



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

Office of the Rector and Vice-Chancellor

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27 May 2019

### **Communique from the Rector and Vice-Chancellor to the University Community**

Dear Staff and Students,

I am writing to you as Rector and Vice-Chancellor to express my disappointment and deep concern about events that occurred in the course of recent student protests on our campuses (4 April 2019 on the Qwaqwa Campus and 21 May 2019 on the Bloemfontein Campus). I am particularly perturbed by the extent to which these instances of violence, vandalism, and intimidation indicate a disregard for the safety, dignity, and rights of staff and students, as well as for university infrastructure.

I want to confirm and convey my solidarity with staff, students, and visitors in taking a firm stance against this conduct; I am so sorry that you had to experience such behaviour.

As you are aware, we have worked hard to increase engagement with the Institutional Student Representative Council (I-SRC) and the respective campus SRCs to respond to student questions, queries, and NSFAS issues, facilitating concessions in respect of student finance, and strengthening the student voice in the governance of the university. We will continue to do so.

Through our Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP), we have also been working hard to achieve the vision and mission of our university and to create a new university citizenship that emphasises the ethics of care, an enhanced interaction with industry, the private sector, commerce, and donors, so that we can invest more funds in student bursaries, student success, university infrastructure and research. The violence that occurred during these protests has the effect of harming our university's reputation, but more importantly, jeopardising what we want to be as a university – a thought leader that impacts our province, our country, our continent, and our world.

The intimidation, the forced disruption of classes and tests, racial slurs, assault, and vandalism that occurred during these protests are unacceptable.

As Rector and Vice-Chancellor, it is my responsibility, together with the university's leadership, to eradicate discrimination, racism, victimisation, intimidation, and violence

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across the board. In executing that responsibility, we wish to assure the university community that:

- [a] the investigations and disciplinary processes emanating from these protests will be concluded with the utmost urgency within the university's disciplinary procedures, and that the university community will be kept informed of the progress of these investigations and disciplinary outcomes;
- [b] we will re-evaluate the university's disciplinary procedures so that those identified in violent protests could be brought to justice much faster;
- [c] a protocol will be developed to guide staff and students on what to do in the event of disruptions;
- [d] a system of 'real-time' communication to our staff will be introduced in the event of disruptions; and
- [e] in partnership with Senate, Student Affairs, and the ISRC, we shall continue to engage with students to increase their awareness of what peaceful protests mean and how it should be properly conducted.

Whereas I share and understand the deep concern of staff and students, I wish to appeal to the university community for patience and restraint while these events are being addressed. The university leadership is committed to engaging in a respectful and dignified manner with all members of the university community to create an environment that is safe, peaceful, and conducive to academic activity.

Regards



Prof. Francis W Petersen  
Rector and Vice-Chancellor  
University of the Free State