

MINISTER NZIMANDE CONDEMNS THE DECISION OF THE SENATE OF STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY ON THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT

6 MAY 2024

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Professor Blade Nzimande has learned with utter dismay and disbelief of the decision by the Senate of Stellenbosch University held on Tuesday, 30 April 2024, where it voted against a motion on ‘Genocide and Destruction of Scholarship and Education in Gaza.’

In its text, the draft motion calls for among others, “an immediate ceasefire and the cessation on attacks on civilians in Gaza and Israel, the passage of humanitarian aid, the return of all captives including the safe return of hostages captured by Hamas.”

The draft motion also calls for “the condemnation of the destruction of the education sector in Gaza and the massive scale of killing of teachers and university staff in the current war and further expressed concern and opposition to any attempts to curtail academic freedom by labelling criticism of Israel or Zionist policies as antisemitism.”

The Senate rejected this progressive draft motion by a vote of 101 against 80, with 18 abstentions. This decision by the Senate is both insensitive, blatantly racist and fails to appreciate that, at stake here, is a matter of fundamental human rights- the genocide and mass murder of Palestinians.

The barbarism and racism of Israel has virtually been condemned by most of humanity, including the United Nations General Assembly. Close to 100 Palestinian professors have been killed, over 12 universities have been destroyed in Gaza (virtually destroying the entire university system in Gaza), and hospitals attacked with murdered patients buried in mass graves.

Today we learnt that the Israeli Cabinet closed down Al Jazeera and banned its broadcasting to the Israeli population. Therefore, the decision by the Senate amounts to a monumental betrayal of the sacrifices of academics like David Webster and Rick Turner, without whose sacrifice we would not have defeated the evil system of apartheid.

This decision is therefore profoundly shameful and takes us back to the darkest days of apartheid, whose regime colluded with the Israeli regime to oppress black South Africans and Palestinians respectively.

Whilst I respect university autonomy and academic freedom, the Senate must be made to understand that there is no autonomy from racism, genocide, apartheid, and violation of fundamental human rights.

By taking this repugnant decision, the Senate of Stellenbosch University has essentially legitimised the mass murder and dispossession of the oppressed people of Palestine, including that of fellow academics.

I call on all progressive members of Council, alumni, the workers, and the student leadership at Stellenbosch University to condemn this morally bankrupt and profoundly racist decision by the Senate.

I also call on all South Africa's universities to make their voices heard in the global campaign of solidarity with the people of Palestine and condemnation of the crimes of the Zionist regime in Israel.

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INNOVATION**