



**MINISTRY
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minister Nzimande concerned with escalating violent protests

22 September 2016 - Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, has noted with concern the calls from some sectors of students for no fee increase for all for the 2017 academic year. The Minister is equally concerned by the escalating violent protests taking place, particularly at the University of Witwatersrand, by fringe and rogue elements exploiting the situation through acts of hooliganism and criminality for their perverse agenda.

Minister Nzimande believes that these calls are not in the interest of the viability of our universities and TVET colleges, let alone the poor and the working class students.

The Minister acknowledges that university students, like all members of our society, have the right to protest and voice their opinions and grievances. However, in doing so they have a duty to do so peacefully and in a manner that respects both the rights and property of others.

Government is committed to address the plight of all students and equally about the well-being and viability of our institutions of higher learning. The subsidisation of the poor, working class and the missing middle, which will benefit over 70% of undergraduates across all our institutions, is a demonstration of this commitment. This is part of the interventions we have been doing since 1994 to progressively make higher education accessible for the poor.

“The universities and TVET colleges require billions of rands to function and continue to prepare and equip our students with skills for the job market and grow our economy. Therefore, we should not deprive our universities and colleges of the necessary funding, particularly from those who can afford, to make our institutions functional”, says Minister Nzimande.

Government and the Minister is encouraged by the overwhelming responses from organised formations, universities and student organisations who

have welcomed the government intervention to subsidise the poor, working class and missing middle for the 2017 academic year. The Minister has also noted the objections by some students who have called for no fee increases in 2017 and will continue to engage stakeholders.

“We need to remind all students that the destruction of property and the disruption of the academic programme does not address legitimate concerns of students. As the Minister, I will not wait on the sidelines for any further damage to property, injuries to students or ultimately loss of life to occur before acting against violent campuses. Equally the demands of students need to take into consideration that government has made massive investments into higher education and that there are other competing government priorities which require funding”, Minister further said.

Government appeals to all students, parents and the higher education sector to give the Presidential Commission of inquiry into higher education funding a chance to do its work so that it can help find a permanent solution to make higher education accessible to the poor. The Commission is expected to conclude its work in the 2017 academic year.

The Minister and Department will continue to engage with universities and student formations, however the violence has to stop. The management of universities must take decisive action against those elements who are turning our institutions into sites of violence and vandalism.

Government cannot and will not tolerate the threat to lives and destruction of property, and requests law enforcement agencies to assist with the safeguarding of students, staff, workers and university property.

The Minister calls upon all progressive forces on our campuses to condemn and distance themselves from these acts of intimidation, violence and vandalism. The primary objective of our universities is teaching, learning and research, and these activities should remain sacrosanct.

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Issued by Ministry.

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