Friday, 30 October 2015

SACC calls for end to university protests

SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES CALLS FOR END TO UNIVERSITY PROTESTS

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The South African Council of Churches National Executive Committee at a meeting in Johannesburg last Thursday called on all university students to suspend their protracted protests and focus on crucial end of year examinations.

The Council acknowledges and recognizes the gravity of the recent mass student campaigns dubbed' #Fees Must Fall', in defense of poor families caught in the cross-hairs of spiralling costs of university education. The churches' pastoral support was manifest during the meeting of the leaders of South African Churches in Kempton Park which was suspended to allow its delegates to go to Wits University for an hour of silent presence and engagement with students as well as university management.

We applaud, in the main, the largely orderly and peaceful way in which students conducted themselves countrywide. We congratulate them unreservedly on their victory. We join in celebrating President Zuma's positive response to this crisis, firmly believing that the plan to engage and to fast-track a future of open access to tertiary education is the right step to follow for all stake-holders..

However the SACC is gravely concerned about the reported unbridled violent acts and wanton destruction of university property by some rogue elements at some campuses. We make a distinction between appropriate and dignified protest, as opposed to criminal acts of violence and destruction. The latter have no place in democratic processes of an open society.

We are concerned about those unjustly arrested just for the mere act of protesting and we call for the release of these students to create a positive resolution of the current challenges. The SACC plans to engage with all stakeholders - students, university management, government and the private sector, to explore various options and ensure equitable access to university education for South African youth and citizenry aspiring for quality education in our reputable academic institutions. The financial precariousness of most students should not be an obstacle to accessing education and students are encouraged at this time to seek consensus to ensure the successful running of the end of year examinations.

The SACC is currently engaged in a 'SEE-JUDGE-ACT' process of status research on issues like poverty, inequality, economic transformation which impacts the quality of life and access to education. We shall pray for - a just, reconciled and equitable society, free of racial, xenophobic, tribal and gender prejudice, a country free of the yoke of endemic corruption and deprivation, a new South Africa with enough food and shelter for every citizen. We will continue to pray that our children thrive in a conducive social, economic and political environment which will enable them to attain their God-given potential.

In this regard, the SACC wishes to see a long-term solution to the matter of inadequate funding of university education.

Posted by Anglican Media Office, Bishopscourt at 21:22