

Transformation committee for 'varsities

Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande has set up a transformation committee for universities, nearly five years after a racist incident in the Free State sparked a probe.



Image: GCS

Part of the committee's job would be to review initiation practices at universities, Nzimande said on Wednesday (23 January).

The committee was created following a probe into discrimination in universities, in the aftermath of a racism incident at the University of the Free State (UFS) in February 2008.

"This report [into the UFS matter] is old, but the realities captured by the report are still there. They are alive," Nzimande told reporters in Johannesburg.

"We have been doing quite a lot of work since this [report]. We have been asking universities to go through a very detailed exercise [of transformation]."

In 2008, a video emerged of UFS employees undergoing an initiation, which included having to get on their knees and eat food which had apparently been urinated on by male students at the Reitz men's residence.

"We are picking up this problem of initiation in some universities. That thing has no place in a democratic South Africa," said Nzimande.

"It is very abusive and we are concerned, because sometimes it can take racial forms and can be very explosive," he added.

Nzimande said the committee would monitor the progress of transformation in universities and advise him on policies to combat racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.

"What we are committing [to] as a department is where there are issues of discrimination, we are not going to fold our arms, nor are we going to allow ourselves to be intimidated into not doing anything," Nzimande said.

He said the committee would consult university students, lecturers and administrators. However, he urged students not to get too involved in the process.

"A committee like this will have to engage stakeholders, including students," Nzimande said.

"I am always reluctant to put students on committees because the role of students is to study and pass their exams. We don't want them to become professional students who take, five, six, seven years to finish a degree," he added.

Members of the committee are appointed for three years, and could be re-appointed by the higher education minister.

"The appointment of the committee is effective from the day of gazetting, which will take place soon after this announcement," Nzimande said.

The committee comprises of University of KwaZulu-Natal vice chancellor Prof Malegapuru Makhoba, University of Fort Hare vice chancellor Mvuyo Tom, University of Witwatersrand transformation director Nazeema Mohamed, and Congress of SA Trade Unions second deputy president Zingiswa Losi.

Prof Andre Keet, from the UFS, Prof Shirley Walters, from the University of the Western Cape, and National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union first deputy president Joe Mpisi were also part of the committee.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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