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8 October 2022

A call for independent investigation

Please attribute to Babalwa Ngonyama, CA (SA), Chair of UCT Council

The past two weeks have been challenging for the University of Cape Town (UCT), with a potential for significant damage to the university's reputation, stability and academic credibility.

Our university remains sacrosanct in our country, continent and the world. It plays a critical role in the efforts to address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, with education being the most impactful lever in making a huge dent on the challenges.

The Deputy Chair of Council communicated the decision to constitute an internal sub-committee to look into the governance and procedural matters relating to the Senate meeting of 30 September 2022 and the contested issues relating to former Deputy Vice-Chancellor Associate Professor Lis Lange's departure.

Council debated two possible alternative proposals: an internal or external investigation. After much deliberation, Council determined that all internal processes should be exhausted prior to considering an external process. Council also felt that internal processes have the potential to foster reconciliation and avoid polarisation. In addition, one potential outcome of an internal investigation could also be a recommendation to undertake an external investigation. However, an internal investigation process should have credibility and stakeholder buy-in.

To be elected as Chair of Council is an honour and a privilege, which comes with great responsibility – one that I do not take lightly. In light of this, as Chair of Council, I have decided to call for an independent investigation, led by a retired judge, that also takes into account the objectives of the internal investigation. I will ask Council to reconsider its decision of 6 October 2022 in the interest of a process that has credibility and stakeholder buy-in.

I call for calm in the best interest of our university, as this process unfolds.

The terms of reference should be developed jointly by Council, Senate and our wider multistakeholder body: the Institutional Forum.

Our university has, in the past, shown resilience during times of extreme difficulty and has been able to overcome them. I have no doubt that this time too, our university will overcome this and emerge stronger.

Together as the UCT community we have committed ourselves to Vision 2030, which aims to unleash human potential for a fair and just society. Our task is to develop thinkers and leaders who will take on the challenges of the world and provide a different set of solutions, and in so doing create a better future for all. Our focus must remain on this purpose.

I urge all of us to give support to an independent investigation led by a retired judge to achieve its work with the necessary speed and without fear or favour.

I thank you.

Sincerely

Babalwa Ngonyama, CA (SA)
Chair of UCT Council

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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