



STATEMENT BY THE

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COUNCIL OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

On the Recent Acts of Violence and  
Our Collective Commitment to Education

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FREE STATE  
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The Council of the University of the Free State stands at a critical juncture in our institution's proud history.

We write to you, our students, staff, alumni, and the broader community with heavy hearts following the acts of violence our campuses faced recently, which left members of our community injured. These events have shaken the very foundations upon which this university was built: the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of every person, and the transformative power of education.

We must state unequivocally: violence has no place within the walls of learning. The injuries sustained by members of our community are not merely physical wounds; they represent an assault on the principles of reasoned dialogue, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence that must govern any institution of higher learning. To those who have been harmed, we extend our deepest sympathies and our unwavering commitment to their full recovery and continued well-being.

## The Sacred Mission of Education

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The Council wishes to reaffirm, with the utmost conviction, the centrality of education to South Africa's future. Our nation stands at a pivotal moment in its young democracy. The disparities we inherited – economic, social, and educational – remain stubbornly entrenched across our society. If there is one force capable of bridging these divides, of lifting our people from poverty to prosperity, of transforming lives and entire communities, it is education.

The University of the Free State has long understood this sacred mission. We educate future doctors who will heal our nation's sick, teachers who will illuminate young minds in townships and rural areas, engineers who will build the infrastructure of tomorrow, and leaders who will guide South Africa towards a more equitable future. Every lecture hall, every laboratory, every tutorial room on our campuses represent the hope for every individual student pursuing their dreams and the hope for a nation striving to overcome its past.

When violence disrupts this work, when fear replaces curiosity, when intimidation silences debate, we do not merely harm individuals – we harm generations yet unborn who depend on today's students to become tomorrow's change-makers. Education is not a luxury; it is the lifeline by which South Africa will pull itself towards justice, prosperity, and equality.

## Concerning External Disruptions

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While the Council acknowledges that legitimate grievances exist within our university community, as they do in any dynamic institution, we have observed with growing concern what appears to be the influence of outside elements that seek to disrupt rather than to build, to destroy rather than to create dialogue. There are forces, it seems, that do not share our commitment to the transformative power of education, forces that see universities not as sanctuaries of learning but as battlegrounds for agendas disconnected from the authentic concerns of students and staff.

We have witnessed tactics designed to inflame rather than to resolve, to divide our community rather than to unite it around shared purpose. These tactics and the orchestrated violence, the deliberate disruption



of academic activities, the targeting of infrastructure bear the hallmarks of those who understand neither the value of education nor the patience required for genuine institutional transformation.

The Council wishes to be clear: we will not allow external actors, whoever they may be, to undermine the educational project to which this university has devoted itself. We will not permit those who have no stake in our students' futures to jeopardise the academic year, to threaten staff safety, or to turn this campus into a theatre of destruction. The University of the Free State belongs to its students, its staff, and the communities it serves, and not to those who would exploit legitimate concerns for illegitimate ends.

## **Our Path Forward: Unity, Healing, and Unwavering Commitment**

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As we navigate the difficult days ahead, the Council commits to the following principles and actions:

### **First, we commit to continuing to grow the potential of our students.**

The young people who have chosen to pursue their education here have done so because they believe in the power of knowledge and in their own potential. They carry the weight of family hopes, community expectations, and national dreams. We will not criminalise an entire student body for the actions of those – whether from within or without – who chose violence over dialogue. Yet, those who have been found guilty of wrongdoings, of disrupting the freedom of learning of others, will face the requisite lawful consequences. Our students deserve our support, our protection, and our commitment to their success.

### **Second, we commit to creating spaces for genuine dialogue about the legitimate concerns that exist within our community.**

Where there are grievances about access, about financial exclusion, about the pace of transformation, about living conditions or academic support – these must be heard, engaged with seriously, and addressed through collaborative problem-solving. The Council recognises that universities must continually evolve to serve their communities better, and we welcome constructive engagement.

### **Third, we will work tirelessly with law enforcement, security professionals, and community leaders to ensure that our campuses remain safe.**

Every student must be able to walk to class without fear. Every staff member must be able to teach, research, and work in an environment free from intimidation. We will invest in the resources necessary to protect our community while maintaining the open, welcoming character that defines university life.

### **Fourth, we call upon all stakeholders – government, civil society, alumni, parents, and the broader South African community – to stand with us in defence of education.**

The challenges facing higher education in South Africa cannot be solved by any single institution alone. They require a national commitment to funding, to access, to quality, and to the recognition that universities are essential to our collective future.

## **A Vision of Hope**

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The Council believes, with unshakable conviction, that the best days of the University of the Free State lie ahead. We envision a campus where students from every background can pursue excellence, where research addresses South Africa's most pressing challenges, and where graduates leave equipped not only with degrees but with the ethical grounding and practical skills to build a better nation. We see before us a generation of students who, despite every obstacle, continue to choose education over



despair, who persist in their studies even under trying circumstances. These young people are the living embodiment of South Africa's resilience and promise. They deserve our protection, our investment, and our faith in their potential.

To our students, we say this: You are not merely pursuing personal advancement – you are part of a grand project of national renewal. Your education matters not just to you but to the siblings who watch you, the communities that sent you, and the nation that needs you. Do not allow anyone – from within or outside these walls – to convince you that disruption serves your interests better than dedication, that violence achieves more than dialogue, that destruction is a path to justice.

The road ahead will not be easy. We face financial constraints, we face legitimate calls for faster transformation, and we face the weight of South Africa's unresolved history. But we face these challenges together, as a community bound by shared purpose and mutual respect. Education has lifted millions out of poverty worldwide; it has toppled dictatorships, cured diseases, bridged divides, and unlocked human potential beyond measure. It will do the same for South Africa if we protect it, nurture it, and commit ourselves to it.

The Council of the University of the Free State stands ready to lead this institution through this difficult moment and towards the bright future that awaits. We invite every member of our community and all South Africans who believe in education's power to stand with us.

Together, we will heal. Together, we will build. Together, we will ensure that the University of the Free State remains a beacon of hope and excellence for generations to come.

**Issued by the Council of the University of the Free State**

For a future built on knowledge, dignity, and shared prosperity

