

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Unisa response to allegations made by NEHAWU

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has taken note of allegations made by a representative of the National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) during a talk radio show on SAFM yesterday (Monday, 25 April 2022).

The university is disturbed by the unfounded and spurious allegations levelled against the Council of the university and the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, which are not based on facts and reality but innuendo and slander.

Whilst the spokesperson of the university was invited to the talk show to respond to the issues raised by the NEHAWU representative and the talk show host, the university holds the strong view that some of the critical issues raised during the show requires further clarification for the benefit of the public and stakeholders. The issues are as follows:

On the disruption of autumn graduations on 15 March 2022

All the venues in the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela building, including the graduation venue, the ZK Matthews Great Hall and surrounding halls, were booked and reserved for graduation business since February 2022. The university has an electronic booking system for venues, and it is impossible for the system to do a double-booking. Whilst NEHAWU were granted permission to hold a mass meeting on the same day, the permission did not automatically translate into access to the graduation venue, which was already booked. In fact, NEHAWU were informed in writing and agreed to hold their meeting at a different venue (Miriam Makeba Hall), only for them to proceed and forcefully access the ZK Matthews Great Hall, thereby disrupting the graduations scheduled to take place at the same time.

Further to this, several graduation ceremonies were disrupted afterwards, including recently after the placing of the NEHAWU Office Bearers on precautionary suspension.

On the alleged unlawfulness of the precautionary suspension of NEHAWU Unisa Branch Office Bearers

The university is absolutely satisfied that it followed all the necessary legal and policy prescripts leading to the precautionary suspension of the Branch Office Bearers in question. The trade union has got a legal recourse to challenge the legal validity of the precautionary suspensions in a court of law or the CCMA if it so wishes.

As a matter of fact, the university went out of its way to engage the NEHAWU Unisa Branch in a bid to amicably resolve the problem arising out of the disruption of the graduation ceremony on 15 March 2022 by NEHAWU members, which efforts were outrightly rejected by NEHAWU.



On the alleged unilateral implementation of the salary adjustment by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor

The human resources and finance systems of the university are designed with the necessary checks and balances with the effect that no single individual, the Principal and Vice Chancellor included, can implement these kinds of adjustments. The governance issues pertaining to the implementation of the salary adjustments were subsequently dealt with by Council, which also demanded consequence management against officials who violated the governance processes of the university. This has since been initiated by the university, and disciplinary actions are under way against those implicated.

It is unfortunate that Nehawu wants to project Management as indifferent to the working conditions of workers when in fact, it is Management working in concert with Council that eventually resolved the salary dispute.

On the alleged inaction by Council on the allegations against the Principal and Vice Chancellor reported to Council

The stance of the university, including Council, is that nobody is above university policy and/or the law; and that all allegations of maladministration, corruption or malfeasance reported in the university system must be attended to, irrespective of the rank of the person/s implicated. Council is seized with all the matters that have been reported to it and should be given the time and space to process these matters without any undue pressure. The matters will be dealt with based on the information before Council and should not be used for political point scoring. Council should be given the space to apply its mind and procedures, and make a determination independently.

It is completely false that Council does not or will not hold the Principal and Vice-Chancellor accountable. Council has a duty to process such matters before it with due diligence in line with governance frameworks.

On the alleged misuse of university resources/vehicle

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor is entitled to an official university vehicle as part of her conditions of employment as determined by Council. The procurement of the official university vehicle is not responsibility of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor. The Facilities Management Portfolio is responsible for purchasing the vehicle, while the Principal and Vice-Chancellor only has access to it during his/her term of office.

Any question arising out of the university vehicle secured on behalf of the Vice Chancellor must be addressed to Council.

Anybody with evidence that shows that the official vehicle utilised by the current Principal and Vice-Chancellor was purchased without following due process must report and produce such evidence to the relevant authorities in the university.

On the official university residence

The university is on record stating that the Principal and Vice-Chancellor did not take part in procurement processes for the refurbishment of the official residence, including the purchase of any movable assets. Any suggestion to the contrary is pure innuendo intended to tarnish her name and the image of Unisa. As a matter of fact, the university conducted an audit investigation into this matter and has since placed a senior official who led this project on precautionary leave, pending a disciplinary hearing. The audit investigation also cleared the Principal and Vice Chancellor of any wrongdoing.

The allegations of expensive and imported movable assets such as the bedroom suite and fridge are simply fabrications intended to portray the Principal and Vice-Chancellor as superfluous. These fabrications are defamatory too.



On the allegation that the VC used university resources to pay for her PA's trip to Dubai

This allegation is simply not true. The Principal and Vice-Chancellor travelled to Dubai together with the Deputy Chairperson of the Unisa Council and the Vice Principal: Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation and Commercialisation to represent the university at the 2022 ZAIRI International Awards, where Unisa won an award in the category: Excellence for Research Impact. The VC's PA was not part of the travel delegation.

On Unisa and its academic programme

Unisa will continue to take measures to safeguard its image and academic programme. Management wishes to reiterate that worker's rights and issues are always handled properly in a robust and honest way. However, lawlessness and violence does not constitute the legitimate agenda of worker issues and Unisa will not allow a culture of lawlessness to fester.

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