

## **Nzimande responds to Stellenbosch student documentary**

27 August 2015 - Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, MP, released a statement, expressing his deep concern about the racist incidences recorded in the student documentary, Luister.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, notes with the deepest concern the revelations of incidents and encounters of racism experienced by students at the Stellenbosch University, which have been recently released in the documentary #Luister.

### **University Council to provide report**

The Minister has closely studied the documentary and written a letter to the Chairperson of Council, Mr G Steyn, requesting the University Council to provide him with a report on how it intends to address the matter.

The video contains interviews of mainly black students describing their encounters relating to incidents of racism and discrimination inside and outside lecture rooms at Stellenbosch University.

These are clearly incidents reminiscent of the old apartheid South Africa and have no place in our democracy.

Most disturbingly, these incidents of racism and discrimination are seemingly taking place unabated at one of the highly rated institutions of higher learning in our country.

It is indeed shocking to view personal accounts of the daily experiences of racism that black students encounter both on the university campus and in the social context in which the University is situated.

These sensitive issues have been prevalent for some time and the students have already expressed their concerns to the university management on numerous occasions.

No South African should tolerate racism and discrimination in our modern, democratic dispensation.

### **Stellenbosch governance, management bodies urged to deal with racism**

The Minister urges the institutional governance and management bodies to deal with issues of racism and discrimination firmly and with the respect, seriousness and urgency it demands.

Racism and discrimination have no place in our democracy and these acts go against the spirit and letter of the Constitution of our country.

The issue is not only about Afrikaans as a language of instruction at the university, but this provides a basis for harbouring racist attitudes among some white students and academics at the university, clearly depicted in the interviews.

The matter of institutional transformation and acts of racism and discrimination were discussed in a meeting convened by the Minister on 16 April 2015 with representatives of Councils and management of some of the former Afrikaans universities, which included Stellenbosch University.

### **Universities agreed to deal with social inclusion, cohesion**

All these universities agreed to deal clearly with issues of social inclusion and cohesion, language and admissions policies.

Although these institutions indicated that they are working on these matters, the student experiences show otherwise.

Programmes appear ineffective. The language policies may be good on paper but the practice is different, thus some of the institutions are still regarded as bastions of the old South Africa.

This culture has to change, and needs to be done so urgently.

The Minister, though, acknowledges the efforts and initiatives that the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wim De Villiers, is making to rid the institution of the culture of discrimination and bring forth transformation and social cohesion.

These are the "Open Stellenbosch" stakeholder engagement forum on transformation, and the establishment of a transformation office and transformation committee.

The Department welcomes and supports these initiatives.

### **Speed actions required**

Clearly, these require speedy actions which have to yield quick and sustainable results. The university council and management must work on the culture and attitudes of the whole of its community and constituency, as everyone must be treated equally and have a fulfilling experience at the university. The university must be welcoming to all who would want to study at an institution of higher learning.

The Minister will be hosting a Higher Education Summit on 15 - 17 October 2015. The main theme of the summit is the transformation of higher education, and he urges higher education stakeholders to participate in a spirit of constructive debate, openness and very honest introspection of the sector.

The aim of the summit will be to develop clear concrete strategies for deepening transformation and tackling difficult questions about the roles and nature of universities in South Africa today, with clear and implementable outcomes.

### **University to appear before Portfolio Committee**

The Minister also welcomes the announcement by the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training, Ms YN Phosa, calling on the management of Stellenbosch University to appear before the Committee on this matter, as part of its important oversight function.

The Minister calls upon all members of the higher education community to treat one another with respect, and conduct difficult and painful debates in a humane and constructive manner.