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Zondo Commission – Agrizzi, Van Tonder plotted to expose Gavin Watson and take Bosasa down

Former Bosasa auditor Peet Venter has denied any involvement in illegal activities that took place within that company – now trading as African Global Operations. Venter told the Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture that he was threatened by former Bosasa COO turned whistle-blower Angelo Agrizzi to get him to participate in Agrizzi's plan to expose Bosasa CEO Gavin Watson. Agrizzi had told the commission that Venter was involved in producing fraudulent invoices for the South African Revenue Services (Sars). Venter, however, says he was not aware of any illegal activities and never participated in such.

"If there were any illegal dealings within Bosasa ... I think my colleagues and I would have picked it up, so I cannot confirm any illegal activities ... We don't interrogate what we are given by a client, we just work with what we are given if there are no clear red flags."

He said that he only knew about Watson's family members who were on the Bosasa payroll but added that there was nothing wrong with that as they provided services for Bosasa through its various subsidiaries.

Venter told the commission about Agrizzi's and former Bosasa CFO Andries van Tonder's plan to take down Watson and how he was threatened to join their quest. He said he met Van Tonder in 2004 while working for Sars and later got to work directly with him when Venter became an external auditor for Bosasa and had more interactions with him and Agrizzi later. Agrizzi and Van Tonder coerced Venter to write a signed affidavit exposing Watson's alleged tax fraud and racketeering, Venter told the commission.

He went on to say that Agrizzi came to him and showed him evidence he and Van Tonder had accumulated over the years to expose illegal activities by Bosasa and Gavin Watson. According to Venter, Agrizzi told him: "either you go down with Watson or you prepare a statement like we have done". Venter added that Agrizzi said they can destroy him because they have built boundaries around him.

Venter said he was summoned to Agrizzi's family home in Fourways and met with both Agrizzi and Van Tonder. Agrizzi divulged that he (Agrizzi) was negotiating on behalf of Van Tonder and two other gentlemen, who had left Bosasa over their retirement package, which would include the group scooping the lucrative Department of Correctional Services kitchen tender – Venter could be part of that, he was told, if he signed an affidavit about Watson and Bosasa's alleged tax fraud and racketeering. Venter said he signed the statement because he was afraid to lose his job and the tender his firm had at Bosasa. Agrizzi promised to pay him even if he lost his job – the money for that would come from the correctional service tender.

He also revealed that he was instructed by Watson to pay the legal fees of former SABC COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng – to the tune of just over R1-million – through Bosasa subsidiary companies.

Venter said that Agrizzi requested the proof of payment of Motsoeneng's legal fees as further ammunition against Watson in the bid for the correctional services tender. He added that Agrizzi sent him a flow diagram explaining what would happen if he did not sign the affidavit exposing Watson – Agrizzi would use the

information in his possession to trigger social media, online media, banks, auditors and politicians, to put Bosasa and Watson under public scrutiny.

Venter also said Agrizzi claimed the group would make profits of over R12-million a month from the correctional service tender; they would give 3% of those profits to Bosasa if they agreed to give them the tender. Venter rebuked part of the affidavit: "Chair...I signed the affidavit after further threats from Mr Agrizzi but some parts of it are untrue, he might have added them himself." He did concede that Agrizzi did not ask him to fabricate any information contained in the affidavit.

Venter's testimony continues.

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