

Striking mortuary workers urged to go back to work or face arrest for contempt of court

05 December 2018

Striking staff from the Fort Napier Medico-Legal Mortuary in Pietermaritzburg have been given an ultimatum to return to work today (Wednesday 05 December 2018) or face arrest for up to 30 days for contempt of court.

This comes after numerous failed attempts to persuade the workers to abandon the go slow which they embarked upon two weeks ago. The Department first issued an ultimatum which was followed by an interim order granted by the court to try and interdict the workers from participating in an illegal strike. When not much response resulted from the interim order, another application for being in contempt of court order was filed by the Department. All this action happened simultaneously with the roll out of contingency plans to keep services running amid challenging circumstances that were taking a toll on many grieving families

Yesterday (04 December 2018), the court pronounced on two applications, firstly, granting the Final order to interdict workers from embarking on a wild cat strike and secondly, granting the second court order for the workers being in contempt of court. However, the labour union Nehawu, which also had a representative in court, pleaded for the immediate suspension of the implementation of the court order which would have seen arrests of all those that are subjected to it since yesterday. The labour union then committed that workers will abide by the order from today.

The Department then affords the workers this very last opportunity to go back to work today, and is closely monitoring the situation. If the workers fail to return to work and work at optimum level, the Department will be left with no option but to return to court to ask the judge to lift the suspension of the order so that laws of dealing with wild cat strikes can be implemented against employees.

The Department has already begun addressing some of the employees' grievances - such as protective clothing and the faulty airconditioning system - at provincial level. Other grievances involving remuneration are being dealt with through ongoing negotiations at national level.