 before my mother's health further deteriorates—or worse.

The Very Real and Present Danger

I had deliberately limited the number of bodies I contacted and filed complaints with, focusing solely on IPID to investigate the police and PSIRA to investigate the PI. This was because I naively hoped and expected the investigations and prosecutions to be completed quickly and effectively before those under investigation became aware of my efforts, thereby putting myself in serious danger.

I purposefully waited a year and a half after my arrest to allow sufficient time and distance between that attempt and the present to reduce the likelihood of additional fabricated charges being brought against me to achieve my removal and halt the process entirely.

After spending the last year and a half compiling various folders of information and evidence, I have significantly increased both the number of approaches and the organizations and individuals I contact. These include the Home Affairs Minister, the Minister of Police, the Director General of Home Affairs, the Western Cape Minister of Police Oversight and Community Safety, the Commander of Central Cape Town SAPS, the SAPS complaints system, Premier Alan Winde, the Press Council Ombudsman, the continuation of dialogue with the British Embassy, and the Police Ombudsman to address IPID's complete failure to respond.

I have also reached out to journalists and publications, whether those that have previously published articles or others who may yet do so. As a result, I am now exposing myself to the significant risk of another attempt to incarcerate me—or worse.

Those involved have already demonstrated their willingness to use highly illegal and immoral means to achieve their objectives. Mr. de Swardt and SAPS's list of crimes is far too long to detail fully here, numbering several hundred criminal offenses. However, their actions include: arresting and attempting to imprison Ollie Sokanyile purely out of spite and revenge, weeks after regaining control of the property and thereby achieving their goals; using arrests to disguise illegal evictions; illegally arresting me twice and attempting to bury me in Pollsmoor Prison on both occasions with extraordinary fabrications designed solely for strategic advantage; using the distraction of my arrest to conduct a secret, unofficial, and illegal raid and arrest at my other Llandudno property to achieve an eviction in disguise; harassing and threatening individuals I knew or who worked with or for me, coercing them with threats of ten to thirty years' imprisonment unless they signed pre-written witness statements; stealing over R100 million in rental premiums, millions spent on refurbishments, and several million in possessions, furniture, artwork, and other contents of my homes during my arrest, all of which the landlords have since kept and refused to return; using unlawful arrests as weapons, including appealing our recent win in December and arresting me the very next day, thereby removing their only opponent.

Additionally, there was the extremely sinister plan devised by Mr. de Swardt and SAPS after my arrest to create victims. This involved deliberately keeping the platforms unaware of the change in control of the villas, resulting in hundreds of families being left homeless. This was done solely to aid their civil court actions to seize control of the properties.

He undertook all these actions purely for strategic advantage for his clients. It is therefore fair to conclude that there is no limit to what they would do to avoid investigation, prosecution, imprisonment, or public exposure as criminals of the worst kind in the media.

As you can imagine, I am determined never to return to Pollsmoor or to endure that horrific experience again. It is utterly terrifying to think that private individuals can weaponize arrest and detention in a personal vendetta for financial gain, all funded by South African taxpayers. Now that I have crossed that line, I have taken an extraordinary risk. I am eager to bring as much of the truth as possible into the public domain as quickly as possible because their incentive and benefit in removing me diminishes significantly once that occurs.

The scale of damage caused by these articles cannot be overstated. Ten articles, across four respected titles, presented the most one-sided journalism conceivable. The tone and content gave readers the impression of factual reporting when, in reality, they were well-prepared fabrications, regurgitated verbatim, and laundered to lend them unparalleled credibility and power. This power was weaponized by WDS and his clients with devastating effect.

As a result, I am unemployable, undatable, unable to reestablish myself, unable to lay charges against those who hounded me like an animal and then locked me up for months in a prison unfit for animals. I am unable to travel, unable to see my mother, unable to tackle my health issues, unable to provide for my dogs if they become unwell, unable to find a home, and unable to relax while I remain so exposed. I have already lost or wasted four years of my life because of these articles and the effects they have had and continue to have on my life, and I am desperate to begin the process of rebuilding.

I apologize for taking up your time, and am very grateful for your attention to date, but the magnitude and significance of removing and correcting these false and fabricated articles cannot be overstated.

Kind regards,

Darren

Attached:

- I noticed that the complaint did not reference all the articles. Specifically, there was one in **News24**, four in **Netwerk24**, four in **Rapport**, then replications including four in **Beeld**, four in **Volksblad**, four in **Die Burger**, along with the **Ground News** replication and the **IOL** article based on the Media24 articles. I have updated the attached table to reflect this. As such I have updated the tables of articles as attached
- To assist further, I have created a more targeted index of folders and files containing information and evidence substantiating my claims, including detailed descriptions for each item and created direct links (named URLs) providing access
- Additionally, I have categorized the statements into four columns: **fabricated**, **false**, **misleading/selective**, and **accurate**, to streamline the review process.
- Lastly, I have included a **contact sheet** documenting the numerous attempts to: (a) File formal complaints and motivate investigations into the extensive criminality and corruption. (b) Address the many aspects of my life that have been sabotaged or destroyed. (c) Recover the millions stolen from me. (d) Ensure those responsible are brought to justice.

As you can see, so much now depends on the Press Council, and so much remains stalled while awaiting the outcome of this complaint.

Screenshots taken on 23 November 2024 show that all the articles remain available across all of Media24's platforms. This is deeply concerning. My detailed letters and the extensive enclosures substantiating my allegations, even for the most sceptical journalist, should have prompted alarm from any responsible editor. Yet, not only did they fail to engage meaningfully, they outright rejected my attempts to correct the record and left all the articles fully accessible online. This shows an absolute disregard for the damage I made clear their articles had caused and a complete disregard for the Press Code. This situation underscores a critical flaw in the Press Council's 20-day rule for lodging complaints. While such a time frame might have relevance for physical print articles or online articles that are quickly removed, it is entirely unjust when applied to articles that remain online currently and indefinitely. These articles are not historical events or "past" publications; they are current, actively accessible, and as damaging and powerful as the day they were first published. For any reader encountering these articles for the first time, the original date of publication is irrelevant—the harm and defamation are just as immediate. It is profoundly unjust to permit publications a loophole simply because the complaint was not filed within an arbitrary period, particularly when the defamatory content remains live and accessible.

