

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION ON THE
OCCASION OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF THE LATE MR MBONELI VESELE
THE EXECUTIVE PROTECTION OFFICER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE
VICE CHANCELLOR

Programme Director:

The Vesele family and relatives, in particular Mr Mboneli Vesele's wife, Bongiwe, and children, Buntle Vesele, Qhama, Nande and Nathi who are twins;

My Colleagues, the Minister in the Presidency Mr Mondli Gungubele and the Minister of Police, Mr Bheki Cele;

MEC present;

Executive and local Mayors;

Amakhosi and the Clergy;

Directors General and Head of Departments of all government departments;

All university stakeholders comprising of the University Council, Trade Unions and the Student Representative Council;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Fellow mourners;

Members of the media;

I greet you all this morning, as we are gathered there today on this very sad occasion.

I once-more pass my heartfelt condolences to the Vesele Family, Friends and the University of Fort Hare on the murder of Mr Mboneli Vesele, the Protection Officer to the University of Fort Hare, Vice Chancellor, Prof Sakhele Buhlungu.

I must still indicate that I remain outraged by this inhumane act which has robbed all of us of this unsung hero.

Albert Einstein said, "The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive." In one word, Mboneli Vesele was a man who gave.

He gave much to his work, by sacrificing his own life to ensure the protection of his own principal. That is why ladies and gentlemen as we are gathered here to say goodbye to him, I would like to recite a poem by David Harris, which says:

Everyday somewhere in the world
another unsung hero is born.
Someone who is willing,
to lay his life on the line
to save another living creature,
on this wonderful planet of ours.

To go out of their way,
and risk life and limb to save something,
from danger and certain death.
These unsung heroes don't want medals,
glory or even fame.

In fact, most would walk away afterwards,
without anyone ever knowing their name.
It is not that they feel guilty.

They just feel that they haven't done
anything that is special
or something someone else
wouldn't have probably done.

Therefore, to all those unsung heroes
this poem is just for you.
For all the lives that you save
each and every day.

As I recite this poem, I got reminded of the words of the family when we were gathered at the family home on Wednesday when they said: "They have lost a father, brother, son and indeed they are hurt, but nevertheless if their son's blood will prevent such things from happening again, let it be so". I am indeed deeply touched by this!

Today as we are gathered here, I want to call upon all of you today, that we commit ourselves and the rest of our country to continue to fight against corruption, maladministration, poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, and gender-based violence and femicide as amongst some of the social problems in our country.

This will be a befitting send-off to Mr Vesele who laid down his life in defence of the integrity of the University of Fort Hare.

Equally, the University of Fort Hare and all its stakeholders must ensure that they disassociate from all the unethical acts or conduct which led to various investigations which are currently underway in the university.

Today we meet with very strong suspicion that as a result of acts of corruption and criminality Mr Vesele was assassinated and the Vice Chancellor and some employees of the university continuously threatened.

As I said before, I strongly condemn Mr Vesele's assassination and the threats to the life of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Buhlungu.

As various stakeholders – the University of Fort Hare, our Department of Higher Education and Training and our law enforcement agencies, we have to ensure that we ramp-up our efforts to ensure the safety of this university community.

Just to remind everyone, the University of Fort Hare has a profound political history with some of our heroes of our country's liberation struggle such as Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo, and Desmond Tutu got their early education from this university.

We dare not allow instances of corruption and lawlessness to rob the future generations an opportunity to study in this institution, that largely caters for the dependents of the working class and the poor.

It is therefore important that in our struggle against corruption and the safety of our institutions, that we mobilise all our stakeholders through regular consultations and briefings.

I remain concerned that some of the stakeholders that I met on Wednesday indicated to that they were in the dark or that they have not taken into confidence on measures that the university has undertaken in the fight against corruption and maladministration by the management of the university.

Without the active participation of all the stakeholders inside the university, no fight against corruption will succeed. Much as the fight against corruption requires champions, but it is fundamentally a collective effort. We cannot win this struggle without the active participation of the trade unions and students at the university.

Our post-1994 higher education legislation created institutional forums precisely for the purposes of promoting internal institutional consultations and also to forge an inclusive style of governance and running of our universities. I am concerned these forums are not being used. I will indeed raise this matter very strongly with the Council of the University of Fort Hare, and urge my department to undertake a comprehensive assessment on the functionality of institutional forums across our university system.

I expect all university councils to ensure that consultations with stakeholders internally at our universities is not a luxury, but a necessary part of good governance, which can go a long way to help us to prevent tragedies like we are having now. Our Department of Higher Education and Training will continue to monitor and ascertain that the University of Fort Hare and all our post school education and training institutions establish all the statutory bodies as required by the Higher Education Act and other governing regulations. That is one of the lessons we need to learn from the tragic passing away of Mr Vesele.

I also wish to use this occasion to urge our universities to prioritise positive co-operation with my department in dealing with the many challenges that require such co-operation. Our universities are public institutions, with autonomy that goes together with accountability both to my department, parliament and South African society as a whole.

It is also important that I emphasise the fact that none of us should be tempted to use such tragedies for populist grandstanding, but that in respect to the sacrifices and the blood of Mr Vesele that has been spilt, we should commit to work together and co-operatively to tackle the many challenges facing our higher education sector, also for the sake of our youth and the economy.

As I publicly said before, as a Minister and department, we remain available, ready and prepared to work with the University of Fort Hare to deal will all challenges before it.

Our determination has been demonstrated right from the process of the appointment of the university Administrator to the appointment of the university assessors and ultimately to President Cyril Ramaphosa signing a proclamation authorising the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) to investigate allegations of corruption and maladministration in the affairs of the University of Fort Hare. That is why I am here today, and that is why we sent an official to participate and speak at the memorial of the late Mr Roets, and that is why I also took the step to attend the funeral of Ms Nosicelo Mtebeni, the UFH student who was brutally murdered by his boyfriend. I stand ready to be with Fort Hare all the time, also now in memory of Mr Vesele.

Today I want to assure the University of Fort Hare and all our institutions that my Ministry and the entire Department of Higher Education and Training will continue to work with you and support all initiative to fight the scourge of corruption, maladministration and gender-based violence and femicide.

I therefore call upon all our institutions to engage with my department in all their plans to ensure that we restore the decorum and dignity of our institutions as institution of teaching and learning. This we will done by ensuring that we provide a safe and healthy environment for all staff and students.

For the University of Fort Hare, we will be meeting again with council in the coming weeks to ensure that we have a smooth start to the academic year.

On the other hand, we will continue to work with the Minister of Police to ensure the swift arrest of Mr Vesels's assailants and that of Mr Roets.

As I already announced on Wednesday, during my visit to the university, we are also going to establish a National Task Force that will look at the security of our institutions working together with our Cabinet Security Cluster.

We also agree in my meeting with the trade union and student leadership on Wednesday that all union and student structures must incorporate the issue of safety and security in their daily work, so as to ensure that the issue of building a safer Fort Hare is driven by the stakeholders themselves. Just as we have community policing forums in our communities, so should we commit to creating similar structures in our PSET institutions. This will go a long way in ensuring that we fight other scourges in our universities and college like gender-based violence (GBV).

Once more, to the Vesele family, I want you to know that we are available for any engagements with the family beyond today. We are well aware that Mr Vesele left his wife with children who currently and in the future might require our assistance to further their studies. My officials will be in touch with the family for further engagements.

With those few words, I would like to say to the Vesele family that Akwehli olungehlanga. Maka lale ngoxolo u Ntlane, ooNtlanga, ooNqabane, ooMsuthu, ooMpilo, ooMkhonswana, ooGxididid, ooMalebomvu.

Hamba kahle qhawe lesizwe, Ngiyabonga