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MEDIA STATEMENT

UPROAR SURROUNDING LUC EYMAEL AND CHIPPA UNITED FC

This statement is issued to clarify Chippa United FC (“Chippa”)’s position concerning professional football coach Luc Eymael (“Eymael”), dispel certain misinformation that has been peddled in the media regarding Chippa’s said position in the matter and lastly to condemn the reckless manner in which the matter has been aired through the Public Broadcaster, being the South African Broadcasting Corporation (“SABC”), firstly in December of 2020 and currently on sports shows.

1. Chippa United FC’s position

Chippa decided in December 2020 to appoint Eymael based on the poor results achieved in the first 8 (eight) encounters of the current 2020 /2021 DSTV Premiership. Mr. Eymael’s performance as a coach in South Africa and the Continent over the past 10 (ten) years speaks for itself, having won at least 7 cups in the said period and he was seen as a suitable candidate to assist the team to achieve its ambitions across the competitions.

Whilst we had no concrete details at the time of appointment, we were aware of the media reports regarding an alleged racist incident in Tanzania, and Mr. Emayael’s reported responses denying the accusations. Following a backlash and public outcry that ostensibly followed a statement by the South African Football Association (“SAFA”) and several broadcasts thereafter, Chippa decided to at the time abandon its plans to appoint Eymael to afford Eymael an opportunity to clarify matters and clear his name.

It must be stated that the decision to withdraw the appointment of Eymael, was not based on any concrete evidence or legal position regarding the claims against Eymael, but was rather informed by the club’s sensitivity to the gravity of the accusations against Eymael, the public outcry and to also allow the matter to be fully investigated. By this time however, substantial reputational and financial damage had occurred against the club, caused by broadcasts, largely on the Robert Marawa World Wide sports shows on Metro FM and Radio 2000 on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (“SABC”) and statements from political organisations and stakeholders condemning Eymael’s appointment.

Chippa United FC proceeded in January 2021 to approach the Ethics Committee of FIFA, the ultimate body governing football, to seek clarity on whether there was any ban issued against the appointment of Eymael, or any matters pending before it. FIFA responded on 13 January of 2021 in summary that it would look into the matter and would take action if required and / or refer it to the jurisdiction of the local Football Association (which in this case would be the Tanzanian FA, against Eymael arose there) to deal with. Nothing further followed from FIFA confirming any ban and / or pending proceedings against Eymael.

Following the departure of Coach Dan Malesela after a string of extremely poor results, Eymael contacted the Chairman of Chippa to confirm that he had independently sought to clear his name, including addressing SAFA, who on his version confirmed to him that there were no proceedings against him. Eymael furthermore confirmed that there were no proceedings from the Tanzanian F.A. nor from FIFA against him. The Chairman of Chippa in response contacted the C.E.O. of SAFA, Mr. Tebogo Motlanthe to request written confirmation that there were no legal grounds to prevent the appointment of Eymael and furthermore that there were no proceedings against him through the local Ethics Committee. During this conversation it became clear to Chippa that there was no legal basis to prevent the appointment of Eymael and Chippa proceeded to appoint him in the position of Technical Director on condition that SAFA clears him in writing and that he receives the necessary work visa.

2. Misinformation and uproar

As stated above, upon the initial attempt to appoint Eymael in December 2020, there was an uproar about Chippa's intentions to appoint an alleged racist. This was by and large caused by utterances of Robert Marawa during a sports show, which also included the continuous airing of a soundbite with a voice alleged to be that of Eymael, the source of which was not credited. We cannot overemphasize the fallout that followed the initial statement by SAFA in December 2020 and the said broadcasts, including public condemnation on air, social media and statements by sponsors and political parties in condemnation of Chippa. This also, caused the withdrawal of plans to appoint Eymael at the time, which as can currently be seen in the team's poor performance led to goals and objectives not being attained.

A new challenge is now faced through the unsubstantiated, unethical and prejudicial actions of in particular Robert Marawa's show broadcasts, which on top of Marawa himself clearly expressing bias, invited a political party and a niche union representing coaches to express their views on what are his views, including the publicly stated intention to disrupt Chippa's upcoming fixtures. The views expressed by callers to the show were a clear intent to preclude the free movement of Eymael and the proper fulfilment of our fixtures and this immediately puts the safety and security of the team, supports and stakeholders at risk. We were furthermore dismayed to note that the tone set on the other SABC stations was followed by the newly appointed Putco Mafani on Umhlobo Wenene FM who interviewed a political party, a station with a long-standing relationship with Chippa and with a sponsorship agreement that includes Chippa United officially advertising the station, jeopardizing such amicable relationship through unprofessional conduct.

It has been made clear that the allegations against Eymael after investigation have not yielded any legal basis across all relevant governing structures of football. What has since subsisted since 3 April 2021, arising from the intended appointment of Eymael therefore falls purely into the political discourse and public opinion informed by the offending utterances and clips during broadcasts.

3. Condemnation of the media actions.

Chippa strongly condemn the use of the public Broadcaster to air unsubstantiated views and promote agendas though politics in sport. In this regard we state the following:

- 3.1. The SABC is a public broadcaster and subscribes to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa Code and adhere to the laws of the Republic of South Africa, including the Constitution;**
- 3.2. The SABC is a media partner of the Premier Soccer League (“PSL”) and as such must adhere to the laws of the game in its broadcasting.**

Chippa will issue a complaint to the SABC concerning the offending broadcasts and are currently seeking legal advice on further action to follow in this regard. We will furthermore raise the issue with the PSL as the actions expressed herein have clear and potential adverse effects to both the League and its other sponsors including DSTV should there be any disruptions to fixtures. Without exhausting the issues arising from the offending broadcasts we highlight the following:

- 3.3. Rule 4 of the FIFA handbook specifically bans the expression of political opinion in football, punishable by suspension or expulsion of the offending party. This therefore compromises SAFA and the PSL, potentially bringing them into disrepute, the SABC being a media partner to the PSL.**
- 3.4. Rule 16.2 of the FIFA disciplinary Code makes associations and clubs liable for acts of supporters, including the use of gestures, words, objects or any other means to transmit a message that is not appropriate for a sports event, particularly messages that are of a political, ideological, religious or offensive nature. The stated intentions by political parties on the offending broadcast to interrupt upcoming fixtures would therefore expose the PSL and Chippa to sanctions under this rule.**
- 3.5. The offending broadcasts furthermore express clear bias against the BCCSA Code in their nature. The clear nature of the matter was completely ignored, with no legal expert being contacted to express an opinion in the matter, instead with political parties and unions of a particular niche group being used to accelerate a clear agenda.**
- 3.6. The legal principle of *Audi Alterum Partem* (hear the other side) was not adhered to, with Eymael not having been provided any meaningful opportunity to respond to the allegations against him. It is important to note that the racial allegations are not against Chippa and therefore there is clear prejudice against Eymael in not affording him an opportunity to respond.**
- 3.7. We are informed that the allegedly racist soundbite attributed to Eymael was illegally aired on SABC and even worse, dissected to air a particular portion that suits a particular narrative. The SABC were not at the particular football match that the soundbite was allegedly attained from and no source has been credited during the offending broadcasts, as is the rightful practice in journalism when disseminating another source’s intellectual property.**

4. Conclusion

Chippa have decided not to continue with Eymael's appointment, who will proceed to return to Belgium. It is clear that Eymael himself requires further time to clear his name. He has reassured the club that he will, in his own capacity take legal action concerning his rights, including the dissemination of the offending media clip through his own lawyers.

We as a club maintain our stance against racism of any form and wish to make it clear that our intended appointment of Eymael would not have happened were the allegations against him have been validated in any form.

We are naturally sensitive to the views of our fans, sponsors, the general public and South Africa as a whole and hence the decision. However, we do regret and condemn the manner in which a narrative was improperly created, without the proper facts being put forward. The team will now focus on means to pull itself out of the compromised League position it finds itself in and further announcements regarding the coaching staff will follow. We regret any negative impact that the turn of events highlighted above may have caused to our loyal fans and sponsors.

MANAGEMENT