

## SIU investigation leads to closure of Master's Offices

Justice Minister Ronald Lamola on Monday announced a countrywide shutdown of the Master's Offices.



Image source: Getty Images

The shutdown - effective Tuesday, 4 January 2020 - has been implemented so as to pave the way for investigations into allegations of maladministration, corruption and fraud.

The shutdown follows President Cyril Ramaphosa's authorisation that the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) investigate allegations levelled against the office.

Following the proclamation, the SIU conducted search and seizure operations at Master's Offices across the country on Monday.

"This investigation was necessitated by several allegations of maladministration and corruption, and the Mpumalanga case where it is alleged that an official in the Master's Office amassed R1.7 million through fraudulent activities, which further highlighted the need for an investigation of this nature.

"As a result, we will be shutting down all Master's Offices across the country to enable the SIU to gather, collate and retrieve information relevant to the investigation without any hindrance," said the Minister at a briefing in Tshwane.

### Details of the investigation

The investigation encompasses maladministration in relation to the administration of estates of deceased and insolvent persons; the protection and administration of the funds of minors, contractually incapacitated and undetermined and absent heirs, which have been paid into the Guardian's Fund.

Following the announcement, Lamola requested members of the public to postpone their intention to visit Master's Offices.

“We are fully aware that the Master’s Office plays a critical role in our communities. It is an office that works for the most vulnerable in our communities. It works for orphans, minor children and the widowed.

“Matters that are urgent and pressing can be escalated to the head office via the local Magistrate's Office for the necessary attention,” he said.

The investigation will also look into the supervision of the administration of companies and close corporations in liquidation; the safeguarding of all documentary material in respect of estates, insolvencies and liquidations; the processing of enquiries by executors, attorneys, beneficiaries and other interested parties, and the appointment of executors, trustees, curators and liquidators.

“We want a Master’s Office that will conduct its affairs with integrity, in line with Batho Pele principles and not squander resources meant for the poor and vulnerable in society,” said Lamola.

The offices will reopen on Wednesday, 5 February 2020.

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