

# House of counterfeits forfeited to state

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A house in Cyrildene Johannesburg, that was used to manufacture and copy DVDs and CDs in a large counterfeiting operation was forfeited to the state last week, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) announced on Friday, 3 April 2009.

The Asset Forfeiture Unit last week obtained a forfeiture order in respect of the value at R600,000.

The forfeiture of property used in the commission of crime is permitted under the Prevention of Organised Crime Act.

“South African law enforcement agencies are making inroads in combating acts of counterfeiting,” NPA spokesman Tlali Tlali said.

“With the impending FIFA World Cup, criminal syndicates will employ various measures to criminally enrich themselves through trading in counterfeit products — they will find our agencies operating with heightened alertness where counterfeiting will not be tolerated.”

The forfeiture order granted by the court last Tuesday followed a preservation order that was obtained by the unit in April last year. The house was raided by police after they were informed by local musicians that counterfeit copies of their CDs, DVDs and cassettes were being manufactured on the premises.

Police found thousands of counterfeit CDs, DVDs and cassettes allegedly manufactured in the house, as well as a vast number of computers, printers, DVD, CD and cassette writers. A search of the house revealed deliberately concealed trapdoors that led to the ceiling area and a recently constructed basement.

In most counterfeiting cases, counterfeiters usually get away with paying admission-of-guilt fines. In this case, the forfeiture order enabled the NPA's unit to seize the house and the equipment used to commit the crime.

The NPA warned property owners to exercise vigilance in order to prevent the use of their properties in criminal activities.

Tlali said the owner of the house, Ruoquin Chen, a Chinese national residing in SA, claimed that she was an innocent owner who had leased her property and was unaware of the criminal activities taking place on the property.

Tlali said the Johannesburg High Court rejected her version and held that it was improbable for her not to have suspected that illegal activities were conducted on her premises. He said the judge commented that ordinary law enforcement efforts were insufficient to deal with certain crimes and there was a need for stronger measures, such as asset forfeiture, to

supplement these measures.

The CDs, DVDs and cassettes that were seized had an estimated value of R1,1m, according to the Recording Industry of South Africa. Tlali said that according to the recording body, such cases resulted in the loss of millions of rands to the recording and film industry and to local artists.

The Prevention of Organised Crime Act was passed in 1998 to combat organised crime, money laundering and criminal gang activities.

*Source: Business Day*

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