

MEDIA STATEMENT - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEHAWU STATEMENT ON THE FEES COMMISSION REPORT

Monday November 13, 2017

The National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union [NEHAWU] notes the release of the report of the Commission into the Feasibility of Fee-Free Higher Education and Training in South Africa.

As NEHAWU, although expected we still reject the findings of the report that the government cannot afford free higher education. We vehemently reject this finding by the commission because since 2009 we have seen unabated looting of the state and the persistent outflow of billions into safe heavens in Dubai. Funds that can fund free education ends up lining the pockets of greedy politicians and those close to them.

Education should be the biggest beneficiary of government budgetary allocation because currently we have an unemployment rate of 38% and majority of those being young people. One of the key impediments that blocks young people from being absorbed by the labour market is the lack of proper qualifications. In order to deal with the scourge of unemployment the doors of learning would have to be open as wide as possible. We will closely monitor the implementation and mechanisms used to dispense free education in TVET colleges.

We hope the report will prompt the private sector to also play a role in increasing access to higher education. As the biggest consumer of skills the public sector is currently playing a very minimal role in ensuring that we train as many young people as possible. The time of piggybacking off the government is over and everyone must play a crucial role in creating universal access to higher education and training.

As NEHAWU we are also fervently opposed to the new Income Contingency Loan System. What the system means is that it will replace the National Students Financial Aid Scheme [NSFAS] with loans that will be provided by the commercial banks. The report suggests that students must graduate while they still have a debt with the banks and at risk of being blacklisted if they don't find immediate employment.

We however, welcome the finding that education must be free in Technical and Vocational Education and Training [TVET] colleges. This further vindicates the former Minister of Higher Education and Training, Cde Blade Nzimande, who equipped that the solution to our higher education lies in TVET colleges. We welcome this finding and hope it will be implemented as soon as possible.

We also welcome the ring-fencing of R50 billions of Unemployment Insurance Fund [UIF] surpluses for infrastructure development for TVET colleges. This will ensure that the plans to improve the TVET sector as captured in the National Development Plan [NDP] are realised. The sector needs a complete overhaul and some of the

issues that plague it are the reason for our National Day of Action to the Department of Education and Training next week Tuesday 21st November 2017.

We will meet the Progressive Youth Alliance [PYA] urgently to map a way forward post the release of the report. As NEHAWU, we remain steadfast in our support of the Right to Learn campaign by the South African Students Congress [SASCO] and will fight side by side with SASCO for the realisation of free education in the country.

Issued by NEHAWU Secretariat

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