MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: Thursday, 25 March 2021

TO: All media

ATTENTION: News Editors/ Reporters

MINISTER NZIMANDE ON THE STATEMENT BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, views the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) statement as vacuous as it is an opportunistic attempt to grandstand on the basis of a deliberate effort to misconstrue his contribution to the central problem facing the higher education and broader post-school education and training system.

The Minister is absolutely clear about what he said and meant by his metaphoric reference to a ‘repeat soapie’, that the higher education system must be supported with proper funding to support Government policy on fee free higher education for the working class and poor if we are to avoid an endless and predictable cycle of instability at our campuses.

The Minister’s metaphor, to make it absolutely clear, was not directed at discrediting student struggles for equality, which he full supports, but at the system that forces this repeat cycle of conflict and instability at our institutions.

“SAFTU’s statement seeks to rubbish the significant advances made by the ANC-led Government since 1994 in progressively expand access to, and success in, both universities and colleges across the breadth of South Africa. This has been an incredible feat. The sector before and after 1994 is simply incomparable, despite SAFTU’s efforts to deny the facts on the ground. Central to these strides by Government have been major advances is promoting a strong working class and poor bias in the expansion and outcomes set for the PSET system. We are equally clear that this is a historical process that will take years to complete, but our commitment to its full realisation is unquestionable” said Minister Nzimande.

Minister Nzimande further said that If SAFTU have real concerns and issues regarding developments in the post school education and training sector, he is more than willing to meet and engage with them.

Minister Nzimande had on numerous public statements and through stakeholder engagement platforms acknowledged the general state of the South African economy and severe constraints imposed by both the strained fiscal situation and the impact of Covid 19, on the funding of critical aspects of the post-school system, including university subsidies and student financial aid.

“Together with the Vice-Chancellors of all our universities we expressed our full understanding of severe financial stresses on many families as a result of the general economic situation in the country,” Minister Nzimande
It is against this background that the Minister publicly pronounced on immediate debt relief measures takes into account the underlying stability of the system and differential capacities of individual institutions to absorb debt.

The Minister together with the Vice Chancellors announced the immediate implementation of a three tier strategic interventions which includes:

- Using several debt relief mechanisms on a case by case basis to enable academically-deserving students to register and complete their studies without undermining the underlying financial stability of each institution. In this regard, specific attention is being given to the plight of senior students who are NSFAS bursary recipients before the 2018 NSFAS policy framework and ‘missing middle’ income students where severe financial difficulties may be experienced.

- Ongoing constructive engagements with student leadership structures at institutional level; and

- The commitment to work on a longer-term solution to support a comprehensive and sustainable student financial aid system.

“This work will be done collaboratively with the rest of the PSET system to ensure that we make the best use of the intellectual capacity in the higher education system,” said Minister Nzimande.

Minister Nzimande said it is on this basis that he welcomes constructive engagement rather than playing to be gallery without any meaningful suggestions.

Minister will continue to engage all the critical stakeholders within the sector including SAFTU if they so wish.

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