

Alice (main) Campus:

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Attention: All Editors - For Immediate Release

UPDATE ON STUDENT PROTEST AND DECISION TO INVOKE A COURT INTERDICT

Yesterday, 25 February, University of Fort Hare Management was forced to suspend academic activity and release staff at its Alice campus due to violent student protests which included chasing staff out of offices, thus leading to a complete disruption of campus operations.

At the heart of the protest is a 'Register One Register All' demand by students who have been financially excluded because of historical debt. It should be noted that Management has implemented all of Minister Blade Nzimande's recommendations regarding handling of student debt. Therefore, all students who qualify with the set criteria (including NSFAS funding) have been allowed to register. Unfortunately, there remains a category of students who do not meet the criteria set out by DHET (and the University of Fort Hare). Management has continuously engaged with such students and a number of concessions in this regard have been made.

Despite the university's efforts to find amicable solutions, on Monday and Tuesday students blocked the university entrance, burning tyres and blockading the R63 in front of the University. There were running clashes with Public Order Police. Even a truck delivering supplies to a local business was ambushed and looted.

Court Interdict

In an effort to restore calm and stability, the Registrar invoked an existing court interdict which prevents students from disrupting campus operations. The Registrar gave the students advance warning that the court order would become effective and that by law, Public Order Police (POPS) have a duty to restore peace. Today, students continued to pelt police and private security on campus with stones, provoking them to retaliate. Later this afternoon 10 students were arrested. Academic activity on the Alice campus is still suspended.

Allegations of Police Brutality Against Students

The University is aware that there are reports and images currently circulating on social media platforms with allegations of a student who has been brutally assaulted by POPS on campus. Management has double-checked with both the Commander of POPS and Private Security on campus, and there are no reported cases of student injury on the Alice campus to date. We are also still checking with the local hospital and other health facilities, but at the time of writing, the veracity of the allegation could not be confirmed.

Management would like to urge students to desist from instigating acts of violence and ill-discipline in order for the academic programme to resume. All possible avenues are being explored to assist financially excluded students. However, the university is not in a position to concede to the demand of 'Register One Register All' as that would bring the university to its knees.

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