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## **BLF-linked disruption of amaB #GuptaLeaks town hall discussion**

The amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism deplores the disruption of our “Inside the #GuptaLeaks” town hall event in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, last night, and regrets the distress caused to members of the public.

Our intended panel discussion was disrupted by several dozen persons who appeared to act in concert with Andile Mngxitama, the leader of Black First Land First (BLF). They sang, shouted and physically threatened participants and members of the public, rendering proceedings impossible. A knife was brandished at one stage.

After roughly an hour, we cancelled formal proceedings at the request of the owners of the premises, who were concerned about the safety of their property. Some members of the audience, however, stayed or returned after Mngxitama and the group had left. We then had a short, informal discussion about what had just transpired and the #GuptaLeaks.

We salute members of the audience, who all stood their ground until we announced the cancellation.

AmaBhungane town hall events are intended quarterly public discussions on current events and the media. This, our second such event, was to have been moderated by broadcast personality Bongani Bingwa and featured journalists Sam Sole (amaBhungane), Thanduxolo Jika (Sunday Times), Krivani Pillay (SABC) and Pieter-Louis Myburgh (News24).

We note claims by Mngxitama and the BLF that he was “attacked by a white man at the amaBhungane event” and that he had laid charges with the police.

A BLF statement read:

*Mngxitama walked into the venue and sat down just as the event was about to start. At this stage a group of comrades arrived and started singing. Two white men then approached Mngxitama, who was seated peacefully, in a threatening manner. One white man got close to the President and pushed him and said, “stop your bullshit”. Mngxitama was startled by this and the white man threatened by saying, “tell your people to stop their nonsense”. The white man was evidently physically threatening Mngxitama who in turn pushed the man back in self defence. The comrades subsequently intervened between the President and the white man.*

This version is not true.

After the disruption started, amaBhungane’s Stefaans Brümmer approached Mngxitama where he was seated, followed by his amaBhungane colleague Micah Reddy.

Brümmer says: “As it seemed that the persons who were causing the disruption were associated with Mngxitama, I went to him to enter dialogue on how to restore calm. I probably put my hand on his shoulder to make contact. I did not ask him to ‘stop your bullshit’, but I did ask him to “please control your people” or similar words.

“Mngxitama stood up, grabbed me with two hands and tried to shove me to the ground, shouting words like ‘you fuck with me’. A second person then threw me to the ground. I offered no resistance.”

We note also that amaBhungane’s Reddy was set upon by a group associated with Mngxitama on July 17 after a television panel discussion in which both of them had participated. The intervention of studio personnel saved him from apparently serious assault.

We are discussing next steps with our lawyers, as Mngxitama’s actions and the disruption may contravene a high court order barring him and the BLF from intimidating, harassing, assaulting, threatening or “acting in any manner that would constitute an infringement on [the] personal liberty” of a number of journalists.

We ask members of the public who may have filmed the above incident, or any other acts of violence, intimidation or harassment last night, to contact us at [info@amabhungane.org](mailto:info@amabhungane.org). This may be important evidence.

AmaBhungane is outraged at Mngxitama and the BLF’s continued attack on freedom of the media and of speech, both of which are protected by the constitution. We shall continue to bring our findings on the #GuptaLeaks and any other matter of public interest to public attention via our reporting and any platform of our choosing.

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