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Don't sacrifice your careers, Pityana urges students
UCT Chair of Council calls for reopening of academic programme
on 3 October 2016

All members of the UCT community have been given an urgent call to work together for a "successful education project" by Siphon Pityana, the Chair of Council at the University of Cape Town, in a [message](#) that is available on www.uct.ac.za. A transcript of his address is available below.

Pityana supports the call for education as a "justiciable socioeconomic right" according to the Constitution. He says: "I applaud our youth, and students in particular, for reminding us and reminding society in general that our constitutional promise cannot be negotiated away." But he also reminds students that they have opportunities that were not available to protesters during the struggle against apartheid, chiefly to improve their lives through an academic degree.

He says: "Unlike in the past, no one should risk not completing their education in order to be heard or realise a just and noble cause, as we are talking about. No one should risk criminalisation by engaging in acts of arson, damage to property and violence in exchanges with each other. The institutions of higher learning are our institutions, they are our inheritance, they are our assets as a nation, and not those of the apartheid system, and not those of the colonisers. They are ours – we should protect them, defend them and jealously guard them in every legal way we can."

He urges students to allow the academic year to resume at UCT and to direct their energies towards addressing the relevant issues in engagement with other stakeholders in higher education. "I appeal to everyone therefore, and students in particular, to encourage and allow that the academic program resumes on Monday, the 3rd October 2016. However great our cause, nobody can justify throwing to waste the financial sacrifice of families that have paid for students due to write exams at the end of this year.

“There can be no justification for compromising career prospects of completing students with offers to start their careers in 2017. It cannot be right that any of our students should lose a year of studying.”

The full transcript of Mr Siphos Pityana’s address follows:

“Greetings to all, I appreciate an opportunity to address you today.

“Of course the doors of learning shall be open to all,” in 1955 so proclaimed the Freedom Charter. Our Bill of Rights and the Constitution has endorsed this call, for it is in that document where the rights to education that it is now a justiciable socioeconomic right. That we should be at each other’s throats for the realisation of this right 22 years on, since a free South Africa was established, is a terrible indictment on our public policy. I applaud our youth, and students in particular, for reminding us and reminding society in general that our constitutional promise cannot be negotiated away. A promise made is a promise kept, and that should be our mantra.

“You remind me of my engagement 40 years ago with many of my fellow learners in the struggle for equal education. It was a battle against [the] apartheid system itself for a free South Africa, which we have now attained. Many died in that struggle, others were maimed, and yet many more lost their youth and education. Many of those that lost their education are today condemned to the periphery of the economy and often unemployed. In a free South Africa you don’t have to pay the same price.

“Please allow us to work together with you to achieve all of these important objectives that all of us are concerned about. The violence that we have seen accompanying the contestation for free education has caused great trauma, distress and division in a community that is united in the objective of ensuring a successful education project. Unlike in the past, no one should risk not completing their education in order to be heard or realise a just and noble cause, as we are talking about. No one should risk criminalisation by engaging in acts of arson, damage to property and violence in exchanges with each other.

“The institutions of higher learning are our institutions, they are our inheritance, they are our assets as a nation, and not those of the apartheid system, and not those of the colonisers. They are ours – we should protect them, defend them and jealously guard them in every legal way we can. Those who destroy them are attacking and undermining our education project. Burning down our institutions of learning does not only keep the doors of learning shut, it also ensures that they shall never be open to all, but only to those that can afford to send their children to study abroad.

“We recognise management’s legal obligation to ensure the safety of all at the institution and that of property, but none of us, including management, are happy to have an institution of learning and intellectual discourse with such visible security presence. I call on all to ensure that we work together to ensure that their presence is avoided sustainably.

“It is my earnest and heartfelt appeal to all that in our rules of engagement we undertake to be peaceful and take every opportunity to discourage any form of violence and confrontation.

Whilst I'm pleased that management took a decision to suspend the academic project for a period of two valuable weeks so close to the end of the year exams to allow us to be in dialogue with each another, there can be no doubt that this is not a sustainable solution.

"I appeal to everyone therefore, and students in particular, to encourage and allow that the academic program resumes on Monday, the 3rd October 2016. However great our cause, nobody can justify throwing to waste the financial sacrifice of families that have paid for students due to write exams at the end of this year.

"There can be no justification for compromising career prospects of completing students with offers to start their careers in 2017. It cannot be right that any of our students should lose a year of studying.

"I am painfully aware that there are many unresolved issues that divide us, they should not be pushed under the carpet. We must continue with the dialogue, we must continue to talk. We must talk about these things, we must find each other -we must resolve on how to take these forward. I commit to ensure that this indeed does happen. I am prepared to ensure that the process facilitated by a credible, neutral and objective person or persons is undertaken to ensure that we continue with the conversation to find each other and find workable resolutions.

"For this to succeed however, we need cooperation on the part of all involved. And I trust that all stakeholders will heed the call to ensure that there is stability in the institution and that we continue to engage to find an amicable and lasting solution.

"Thank you for your understanding. I wish you all the success in your academic endeavours.

Thank you."

ENDS

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