

08 June 2016

## Rhodes University Council statement

### *Recent student protests*

At its meeting of 5 May 2016, Council was apprised of various developments on campus including the student protests that started on Sunday, 17 April 2016. The Vice-Chancellor gave a detailed account of the events prior to and during the student protests against the alleged 'rape culture' at Rhodes University.

Council unequivocally condemns any form of sexual violence in our University and beyond and expresses support for any student or staff member of Rhodes University who has been subjected to sexual violence. Council encourages any student who had been sexually assaulted to report the incident so that action can be taken against the perpetrator. Rape is a serious criminal offence which should be reported to the South African Police Services (SAPS). The University will support any student or staff member who wishes to report to the SAPS.

Council was fully apprised of the serious breakdown in law and order on campus that resulted in the University leadership approaching the Grahamstown High Court to secure an interim interdict. The Vice-Chancellor assured Council that the decision to approach the High Court was not taken lightly and that it was done after careful assessment and analysis of the situation on campus and the reasonable apprehension of the real and imminent danger of loss of life and/or damage to property and/or further serious infringements of the rights of others. Council accepts that the University had no alternative remedy to address the protests, as the Campus Protection Services staff is not equipped with the skills necessary to control violent protests. The Vice-Chancellor further indicated that there was no intention on the part of the University to develop an internal capacity or capability to deal with violent acts that may accompany a protest, as disagreements in an institution of higher learning should be resolved through the power of reasoned debate and dialogue.

Council affirms the constitutional right of students and staff to peaceful and legitimate protests that pay due regard to the rights of others. Council condemns all acts of violence that accompanied the student protests and regrets that an interim interdict had to be sought to bring stability on campus. Council supports efforts by the University community to develop a protocol that will guide interaction in instances of protests. Universities should not have to turn to the courts due to violations of others' rights by anarchists and agent provocateurs who hijack legitimate protest to instigate and participate in violence and damage to the University's and others' property.

It is to be expected that students and staff will from time to time raise important and legitimate institutional and societal concerns in a robust and uncomfortable manner. This must be welcomed and

encouraged in an institution of higher learning. It is the duty of Council to ensure that lawful protest action, however robust, is allowed and protected. Such robust engagement however should not propagate or result in violence, racial hatred or undermine individual dignity or the protections each of us have a right to in respect of, amongst others, freedom of expression, academic freedom, religion, culture, creed, and sexual orientation.

We believe that it is possible for all the University's stakeholders to agree to a compact or accord that allows for robust exchanges and disagreements. It just cannot, and will not, be allowed that the dignity of protest actions with legitimate demands for addressing sexual violence, transformation, lack of food for some oppidan students or securing access to quality education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to mention but a few, should be undermined by unlawful conduct. The University's leadership is expected to take lawful action against those who may believe they have license to break the law and violate the constitutionally protected rights of others, and is not at liberty to simply look away and allow a culture of impunity to take root.

### *Transformation and the future of the name of our University*

In 2015 Council approved a process that had been proposed by the Institutional Forum to advance transformation at our University and to solicit the views of all stakeholders on the future of the name of our University within the context of its long-term sustainability. The Registrar reported to Council at its last meeting that, due to the busy personal schedules of the eminent persons we had agreed to appoint to facilitate our transformation engagements, there had been inordinate delays in securing them to meet. In the circumstances, and to minimise further delays, Council resolved that the transformation of Rhodes University is ultimately a responsibility of the Rhodes community and that a stakeholder inclusive process had to substitute the eminent persons' process that had initially been envisaged.

To this end, the University will convene a transformation summit towards the end of the year to consolidate and provide impetus to the University's transformation journey and devise a less cumbersome process to address demands regarding the name of the University.

Council directed the University leadership to make arrangements for the said summit. As the Chair of Council, I am required to engage the Institutional Forum on these matters and request its advice on the stakeholder-inclusive transformation path to be followed, including the format the summit should take and the identification of stakeholders to be invited to participate in it.

We are confident that there is enough goodwill and commitment to ensure that our transformation process results in a stronger, more resilient and sustainable University that can inspire pride in all its stakeholders.

**Mr Vuyo D. Kahla**

**Chairperson: Rhodes University Council**