

# **NEW SCHOLARSHIP FOR SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS STUDYING OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY—ANC YL PERSPECTIVE:**

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## **Background**

The African National Congress Youth League National Executive Committee resolved in December 2009 to lobby the South African Government to establish a scholarship that will fund South African students studying in best Universities outside the country. The ANC YL NEC specifically resolved to lobby government to “send not less than 10 000 students to the best Universities across the world to get the best education and skills on important areas such as medicine, engineering, accounting, technology, and science”.

The resolution of the NEC further said that “The scholarship we are proposing is not an opposition and not a contradiction to the National Students’ Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and will not reduce the amount of money and resources allocated to the NSFAS. The ANC YL will continue with campaigns for the transformation of Higher Education in South Africa and for increased funding for particularly disadvantaged students, yet convinced that additional measures are needed to produce as many skills as possible in South Africa”.

These resolutions are informed by the reality observed by all objective and scientific research outcomes about the quantitative productivity of higher education in South Africa, particularly on critical skills such as accounting, technology, engineering, medicine and science. A worrying factor is that various prejudices defined along race, gender and class preclude particularly African students from making the necessary progress within these fields on record time. The problems and hindrances are often and objectively systemic and systematic challenges, most of which are embedded in apartheid education and value-systems legacy. The most recent observations about these realities are contained in the Ministerial Report on Transformation and Social Cohesion in Public Higher Education Institutions (commonly referred to as the Soundin Report).

## **The case for a New Scholarship**

The Soundin Report observes in no specific sequence that:

- a) “It is clear from this overall assessment of the state of transformation in higher education, that discrimination, in particular with regard to racism and sexism, is pervasive in our institutions. The disjunction that is apparent between institutional policies and the real-life experiences of staff and students is discussed in more detail in the remainder of the report, which focuses on the real-life experiences of staff and students in relation to specific areas of institutional activity, namely learning, teaching, curriculum, language, residence-life and governance”.
- b) “Socio-economic factors, particularly those pertaining to social class, were repeatedly raised by students as an inhibiting factor concerning their ability to not only access higher education opportunities but to take full advantage of the range of opportunities provided. The

Committee recognises the progress that has been made in providing financial assistance to needy students via the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). However, this is clearly insufficient and it is imperative that the Ministry leverages additional resources to facilitate access to, and the success of, financially disadvantaged students at higher education facilities (Soudin, C; 2008)".

- c) "Despite the ongoing efforts to provide academic development and support programmes, the throughput and graduation rates of black students remain low. In addition, completion rates for white students are also low. Universities should devise approaches that will improve throughput rates of students, while government, as part of its human capital development initiatives, provides financial support to students who are studying in fields where skills are scarce. It is apparent that some students are failing to succeed because they are also doing other jobs in order to support their families. This applies largely to black students who cannot afford to study on a full-time basis".

These observations are contained in the most recent reports of the institutional cultures of South African public higher education institutions and consistent with various other observations made by the Council on Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Higher Education Quality Committee, individual institutions' reports and lived experiences of many staff members and students.

It should be categorically affirmed that the ANC Youth League's proposal for a scholarship does not amount to postponement of the intentions and concrete programme to resolve the challenges and confronting higher education in South Africa currently. In the contrary, efforts to transform higher education institutions into favourable people's centres for knowledge production should be intensified.

In the process of transforming institutions of higher learning, we should acknowledge and appreciate the following realities;

- a) The transformation of higher education in South Africa is not happening at the pace and rate that is required.
- b) Higher education in South Africa is stagnant, less productive and slowly transforming—still characterised by the remnants of colonial and apartheid education and value systems.
- c) The number of learners produced by pre-tertiary education from Grade 10 upwards cannot be wholly absolved by the entire (private and public) Higher Education fraternity and the Further Education and Training sector. This particularly relates to high level critical skills such as accounting, engineering, medicine, technology and science.
- d) The programme to transform higher education will not and should never be an overnight exercise of, for instance removing institutional autonomy, but a protracted, well-thought, carefully planned and decisive model which will not only make institutions of higher learning only quantitatively relevant, but qualitatively suitable.

The Soundin report makes no mention of a proposition to send students to the best Universities across the world, yet effectively acknowledges the reality that South Africa's institutions of higher learning are not conducive for particularly Africans' students' progress in critical skills such as accounting, medicine, engineering, etc.

Another reality is that the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation has more than 100 Embassies/High Commissions in more than 100 countries, some of which have the best Universities and training institutions in the world and use English as medium of instruction. A creative, effective and decisive way should be found on how these foreign missions contribute to young South Africans' attainment of skills, knowledge and expertise within these institutions.

It is within this context that the ANC Youth League propositions a new scholarship funded by government and the private sector which will send suitably qualified students the best Universities in the world to attain skills. The number of students sent to the best Universities across the world should be reflective of South Africa's demographics in terms of race, gender and class. Emphasis should be placed that the students sent to the best Universities should have shown capacity to make progress because they should make progress. These students would later contribute to the country's socio-economic development, economy and knowledge development.

#### **Concrete way forward:**

- The RSA Presidency should constitute a high-level compact inter-ministerial task team headed by the Deputy President, which will oversee the overall implantation of this programme. The task team should include but not limited to the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, Science & Technology, Health, International Relations, and Public Service & Administration.
- The inter-ministerial task team will be responsible for the overall coordination, management and financing of the non-refundable scholarship.
- The funds for the scholarship should be sourced from government central budget, departments in need of critical skills, provincial governments who need additional numbers of students from their provinces, the private sectors and State Owned Enterprises.
- A Secretariat of the task team should work closely with the two Education Ministries to recruit students from schools, institutions of higher learning and further education and training colleges.
- All students recruited should undergo a thorough assessment on their understanding of South Africa and its vision and further test their suitability for the fields they want to pursue at post tertiary level outside the country.
- All recruited students should sign a legally binding agreement that for the 5 years after their completion of their studies, they will dedicate their time to service the country in whatever field they will be deployed.

- The scholarship should be a non-refundable scholarship, particularly in light of the fact that the recipients will be legally bound to work in South Africa after completion of their studies.
- The scholarship should cover all the educational needs for students, including transportation, tuition fees, residence fees, additional learning support materials and stipend.
- Embassies/high commissions should constantly check the wellbeing and progress of students in countries where they are found and submit quarterly reports to the inter-ministerial task team secretariat of the scholarship.

## **Conclusion**

The scholarship should be given the necessary attention and focus and will go a long way in contributing to knowledge, skills, and expertise production, accumulation and attainment in South Africa. An emphasis is placed once more that the proposed scholarship does not replace the good efforts and work being done to transform and make more qualitatively and quantitatively productive the South African education system. The recommendations of the Soudin report should in this instance be given the necessary attention.

## **REFERENCES:**

- Soudien, C., Michaels, W., Mthembu-Mahanyele, S., Nkomo, M., Nyanda, G., Nyoka, N., Seepe, S., Shisana, O., & Villa-Vicencio, C. Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions. Department of Education (2008 Nov 30).