

Address of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Durban University of Technology, Professor RH du Pre' on the occasion of the Art for Humanity Gala Dinner, Durban Art Gallery, 17 May 2008

Deputy Mayor Logie Naidoo

Members of the diplomatic community present

Business representatives and business partners present

Friends, colleagues, distinguished ladies and gentlemen

May I greet you all.

Since ancient times, the university has held an esteemed and elevated place in society. In its most basic form, it is an institution for higher learning, engaged in teaching and research, awarding undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

At another level it is meant to be a liberated space in society guaranteeing the free exchange of ideas according to the rules and conventions of academic discourse.

This year, 2008, marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed this living document in response to the needs of the world. Described by the Guinness Book of Records as the "Most Translated Document" in the world, the Declaration enshrines Human Rights and Academic Freedom as essential values of humanity.

However, academic repression, censorship and ideological control, as well as the repression of student activism that have made an impact on the world of academia, are outlined in the Human Rights World Watch Report in 2002. Repression of academics is widely reported to exist in China, and to a lesser extent Iran, Tunisia and North Korea. In some of these countries, academics have been arrested for speaking their minds, which are oftentimes in contravention of the ideologies of their governments.

The recent furore caused at the University of Pretoria, with a speech made by Professor Hussein Solomon, led to the Association of Islamic Madressas lodging a defamation suit against the Professor. The organisation was claimed that Professor Solomon alleded that Islamic schools were being used for military training, and according to him, are a breeding ground for terrorists. The University of Pretoria

came out in support of Solomon, and said that he was exercising his constitutional right to academic freedom.

Closer to home, Durban University of Technology supports Arts for Humanity and their endeavour to promote research in terms of sustainable development, human rights and democracy. Art for Humanity also presents a valuable resource for students in the Arts and Journalism Departments.

Here, academic freedom is exercised in a number of ways. Students within the Journalism Department produce a newspaper, iThemba, as well as an Online Publication called *Seduta* and they are responsible for the content contained within these publications.

Responsible freedom of expression can never subvert the right of freedom of expression of the other person. In this instance all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, sexism, etc. inherently suppresses the right to freedom of expression of those who are the target of these forms of discriminations. It is the duty of all institutions including DUT to insist on responsible academic freedom and thus responsible freedom of expression.

Art for art's sake might be considered as a philosophy that divorces "true art" from any moral function. The many projects including Break the Silence HIV/AIDS Portfolio, and Women for children, driven by Art For Humanity are proof that this organisation is dedicated to the pursuit for not only human rights and academic freedom, but for developing the proper environment for artistic creativity . Through the many human rights advocacy campaigns and projects developed by Arts for Humanity, DUT's public profile is promoted as a university with a strong social responsibility consciousness and as an institution that promotes human rights publicly.

Promoting creativity and allowing it to flower in a spirit of freedom and intercultural dialogue is one of the best ways of maintaining cultural vitality. To quote Art For Humanity's very own Jan Jordaan, 'Art created today will influence the social values of future generations.'

Ends
