

SILENCE ON UNITECH SAGA BY GOVERNMENT IS DEAFENING

The Unitech saga which started two years ago is far from over. National Academic Staff Association (NASA) and National Staff Association (NSA) executives are worried whether the commencement of the academic year 2014 will be smooth or whether there will be more turbulence on the way.

NASA President Justin Kehatsin and NSA President Wilfred Pasanai are optimistic but have few reservations though because of the absence of the Sevua report findings and the National Government's failure to make its position clear. The report which investigated the saga was commissioned by the National Government (K500,000) and it was promised by the Prime Minister (PM) that the findings would determine what decisions and actions were to be taken to normalize the situation.

It has been more than six months now since the completion of the investigation and the report is still being kept private by the Prime Minister. The PM promised to use the findings from the investigations to resolve the matter but to-date nothing has been said and done.

Silence by the National Government is truly deafening and is truly generating anxiety and Sinicism amongst the populace of Unitech and PNG, they said. The PM and the Minister for HERST, Honourable David Arore have the facts before them and they must own up now and tell the community of Unitech and also the PNG community at large what decisions they have formed based on evidences and facts before them.

The Council under the Chairmanship of Sir Nagora Bogan, has made its decision known in the last Council meeting held at the Holiday Inn on the 12 December 2013. The Council confirmed and reinstated once again Dr Schram as the Vice Chancellor of the PNG University of Technology. With faith in Dr Schram, the Council expected the Vice Chancellor to recommence duty as soon as possible. They had in their possession a copy of the letter from the Council written to Dr Schram informing him of his reinstatement. Failure to turn up by the Vice chancellor at the end of March would ultimately mean cessation of employment, the two presidents reported.

Mr Kehatsin and Pasanai together with their executive members said that the interest of the university must be upheld at all times as stipulated in the University Act. This same act also spells out the functions of the Council and the code of conduct in situations of recruitment. The act clearly specifies the Unitech Council as being the legal body to make appointment of a Vice Chancellor etc.

Mr Kehatsin feels strongly that the Unitech saga could have been resolved long ago but politics has been allowed to interfere in the healing process. NASA President cautioned politicians not to interfere with the administration of the university and must not exert undue influence on senior management members of the university.

"Politicians will do well by keeping away from the corridor of the University Council. Politics has always been a bad omen when mixed with other non-political organizations and the

NASA President has urged politicians to change their mindset and begin to see universities in PNG as autonomous institutions which must be independent of political maneuvering. “

Both presidents and their executive members urged the government and the Unitech Administration to handle the case with utmost care and diligence.

They urged the Senior Management team at Unitech to do the following as matters of urgency:

- i) Follow-up on Dr Schram’s visa and make sure that necessary paper work is being done to process the document
- ii) Establish dialogue with the National Government in expediting the visa process
- iii) Request the National Government to release the Sevua report as soon as possible
- iv) To assure all university stakeholders that the academic year will begin in earnest without any hiccups
- v) To make sure all necessary measures are in place to harmonise any unforeseen consequences and /or disturbances

To the National Government, the presidents and their executive members are requesting the following:

- i) That the government through the Minister for Foreign Affairs expedite the processing of Dr Schram’s visa
- ii) That the PM and Minister for HERST to make public the Sevua report as soon as possible
- iii) That the National Government recognises and confirms the reinstatement of Dr Schram as the Vice Chancellor of Unitech
- iv) That the National Government make public whether it supports the new Unitech Council headed by Sir Nagora Bogan as chairman

Being proactive, both leaders felt obligated to act as the time is neigh in their haste to prevent any repeat of what had happened last year, 2013.

Failure to listen to the voices of NASA and NSA and /or other related associations within Unitech can compromise the integrity of our premier university and can be counterproductive and detrimental to the progress and advancement of the mission and vision of Unitech.

It is high time now for the National Government and Unitech stakeholders to create an atmosphere filled with certainty which must be free from naivety and unpredictability.

A win-win climate must be established right from the outset to set the stage and pace for the year. Common sense must reign supreme over unwitting wishes of others when it comes to issues indulging in higher institutional matters. The rule of chances must not be allowed to take root in any universities in PNG, especially the PNG University of Technology. Our University is too big and high for any one person to manipulate with personal ultra motives.

NASA and NSA Presidents together with their Executive members pay homage to the work of the National Government and with sincerity request the National Government and the Unitech Administration to do more to maintain a high standard of performances and professionalism in the university in 2014.



Justin Kehatsin- NASA President