

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS FORUM (THE FORUM) DELIVERED BY FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE DIKGANG MOSENEKE AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE NELSON MANDELA FOUNDATION AUDITORIUM, 107 CENTRAL ROAD, HOUGHTON, ON 2 FEBRUARY 2017, AT 14:00

The Chairperson of this Press Conference and Co-Convenor of the National Education Crisis Forum: Mr Sello Hatang;

Co-Convenors of the Forum: Ms Santie Botha, Judge Yvonne Mokgoro, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana and Prof Pitika Ntuli, and – in their absence – Mr Jabu Mabuza, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Prof Mary Metcalfe and Mr Jay Naidoo;

Partners of the Forum: the Higher Education Parents Dialogue (HEParD) and the South African Universities Staff Network for Transformation (SAUSNeT);

The Secretariat of the Forum: Adv. Louisa Zondo and her team;

Ladies and Gentlemen of the media;

Good afternoon.

We gather this afternoon in a press conference, the purpose of which is to:

- Present the National Education Crisis Forum through yourselves, to South African society;
- Convey the objectives of the Forum;



- Provide feedback on the work that the Forum has been doing in relation to the higher education crisis facing our country;
- To inform about the process towards a national civil society engagement in the form of an education convention; and
- Call for South African society to actively engage with the issue of education and collectively contribute to creating solutions to our education challenges.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS FORUM

The Forum came into existence in the latter part of 2016. I convened the Forum together with nine (9) Co-Convenors, all of whom are prominent members of South African civil society who have been directly involved with education in South Africa at various levels, and specifically engaged with the current crisis unfolding at universities.

REASON FOR THE FORUM'S EXISTENCE

South Africa is on the cusp of a systemic crisis in education. The education crisis affects all levels of education in South Africa – from early childhood development through to tertiary education – and reflects a societal problem produced by policy choices made over various epochs in South African history, including the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. The crisis is evident in the perpetuation of

inequality, as well as exclusion and marginalisation on various grounds including race, gender, class and a range of others in which dominance is created and normalised and discrimination is meted out to those who, through such prism of dominance, are considered to constitute “the other”.

Violence and instability at universities have become key features of the response to the crisis. Responses to violence are characterised by securocratic approaches. The violence and its effects, tend to mask the deeper fundamental issue of the South African education system – and the related broader societal issues of inequality, poverty and exclusion. These are some of the key messages raised by FeesMustFall and by elected student leaders across all of our campuses. At the core is the call for free, quality, decolonised and decommodified education, which catalyses a more fundamental societal review of inequality, poverty and exclusion.

The situation is complex, with differentiated dynamics at each university. The reality, however, is that while South African society needs to contribute to reimagining our education system and to participate in sculpting the system for the education it envisages, resolution of the crisis requires State responsiveness to the vision of education that emerges from civil society. In this regard, we have been in discussion with the State President, his Inter-Ministerial Task Team and



the Minister of Higher Education and have communicated the constructive role we wish to play in contributing to a resolution of the current crisis. It is our belief that the cohesion deficit in the various efforts that civil society, across the country, brought to bear on the crisis, needed to be remedied. It was in this context and to this end that – in the latter half of 2016 –the Forum came into existence.

Together with our partners –HEParD, who were already partnered with the South African Council of Churches at the time when the Forum was constituted and SAUSNeT, who had initiated processes to coordinate the various organising efforts of support and academic staff at universities, around the higher education crisis – we have been able to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

We do not take for granted the centrality of trust in the process of meaningfully engaging the range of stakeholders involved in the education crisis – who very often have limited or no alignment of interests and views. In order to retain and develop trust, the independence of the Forum remains one of its most crucial features. It is for this reason that, the Forum holds very high, the principle of independence in all it does. The Forum is therefore not beholden to any of the stakeholders, but, seeks to ensure that the right to education enshrined in the South African Constitution becomes a lived reality for all by facilitating pathways



for the meaningful attainment of this outcome, through engagements with relevant stakeholders who are committed to acting accordingly.

The principled basis on which we will take forward this work includes:

- Peaceful mediation and resolution of disputes with all parties refraining from the use of violence;
- Zero tolerance of racism and gender discrimination;
- Sufficient representation based on constituencies;
- Sufficient consensus building through democratic engagement and respect for divergent perspectives;
- Disciplined collective action through democratic deliberation and mandated leadership;
- Dialogue with state, universities, students and concerned parties.

THE FOCUS OF THE FORUM

As the 2016 academic year drew to a close in the midst of a delicate reprieve in the cycle of heightened violence, it was clear to all who cared to analyse the situation even on a cursory basis that the crisis and the related instability was not likely to abate. It was also clear that the 2017 registration process was likely to trigger instability unless appropriate attention was given to the immediate issues

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and processes were initiated to address structural and policy defects in education. The Forum's terms of reference therefore include: (i) Calling for peace and dialogue and normalising the situation at our universities particularly in the run up to reopening in March 2017; (ii) Facilitating the voice of the range of stakeholders including students, university staff, university authorities and parents; (iii) Convening a national process of conflict resolution and a civil society convention at which stakeholders would secure policy and funding solutions for the medium to long-term; and (iv) Mobilising resources for the Forum's work.

Accordingly, the Forum and its partners set itself a programme of work that sought to: (a) Deepen the Forum's understanding of the education crisis and the range of ideas in this regard; (b) Engage the various stakeholders in education on their views of the crisis; and (c) Propose the notion of civil society engaging with the education crisis in a national convention.

On 3 December 2016 the Forum then held a meeting at which the Convenors and HEPaD, exchanged views with Vice-Chancellors on the state of South African education and on possible education funding models, after considering a STATSSA presentation on the state of education and various presentations on possible education funding models. The opportunity was also taken, at this meeting, to engage with the Vice-Chancellors on issues that require immediate



attention to facilitate stability in the 2017 academic year. This exchange of views highlighted the constraints faced by Vice-Chancellors in regard to the challenging issues of fee increases, historic debt, as well as internal disciplinary processes and legal action related to protest action, on the one hand. On the other hand, the opportunities available for the deepening of trust and the creation of peace within respective campuses were also highlighted.

A broader stakeholder engagement was held on 10 - 11 December 2016 and was attended by student representatives from the various universities, VCs and representatives of VC's, HEPaD and SAUSNeT representatives, the faith-based community and labour. The participants held engagements on the state of South African education, funding models and a range of issues requiring immediate resolution at respective universities. The immediate issues include: the fee increases in 2017; historic debt; internal disciplinary action against students; and student arrests and criminal cases against students. The impact of these issues on 2017 registration and student access to university education was starkly highlighted. This meeting also confirmed the need for stakeholders to mandate representatives to participate in working groups that would develop the preparatory work towards a Higher Education National Convention on the basis of identified work streams.



The Forum and its Partners proceeded to hold engagements with a range of stakeholders including, students, University Vice-Chancellors and Chairs of Council, the Minister of Higher Education, Minister Blade Nzimande and the President of the Republic of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma. At such engagements, the Forum sought: to highlight the nature of the education crisis; to seek full contribution of respective role-players in the potential resolution of matters, as well as to inform stakeholders about plans to convene a national civil society engagement on education.

The 2017 university fee increases of up to 8% is one of the issues for immediate attention that various stakeholders considered to pose a threat to stability in the 2017 academic year. The Forum made an effort to engage with government on the conversion of the 8% fee increase into an 8% increase in government subsidy. To date, this proposed approach or other related approaches have not been introduced to address this potential threat to stability in the academic year.

Historic debt is another significant challenge in the registration process at various university campuses. Proposals on government underwriting of historic debt have not yet been taken up. At various universities, students who are not allocated NSFAS funding are currently unable to register for the 2017 academic year on account of historic debt.



In engagements with Vice-Chancellors and Chairs of Council of various universities, the Forum took note of the significantly challenging financial and legal constraints that confront the leadership of universities in regard to addressing historic debt. In the absence of pronouncements by government on the underwriting of historic debt, respective universities are implementing a range of measures which do not eliminate historic debt as an obstacle to registration. Financial exclusion related to historic debt therefore remains a significant unresolved challenge to the 2017 registration process.

The challenges highlighted in the registration process are symptomatic of the deeper crisis. The crisis calls for South African society to understand the nature of the crisis evident in education and to contribute to the co-creation of solutions.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE HELD ON 25 – 26 FEBRUARY 2017

Recognising that the challenges facing the education system as a whole, are a societal problem affecting every citizen, the Forum is calling on civil society to raise its voice on the issue of education. This is being done in a manner that fully recognises the struggles of students and university employees as well as the



major challenges of university leadership and seeks to create meaningful consensus on a vision of the desired South African university.

The Forum will be sending invitations to a broad range of civil society formations to attend and participate in the envisaged Higher Education Convention. The Forum further invites any other civil society formation even though not directly invited to communicate with it with a view to being invited to the Convention.

In preparation for the Higher Education National Convention, therefore, the respective stakeholders are considering various Work Streams with a view to drafting discussion documents which will be distributed in the build-up to the Convention.

Over the next few weeks, the Convenors and Forum partners plan to have provincial engagements at which the Work Streams will receive further consideration.

Below is a list of the Works Streams and a brief description of some of the critical elements to be addressed.



WORK STREAMS

1. Registration

The 2017 registration period is already under way at many universities. This requires the immediate resolution of issues affecting the peaceful and effective registration of all students.

One of the barriers to entry for students is the cost of registration. For those who are returning students, the issue of historic debt may disallow them to return to complete their studies. The tensions surrounding these issues are heightened by the dichotomy between what the government requires of universities in this context and what the universities say they are legally and financially capable of doing.

2. Funding models

It has become apparent that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the public entity that seeks to provide efficient and effective financial aid to poor and working class (missing middle) families through a loan-based scheme, seems to no longer be an effective driver for higher education funding in South Africa. As a result, several funding models have been developed to demonstrate the potential possibility of free, quality education. This work stream, in preparation for the National Convention, focuses on questions of who should



be funded, how funding should be achieved, the period in which fee-free education should be attained, the quality of education within a fee-free higher education system, financial administration at universities, implementation of funding models and related issues.

3. Peace and Mediation Framework

The 2016 academic year was marred by violent protests, distrust between students and university management and miscommunication between relevant stakeholders. Issues that hinder peace and mediation require immediate resolution to ensure a smooth transition into the 2017 academic year. These include coordinating accused students in disciplinary and criminal proceedings, the securitisation of campuses, and facilitating greater communication to engage with possible solutions and minimise distrust between stakeholders. In order to resolve the higher education crisis, the framework for peace and mediation requires the input of all stakeholders including students, parents, university Councils, Vice Chancellors and staff, and government.

4. Transformation

The transition from a racially oppressive past to a democratic society included a negotiated settlement by stakeholders in various sectors, including education. As a result, issues of a fragmented funding system, massification of the system, and decolonising, de-commodifying and Africanising the curriculum in higher



education was not resolved. In this context, a framework for the resolution of the higher education crisis must crucially include and address issues of transformation in university structures and systems. This work stream focuses on re-imagining the role of universities in a democratic South Africa.

5. Higher Education Access and Massification

Access to higher education goes beyond the ability to access funding. It speaks to access to institutions through differential fees and access requirements, race and class disparities in patterns of access, access to the resources necessary to participate in learning, and patterns of completion rates relating to race and class. The work stream also addresses the “massification” of post-school education in increasing the numbers of the institutions of higher learning, while standardising the quality of education across all institutions. This speaks to the accessibility and capacity of universities nationally.

6. Student Accommodation

While the primary focus of funding within universities has been the cost of tuition, students have raised as a concern the need for university accommodation that is conducive to learning. Within this context, there is a miscorrelation between the amount of students enrolled at institutions of higher education and the university facilities available to accommodate these students. This raises further concerns



around the security of students in the spaces that accommodate them and the proximity of residences to campuses.

7. Policy and Legislation Amendments

Within the context of re-imagining higher education in a democratic South Africa, is the question of regulation. Changes to the post-school system would require legislative and policy amendments to regulate the transition and transformation of the system nationally and within each institution. This work stream identifies the legislative and policy amendments that are required to resolve the higher education crisis in the long and short term.

The details of the Convention will be provided continuously in the coming weeks through the Forum's website which will be accessible at <http://www.necforum.org> from 16:00 on Thursday, 2 February 2017.

This is therefore a call for South African society to get engaged and prepare to contribute views towards the realisation of a vision of education that contributes to a just and peaceful South Africa free of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Justice Dikgang Moseneke

Ms Santie Botha

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