Maties vote for status quo

Anger as Stellenbosch University convocation ‘ignores transformation’

THE Higher Education Transformation Network has called for Stellenbosch University’s convocation to be dissolved following the election on Tuesday night of advocate Jan Heunis as president.

Netwerk spokesman Hendrick Makaneta said the organisation was “not convinced that [Heunis’s] appointment will bring about significant transformation at Stellenbosch University”.

“The entire structure of the convocation must be dissolved,” he said.

The convocation is a statutory body consisting of graduates and academic staff. Its role is to ensure the input of alumni into matters regarding the university.

Parliamentary policy researcher Ziyanda Stuurman, who had also been nominated for the position, said of Heunis’s election she was “not expecting anything different”. She received 199 votes to Heunis’s 476.

“I know how good people who oppose transformation are at mobilising. The speeches took unfair pot shots at university management, and how they’re failing to protect Afrikaans. It’s an incredibly warped, skewed and nostalgic viewpoint,” she said.

In his address, Stellenbosch rector Wim de Villiers said: “Our language policy gets a lot of attention. Some fear that our use of Afrikaans may exclude those who prefer to study in English. Others fear our use of English is putting Afrikaans at a disadvantage.

“I want to tell you the university is committed to multilingualism without any exclusion. Language should never be an obstacle to any student. That is why we are expanding parallel-medium tuition.”

De Villiers said the university had allocated an additional R70-million to diversify the staff body.

The university’s student representative council said yesterday: “The convocation chose to remain within the boundaries of what is comfortable and, in real terms, regressed in its representation of diversity and much-needed transformation.”

Heunis said yesterday he had been impressed with attendance at the meeting — about 2000 alumni turned out.

“The turnout was remarkable. Management was democratically elected.”

He said of criticisms levelled against the meeting: “No one has a problem with diversity. The turnout signifies that Afrikaans as the [main] language of instruction will not suffer at the university. We believe that both English and Afrikaans can be primary languages of instruction.”

Heunis said yesterday: “I am happy to engage in ongoing discussion with all stakeholders in the interest of the university”.

Speakers at Tuesday’s election included author Breyten Breytenbach and Nigerian-born, Afrikaans-speaking Lovelyn Nwadeyi, the first woman and first black person to address the convocation.

Nwadeyi was up for the position of vice-president but lost out to Jacques du Preez by 15 votes.

“The reality is that language, race, power and privilege are issues at the moment. Change is a direct threat to people at the moment. People feel it’s a direct attack,” Nwadeyi said.

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