

Former EFF leader in court on fraudulent land sales charge

EC politician and co-accused remain in jail until their February 4 appearance

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Well-known Eastern Cape politician Themba Wele will spend a further six days in jail after his bail application in an East London Airport land fraud case was held over to next week.

Wele, a former provincial EFF leader, and four co-accused were arrested on Wednesday in connection with the illegal sale of land near the airport.

The matter was postponed to Thursday by magistrate Annemarie Elliot at the East London magistrate's court on Friday to allow the National Prosecuting Authority time to conduct profiling of Wele, 40, along with his co-accused Xolani Fani, 48, Noludwe Mkiva, 38, Thembile Ndibaza, 67, and Bonginkosi Mabhula, 45.

They were arrested for fraud during a joint intelligence operation by the police, but additional charges of allowing or creating opportunities for illegal occupation of land might be added by the prosecutor.

They are accused of illegally selling "plots"

of land to willing buyers on the Greydell farm, which belongs to the national department of public works & infrastructure.

Reports suggest that the group was selling plots for R15,000 each up to December 31, but the price increased by R5,000 to R20,000 per plot in January 2021.


The five accused, all members of the Bhongweni community committee near the East London Airport, made a brief appearance in court. They will be back in court on February 4 for their formal bail application.

Wele, who is now an activist in Mmusi Maimane's One SA Movement in the province, appeared in court wearing a red top with gold stripes.

Upon arrival, he looked around to see whether there were any familiar faces present before he faced the magistrate, but there was no-one as supporters were not allowed into the courtroom due to Covid-19 protocols.

His co-accused focused on the magistrate and did not share a word, except with their legal representative, Sipho Klaas.

Elliot said the National Prosecuting Authority had asked for seven days to profile the



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accused.

She said there were also outstanding investigations which included video and audio recordings, statements, cellphone recordings and photos.

"You are all remanded in custody to February 4 so that the court hears what your bail position is," Elliot said.

Klaas tried to put up a fight, arguing that he could see no reason why the prosecutors needed more time to conduct their profiling of the accused.

"I'm just having an issue with the profiling because the accused were arrested on Wednesday and the investigating officer had all the time to do the profiling," Klaas said.

Outside the court, Wele's supporters waited with bated breath to be addressed by Klaas on what had been said in the courtroom.

They were disappointed when told that Wele and his co-accused would remain behind bars.

The Dispatch approached Klaas for comment, but he politely declined, saying only that he was positive his clients would be granted bail soon.