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Two appear in court for fatal Rheenendal bus crash

Siphokazi Mnyobe

As two people linked to a private vehicle-testing centre in George appeared in court — nearly 12 years after a fatal bus crash in which 14 pupils and the driver were killed — the mother of one of the victims spoke out about her trauma.

André Ricardo Hobanie, 40, and Christo Lourenco, 58, appeared in the George Magistrate's Court yesterday, on charges of fraud and corruption.

Their case was postponed to April 4 for a formal bail hearing.

According to the Hawks, the company they worked for allegedly issued a fake roadworthy permit, despite the African Express Tata school bus not being roadworthy.

The bus later plunged into Kasat-se-Drift, outside Knysna, on August 24 2011.

The children and the driver all came from the small farming community of Rheenendal and soon became known as the "Rheenendal 15".

"I would have lost two of my kids on that school bus, but God did not allow it," Kathleen Wessels, 55, said.

One of her children died in the horror crash.

Family members of the school bus victims gathered in-



We never received any closure for the death of our kids, and my son, who is now afraid of driving, lives with the trauma of seeing the lifeless body of his sister'

side court as the two accused briefly took to the dock.

The bus had been serviced by TJ Private Vehicle Testing Station.

Hobanie and Lourenco were finally arrested on March 17, after investigations led the police to believe they had issued roadworthy permits to vehicles that were not roadworthy, including the bus.

Wessels's daughter, Rayleen, would have turned 24 on March 22.

"We never received any closure for the death of our kids, and my son, who is now afraid of driving, lives with the tra-

uma of seeing the lifeless body of his sister.

"He never received any form of counselling," Wessels said. "My daughter used to assist me with Sunday school activities.

"She promised to take care of me when I am old.

"Instead, I now have a disability and depend on a grant to survive.

"We need to be compensated for our losses."

Hawks spokesperson Zinzi Hani said the investigation into the alleged fraudulent activities at TJ Private Vehicle Testing Station emanated from the fatal accident in 2011.

The arrests were made after a joint intelligence-led operation between the Hawks' serious corruption investigation team, based in George, crime intelligence, public order policing, members of the local criminal record centre, as well as the officials from the departments of transport and public works.

The two accused remain in custody.

LASTING ANGUISH: Kathleen Wessels at the scene of the accident where she lost her daughter, Rayleen. Photograph: WERNER HILLS



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