

**DECLARATION OF  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES' STAFF NETWORK FOR  
TRANSFORMATION (SAUSNeT)  
CONFERENCE**

**January 27-29, 2017**

***Re-imagining a More Responsible Public Higher Education in South Africa Today –  
Towards Feasible Policy Alternatives***

**Preamble**

The South African Universities Staff Network for Transformation (SAUSNeT) was formed on 20 November 2016 in response to the continuing crisis in higher education. It seeks to include the voices of academic and support staff in the broader consultative processes towards the realization of a transformative peace and just solutions. SAUSNeT is committed to reimagining a 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education system that addresses the challenges of society.

**Declaration**

**WE**, the delegates - representing unions, associations and individual administrators, support staff and academics from universities in South Africa - to the South African Universities Staff Network for Transformation (SAUSNeT) meeting at the O.R. Tambo Garden Court, Gauteng, South Africa.

**Recognising:**

- The historic moment of students' demand for free, quality, decolonised education as well as the workers' demands for insourcing.
- Unity between all university staff, including academics and support service workers, is crucial to ensure collective voice and power. Such a common platform was not established in the past and is required in the present.
- The national and systemic crises at our universities, which is exacerbated by structural poverty, inequality, racism, unemployment and general lack of opportunities for young people in our country.
- The traumatic experiences and antagonistic relations at our universities among management, staff and students as well as the divisions within these individual constituencies.
- Poor communication from government and management, and the lack of consultation, especially with staff and unions.
- Acts of violence and destruction, including the burning of libraries, a climate of fear, as well as the securitisation of campuses.
- The exploitation of the crisis for political purposes.
- The poor quality of basic education, which undermines higher education and further training.

- The interconnections between the crisis at universities and in society, and to reimagine the sector, policy and society.
- Public goods in society such as decommodified education, health care and transport should be provisioned with quality, excellence and a spirit of public service to all.

**Reaffirming** our principles to guide our approach to universities and broader engagement:

- **Constitutional democracy:** which protects and promotes the Bill of Rights which includes the rights to education, association, protest and protection or security, among other rights.
- **Zero tolerance to racism:** universities having unevenly confronted the structural, behavioural and unconscious racism within these spaces. We remain guided by a firm commitment to address racialised legacies and practices at our universities by drawing on anti-racism, Black consciousness and radical non-racialism to ensure zero racism takes root.
- **Non-violence:** rejecting all forms of violence, especially gender based violence, but also violence within political action and engagement, while affirming democratic, dialogical and peaceful means to address problems.
- **Equality:** recognising that all humans are entitled to resources, opportunities and rights that ensure a just existence and commit ourselves to fighting all forms of discrimination especially based on gender and sexuality.
- **Transformation:** recognising the achievements made in the last 22 years, we recommit ourselves to radical transformation within the sector.
- **Ecological justice:** seeking to protect natural resources and eco-systems for present and future generations, while limiting the eco-cidal logic of corporate driven societies.

**Informed by conference deliberations, we declare our support for:**

***Restorative justice in respect of student discipline***

- A process of restorative justice in the face of the criminal and disciplinary cases against students. While we support the students' demands, we cannot perpetuate a culture of impunity. We support the Trusted Convenors, led by former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke, in resolving these matters through a restorative justice process. We also believe the Trusted Convenors must give consideration to establishing a civil society led commission of enquiry into human rights violations and the undermining of the right to peaceful protest at universities during the #FMF 2015 and #FMF2016.

***Building a Transformative Peace and Unity at Our Campus***

- We call on university administrations that have securitised our universities through blanket interdicts, a heavy police presence, bouncers and other extreme measures to desist with immediate effect. We appeal for an undertaking and commitment to move forward through dialogue, debate and negotiations.
- Our universities need to be re-united through taking seriously student calls for decolonisation, decommodified higher education and insourcing of precarious

workers. Social compacts, peace agreements, accords and transformation summits are encouraged.

### ***A Civil Society Convention on the Crisis in Higher Education***

- We affirm:
  - the role of the Trusted Convenors, as our partners, in creating a participatory platform, with all stakeholders, for dialogue, debate and negotiations, leading to more equitable, permanent and sustainable policy solutions in higher education. This we must do in a climate of trust, as supported and initiated by respected leaders and organisations in society.
  - the need for participatory and democratic agenda setting that addresses the systemic challenges of higher education.
  - an inclusive constituency-based approach to the convention, guided by our principles.
  - the need for sufficient student representivity to be part of this dialogue, despite the prevailing divisions among students.

### ***Proposals for Systemic Reform***

1. Fiscal Justice: Demand the state increases funding to universities to ensure fiscal justice and institutional autonomy. This can happen through various redistributive measures such as increasing the training levy and its allocation to universities; increasing corporate taxation ( given that corporations have benefitted from massive cuts since the mid-1990s); increasing wealth taxes; advancing a substantive basic citizens' income grant and similar measures. Ensure the state adequately funds the costs of insourcing.
2. Fiscal waste: Challenge the state's abuse of public resources, including the looming nuclear deal, mega infrastructure projects and annual corporate outsourcing, which redirects urgently needed resources from higher education and other social priorities.
3. Accommodation: Ensure safe, hygienic housing and call for the gazetted minimum norms and standards to be implemented by universities and applied to private student accommodation as well.
4. Hunger: Promote food sovereign commons (e.g. plant fruit trees and vegetable gardens across campuses, link to community small-scale farmers) to ensure adequate nutrition to students. Fast food outlets should be replaced by communal dining halls.
5. Gender-based violence: Demand immediate action to address gender empowerment and sexual violence; a national task team to investigate rape culture, reporting institutions, and university policy; education for staff and students on gender-based violence.
6. Advancing the next generation of staff: Actively promote through support programmes, training, and promotion planning, the advancement of black postgraduate students and black academic, professional, administrative, and support staff.
7. Pluralities of knowledge: Promote and implement decoloniality to replace the ethos and knowledge structures of the apartheid university. Knowledge structures and pedagogies that address the existence of coloniality to be encouraged, supported and promoted. Research, learning practices, pedagogical experimentation and spatial

transformation in keeping with decoloniality to be advanced. All knowledge systems to be valued.

8. Advance information for all: to address the information deficit, lack of access to information technology and lack of skills to utilise libraries. In this regard zero VAT rating on education material, increased funding for indigenous knowledge collections, promotion of the online commons, library training for students, access and promotion of libraries as a public good across society and free access to the internet to be achieved through libraries.
9. A push to fix school education: through the Trusted Convenors of the numerous policy solutions, plans and proposals to address the crisis in school education. Social power must be focused on the dysfunctionality facing our schooling system and which is contributing to the crisis in higher education.
10. Differentiation in university and higher education system: TVET/FET need to be strengthened through labour market planning, good governance, and accountability for job creation and national development. A functioning higher education system presents school leavers greater opportunities and expanded options for further education. Such a system must ensure flexible complementarity and articulation so that learners can move into any level of the system based on their needs. Universities should also support capacity building in TVET/FET.
11. Participatory Governance and the power of all university staff: propose a new model and/or role of university Councils, and other institutional structures to ensure greater transparency, participation, and representivity. Replace the new managerialism, performance management and market exploitation model that governs universities. Such transformation can happen through streamlining managerial structures, decent work for all staff, collective bargaining, recognition of trade unions, narrowing wage gaps, insourcing, sharing medical aids, participatory reviews, greater allocation of research funds to academics in departments and adequate representation of students and staff on university governing structures.
12. Building eco-centric universities: address the lack of leadership on the climate and broader ecological crisis. In this regard, universities to champion zero carbon emissions through renewable energy, greater thermal efficiency in buildings, zero hunger through food sovereign commons, integrated public transport, car free zones, bicycle lanes, zero waste, research to develop climate science and an eco-centric knowledge project for university disciplines.

### ***A future for SAUSNet***

- Strengthen its reach at universities among associations, unions and interested staff through the following:
  - immediate dialogue with all constituencies within universities and civil society on the conference declaration;
  - initiation of SAUSNet forums where appropriate at universities and in regions;
  - include all participants at this conference on the SAUSNet mailing list and social media.

- Unions and associations participating in SAUSNet need to deliberate on their relation to SAUSNeT going forward (e.g. forms of support, resourcing, membership, affiliation).
- SAUSNeT will seek to engage civil society partners and Heher Commission as well as the DHET on its financing model and the Lesedi model.
- SAUSNeT will also consider principled, disciplined and non-violent mass protest action and campaigning to take forward its agenda for systemic reforms.

### ***Global struggles in higher education***

- Commit ourselves to the global struggle for free, quality, higher education in all parts of the world, including learning from countries that have embraced public higher education models such as Argentina, Cuba, India, Palestine, Germany, France and several Nordic countries. Committing ourselves specifically to partnerships with other public universities through exchanges and other measures to promote solidarity.