SANDILE NDLOVU CONDOLENCES

Let me start this briefing by first expressing my most sincere condolences on the passing away of Sandile Ndlovu - a first year Industrial engineering student who was attacked in the lecture hall of the Steve Biko Campus of the Durban University of Technology.

I again wish to express my heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and fellow students on his passing, and further express my most serious concern about the often-tragic deaths of university students on some of our campuses.

Ndlovu passed away on Saturday, the 21st September 2019, at an intensive care unit where he was on life support due to extensive brain damage sustained during the attack.

I urge our criminal justice system to ensure a speedy arrest and prosecution of the people responsible for his death.

I also welcome the decision by the university management to suspend the head of security at the university. The head of security had the responsibility to ensure that there are proper security measures in place, including the installation and monitoring of video cameras that could have been significant in helping the police to identify and arrest the people who committed this distasteful act.

As I indicated in my statement yesterday, our institutions are a place of teaching and learning and not places to breed criminals and lawlessness. I therefore expect the university management to safeguard the lives of everyone on campus including the university property.
I wish to express my appreciation to the Council and Management of DUT for the support they are giving to the Ndlovu family during this time of bereavement.

ON THE MEETING WITH THE COUNCIL AND SENIOR EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

On Friday, the 20th September 2019, I met with the council of the University of Zululand and its senior executive management to discuss various issues including safety and security of students and staff on the KwaDlangezwa Campus.

In the past weeks, we have experienced unprecedented violence in and around the university including a student from an off-campus unaccredited residence being shot and wounded.

We have also experienced protest action leading to the disruption of the academic programme and the closure of the university, the damage to schools in the area and a satellite police station being torched.

UniZulu students have highlighted the vulnerability of students living off campus to burglary and related violent crimes, and the dire shortage of sufficient and safe student housing on the university campus.

Our university sector is reeling from the spate of recent violent attacks on students on and off our campuses. We are extremely concerned about these attacks and we have met with the Vice Chancellors on how to address these and other related challenges.

The attack on Msawenkosi Nxumalo within the community surrounding the university is another senseless and tragic case that has been highlighted in the media, in the wake of the deaths of Uyinene Mnwetyana, a UCT student raped and murdered at a post office, and of Jesse Hess, a UWC student found murdered at her home with her grandfather.

The many incidents of violence we have seen over recent months are a reflection of the high levels of violence in broader society, from which universities are not immune.

Indeed, many incidents that affect students take place in communities outside of universities.

The public anger about incidents of violence against students on and off our university campuses is palpable. It compels all public institutions and organisations to think about what they can do differently to reduce violence, including gender-based violence in South African society.

The UniZulu Council expressed its concern that often historically disadvantaged institutions located in rural areas are not taken seriously and are often ignored when such incidents occur, whereas those in urban areas are immediately in the national limelight.
I met with the Council and management of UniZulu on Friday to emphasise my support as the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology for this university. I expressed our commitment to work with it and all other universities across the country, to find ways of dealing with the issue of campus safety and security.

I informed the Council that I had held a meeting with the leadership of Universities South Africa (USAf) on 13 September 2019, at which we agreed that USAf would work with the Department to develop a joint plan of action towards a plan to address campus security, including preventing acts of violence, and gender-based violence in particular, on university campuses.

We agreed that this would include a process to gather information on the status of safety and security plans and strategies on campuses across the country, to identify urgent matters to address at individual institutions.

This will include looking at infrastructure requirements for better security on campuses that could be funded through the Department’s infrastructure and efficiency fund.

I must, however, emphasise that infrastructure alone will not solve our problems. The problems of violence are much deeper and require all members of the university community, students, staff, management, and surrounding communities and businesses to work together.

Everyone must take responsibility for their personal actions, and the criminal elements in society need to be dealt with decisively by law enforcement agencies.

The safety of students at UniZulu is intrinsically linked to issues related to its location and relationship with the surrounding communities in Kwadlangezwa.

Currently the university has on-campus student housing for 5560 students, which is just over 30% of its total student population and other students live off-campus in the surrounding communities. Their safety is dependent on the surrounding community.

The university reported that the majority of its students are living off-campus, and face security issues on a daily basis. Ideally the university aims to house 80% of its students in on-campus or off-campus accredited accommodation that is safe and of quality that will support university learning.

The UniZulu Council expressed its thanks for the infrastructure development support provided by my Department to assist the university to develop a comprehensive spatial development plan for the campus, which has now been approved by Council.

Included in the plan is the construction of 3500 new student beds over the next three years.

The plan also includes refurbishing the current student housing stock at the university, which has been poorly maintained in the past and is currently overcrowded with insufficient security and management in place.
My Department has included UniZulu as part of its Student Housing Infrastructure Programme (SHIP) currently being implemented across the county.

An amount of R235 million has been earmarked for this student housing development and has already been transferred to the university.

The Department through the Student Housing Infrastructure Programme will support the university to secure the additional funding for the full development of the plan through the Development Bank of South Africa.

I have agreed that the university should start the procurement for the first phase of construction as soon as possible, utilising the funds already at their disposal. I have already communicated this to the Council meeting on Friday.

I am confident that the university has developed a robust procurement process, and with the support of my Department, will be able to manage the development of this project to transform the student-housing situation on the campus over the medium term to long term.

I have requested that the university work with my Department to develop a full plan for the next six to ten-year period that will result in 80% of students being able to reside on or near the campus in dignified residences that meet the norms and standards for conducive and secure university living and learning environments.

I have also requested my Department to work with all the historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) to put in place similar plans so that we can comprehensively deal with the issue of accommodation on the campuses in rural contexts where there is little availability of off-campus student housing.

Whilst my department is focusing its attention to addressing student accommodation in all of our institutions, I will however give added attention to student accommodation needs in rural institutions, as these have no alternative accommodation as is the case in the urban areas.

There are already processes in place to support many of these universities, including at University of Fort Hare where construction is already at an advanced stage for an additional 1437 beds, at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University where funding for 2000 new beds has been secured and plans are in place to start construction soon.

Processes are also underway at the University of the Western Cape, University of Limpopo, North West University (Mafikeng) and Walter Sisulu University for large-scale student housing projects.

The Department is also working with UniVen to improve its infrastructure delivery and ensure the effective completion of student housing projects currently in progress.
One of the challenges we still face with many of our HDI universities is the issue of land ownership.

I have also discussed the current situation of the land issue relating to the Kwadlangezwa Campus with the Council.

While UniZulu will be 60 years old next year and it is legally established on a defined area of land, the issue of land ownership is not yet resolved as it was built on tribal trust land.

I have agreed to call a meeting between the relevant Ministers and the traditional authorities to find a solution and expedite the transfer of land to the university.

We appeal to the academic community, and the intellectual leadership of our universities to work together to better understand the root causes of this violence in our society and to work with us to identify interventions that can assist with changing the narrative, and minds and hearts in practical and effective ways.

I however wish to condemn the destruction of property in our institutions as this can only serve to deprive future generations of the much-needed infrastructure. I also condemn the destruction of property in nearby schools and disruption of tests and exams, especially also given the very good affords by past students of these schools to raise funds to support the upgrading of schools’ infrastructure.

We call on the Minister of Police and security personnel to ensure that there is effective policing in and around our campuses that identifies and brings criminal elements to book.

We all have to stand up and say that enough is enough! We have to change our behaviour, be aware of our responsibilities, and ensure that perpetrators of violence in general, and against women in particular, are reported and stopped from repeating these offences. Campuses need to be safe intellectual spaces and we need to ensure collective responsibility.

ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 29, “everyone has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, independent educational institutions that:

Do not discriminate on the basis of race;
Are registered with the State; and
Maintain standards that are not inferior to standards at comparable public educational institutions.

As you might be aware, there are media reports that Solidarity aims to build a R300 million private Afrikaans university in Centurion, Pretoria.

As a Department we have not received any application for any such institution.
Currently, the legal framework for registering private higher education institutions does not permit them to be referred to as universities.

The Department is in the process of establishing the legal framework for the registration of higher education institutions as Higher Education Colleges, University-Colleges or Universities.

Once the new framework is in place, private institutions that meet the requirements and are registered as either one of the latter institutional types, may use the word “University” in their legal name. Currently no private higher education institution may use the word ‘University’ in their name.

Our policies require adherence to the Bill of Rights as contained in our Constitution.

If any registered private education institution fails to honour the Bill of Rights or does not follow the national goals of social integration and cohesion, including using any official languages to exclude South Africans, its registration will be immediately cancelled or not approved in the first place.

Ends
Issued by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology
DST Building (53), CSIR Campus
Meiring Naude Road
Brummeria
Pretoria
Enquiries: Ishmael Mnisi, 066 037 8859, Ishmael.Mnis@dst.gov.za