FAKE NEWS IN THE TIME OF COVID – 19

Category: Administrative and Procurement Law,Commercial Law,Dispute Resolution,Media and OTT
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Fake news has caused mass panic in these times of global crisis. It not only makes people believe false things, but also makes them less likely to accept or consume accurate information.

On 18 March 2020, government gazette no. 43107 issued regulations in terms of section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002. These regulations deal specifically with the Covid – 19 outbreak that has *gone viral*. Here's how they impact you…

A law enforcement officer is mandated to order dispersal of people and is permitted to take appropriate action (which can include arrest) if people refuse to disperse.

Any person who has Covid – 19; is showing symptoms of Covid – 19; or who has come into contact with a person who has Covid – 19, may be admitted to a health establishment for treatment. If such person refuses, they must be placed under quarantine or in isolation for a period of 48 hours.

Any person who intentionally misrepresents that he/she or any other person is infected with Covid – 19 may be liable to a fine and 6 months imprisonment. Further, any person who intentionally exposes another person to Covid – 19 may be prosecuted for assault, attempted murder or murder.

Finally, and in our opinion most necessarily, any person who publishes a statement, through any medium (this includes WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter), with the intention to deceive any other person about the virus; the infection status of any person; or any government measures taken to address the virus, may be liable to a fine and imprisonment for up to 6 months.

It is imperative, given the reach of social media, that only accurate and verified news is circulated in order to avoid mass panic. You can do your part by checking the sources of the information you receive and only forwarding messages or documents that are truthful and substantiated. So think twice before you send thank link to the family WhatsApp group about stock piling in preparation for the impending zombie apocalypse!