



24 July 2019

UPDATE ON STUDENT PROTESTS

Dear students and staff

We are all aware that over the last two weeks or so, the Durban SRC, through various media, announced that it would shut down the University, for various reasons. Management regrets that the Durban SRC has been attempting to do this since Monday, 22 July 2019. We also regret that, in the process, many staff and students have been directly and indirectly affected by this.

May we hasten to note that Management did all it could do to prepare for the protests, during this time. In fact, several meetings with the relevant authorities have been held since April 2019. Further, coordinated plans among all of the security groupings have been in place as early as June 2019.

Despite all of our plans to manage the protests much better than ever before, it is with deep disappointment and sadness that Management confirms that last night, under the guise of students visiting the library at the Steve Biko campus - and perhaps, to escalate their protest - protestors burnt a vehicle that belongs to one of our PhD students, Mr Tinaye Mahohoma. This was a criminal act and a dastardly one too, on the property of a member of our community, who has nothing to do with the matters at hand. We hope that the relevant authorities will leave no stone unturned to apprehend the criminals responsible for this.

Management hereby expresses our regrets and sympathy with Mr Mahohoma. Given this tense situation and its potential dangers, Management advises all staff and students never to leave their cars and other valuable property, especially in unguarded parking lots and spaces, during the evenings.

As noted above, the Durban SRC commenced with their protest action on Monday, 22 July 2019. This was surprising, since the University had been engaging with them continually on a number of issues that they had raised in recent weeks. On Mandela Day, Thursday, 18 July 2019, the Dean of Students, Dr Maditsane Nkonoane and his team at Student Services, had a constructive and a positive meeting with the Durban SRC. The said meeting was to be followed by another one on Monday, 22 July 2019 at 14h30. The Durban SRC failed to honour this meeting, perhaps choosing to start their protest. Therefore, on the back of those developments, Management finds it disingenuous that the SRC would resort to protest action, disruption of lectures and the intimidation of non-protesting students and staff. In addition, there were unfortunate altercations with the police and security personnel, after protestors tried to break down gates and illegally enter the Steve Biko campus as part of their protest.

It should be remembered that while protests continue to be legal, the current court interdict allows them only outside of 150m from the University premises, amongst other conditions. This extraordinary step was taken early this year to limit intimidation of students and staff and to allow for better protection of limb, life and property. Since the protest started, SAPS has arrested those protestors who violated the court interdict. Relevant judicial processes will now unravel.

Management is resolute that DUT cannot be allowed to be an enclave of violence and criminality without consequences. When the Durban SRC refuses to engage as it did earlier this week and resorts to violence, those of us trained in reason and debate, but not in managing violence, criminality and their consequences, will leave such situations to those that our democratic state has given authority to – the safety, security and justice systems.

Henceforth, and in order to ensure that both Management and the SRC are on the same page on how the court interdict is to be implemented and how protest action is to be conducted and managed, Management has issued a set of guidelines to the SRC. The said guidelines are meant to ensure that we do not find ourselves in a situation akin to that of February this year, where a young life was lost and a staff member was seriously injured, amongst many atrocities visited then on our staff and students by the protesters.

Some of the guidelines, as already communicated to the SRC, are as follows:

1. *Firstly, there should be documentary (and other type of) evidence of engagements with Student Services that show that the latter would have failed to resolve whatever matters at hand that the University has jurisdiction and authority over.*
2. *Secondly, there should be documentary (and other type of) evidence from both the SRC and Student Services to the effect that all processes of internal engagement and decision making stipulated in the SRC Constitution and other relevant University policies/procedures would have been exhausted.*
3. *Thirdly, and in light of the court interdict and whatever legal determination by a competent legal authority, clearly identified and delineated areas of protest must be agreed with Student Services before a march and submission of memoranda are undertaken.*
4. *Fourthly, requests and notices for protests must be lodged with Student Services well in advance (this to be the subject of further engagements and determination) so that all relevant officers of the University and some relevant external stakeholders including the Public Order Police could be ready and available to play their respective roles during the planned protest, more importantly, to ensure the safety and security of our staff and students first before any march takes place.*

Part of the Durban SRC's narrative in the media is to portray themselves as victims. However, if any citizen or inhabitant of South Africa violates the same laws and/or court order, the police would also arrest them. As noted above, and we reiterate: DUT's premises will never be turned into an enclave for violence and criminality.

There has also been a number of other false statements made by the Durban SRC, amongst them, that the University is financially supporting specific student groups against the SRC. Let us be clear, we do not give funds to any student groups outside of the SRC. If the Durban SRC has proof to support their allegations, Management urges them to table their evidence so that we can act on their claim.

We implore the Durban SRC to not politicise legitimate student concerns. We realise that SRC elections are on the horizon.

Perhaps, for some, and quite contradictory in a place of reason and debate, the level of violence they can wreak is a test of their strength and legitimacy to represent students. We hope those of us who are legitimate parts of this highly intellectual community, will see through this basest of warped notions.

Finally, after several attempts since the failed meeting of Monday 22 July 2019, our Dean of Students, Dr Maditsane Nkonoane, has managed to get a commitment from the Durban SRC to attend a meeting with Management that was scheduled for 11h00 today, 24 July 2019. We look forward to progressive engagements and to reaching resolution of the matters at hand.

Management remains resolute and committed to resolving the issues that are within our areas of authority and control. We thank all staff and students for being equally resolute and committed to our academic programme, despite all of the threats, intimidation and violence.

Sincerely

DUT Management