

Statement by Faith Leaders

National church leaders and other faith leaders gathering in Johannesburg from 21-22 October 2015 at OR Tambo, for their annual meeting, issued the following statement on the student fee crisis:

We the Church leaders of South Africa lament the student fee crisis engulfing the country. We believe this a national crisis.

We lament that we have not discerned the signs of the times. We have failed our students and not heard their voices.

We lament and strongly condemn the unnecessary use of violence and police brutality against our students and children. We call for the immediate release of all detained under these circumstances.

We further lament the exclusion of the poor from our spaces of higher education and learning because of unaffordability. We recognize that the majority of these students are black and this entrenches inequality in our nation and further disadvantages many students. Our sacred texts call us to identify with the poor and marginalised. The church and faith leaders therefore have an obligation to stand in solidarity with the students on campuses, their parents and university leadership in the country.

Consequently church and faith leaders have resolved to undertake a symbolic visit to the Wits campus to express our solidarity. We are committing ourselves to creating courageous spaces where South Africans are able to listen to one another and to the voice of God. We further encourage church and faith leaders to do the same on other campuses.

We call on university authorities, government and students to avoid further violent behaviour that shuts down dialogue. Only through deep dialogue, listening and courageous action will we be able to find lasting long-term solutions.

We especially call on the government to provide adequate resources immediately to stabilize the situation, to enable students to write their examinations, whilst lasting solutions are being explored with all stakeholders over the next 12 months.

As Church and faith leaders we commit to engage and journey with all stakeholders on this issue.

We also assure the students, their parents and university leadership and government in the country of our continued prayers in this time of crisis.

Statement by Archbishop Thabo

Archbishop Thabo issued the following statement to the Church on 22nd October. It was also released to the media:

"I will join about 40 leaders of the National Religious Association for Social Development on a visit to Wits University, my alma mater, this morning. We are interrupting meetings in Gauteng to do so.

"I appeal to Bishops and parishioners in all our dioceses to support students and staff at tertiary institutions, and to pray for an amicable resolution to the crisis. Apart from holding prayer vigils, I appeal to our churches to give practical help to students in distress.

"I also call on everyone involved in the protests to avoid the use of force, and on the police to take action which is strictly proportionate to any threats they may face.

"Government leaders should refuse pay rises as a symbolic expression of their concern. And they have bailed out parastatals in trouble; could they not now bail out our students and institutions, at least for a year, while a lasting solution is sought?"

"These are our children, as parents we need to act. Nyaki was arrested in Cape Town yesterday. He was released from the central police cells last night, and was scheduled to appear in court this morning. Thank you for your prayers."