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UCT protects rights to lawful protests

Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) this morning constructed a shack on Residence Road to draw attention to issues of poverty and accommodation needs for students. The University of Cape Town respects the constitutional right of any member of the UCT community to participate in protest action on our campus. We will always uphold this constitutional right.

UCT is indeed facing an accommodation issue. The main reasons for this is that some 700 beds normally released in early January in any given year could not be released due to deferred exams, outstanding financial aid decisions based on increased National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding made available from government and an dramatic increased call from students for assistance with accommodation. We suspect this was influenced by national public statements about debt relief, the promise via NSFAS to fund all those in need, and discussions about free education. The university has only 6680 beds for a total of 27000 students. Therefore some 75% of students live outside of the residence system.

We are indeed making significant progress in dealing with the situation and have found accommodation for hundreds of students. We have provided temporary accommodation, food and transport for these students. We are appealing for private property owners in Cape Town that may have rooms, cottages available to step forward and to assist us in placing the students who are still in need of accommodation and who are in temporary accommodations at present.

UCT rejects completely the accusation by RMF that we are seeking to exclude students from accommodation on the basis of race. It must also be noted that it is the very action of RMF in interfering with staff and operations at UCT that

compounded the accommodation issue as various offices that were meant to deal with the accommodation issues had to be closed due to RMF interference. RMF claims that UCT spend R2 million a month on private security that they say could have been spent on accommodation. What RMF is not saying is that it is their very actions (occupation, intimidation, interfering with staff, interfering with operations) that forces UCT to have private security on campus in the first place. They create that cost for UCT.

Again this morning there were some members of RMF who persist with unacceptable behavior. This includes the burning of rubbish bins which presented a safety hazard and the traffic access to upper campus was interrupted.

We call on the protestors to cease those activities that are outside the boundaries of acceptable protest action and to respect the rights of other students and colleagues at UCT. While we fully support RMF members' right to freedom of expression, this right must be exercised responsibly.

We are again reiterating that protest action is part of the fibre of UCT as an institution and we will always protect this right. But protest action may not interfere with the right of others to participate in the official business of the university.

ENDS

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