

## **STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA: STUDENTS' DRESS UP PARTY**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, we (Ross Bartlett, Mark Burman and Michael Weaver) attended a 21st birthday party with the theme “Twinning” (a portmanteau of twins who are winning), where guests were invited to dress-up in line with the theme. The theme suggested that people dress up as well known celebrity duos. Everyone who attended the event dressed accordingly to the theme. We (Ross and Mark) attended dressed as Venus and Serena Williams – successful American tennis-playing siblings.

Unfortunately, as we all know this has resulted in the misinterpretation of painting our bodies black and has been associated with “black facing”, which we now know is a disparaging practice used to portray offensive racial stereotypes, and we cannot stress enough that this was not our intent. There was no racial undertone to the costumes. This was not us dressing as a ‘blackface minstrel’, in the sense of theatrical makeup used to perpetuate racial stereotypes and caricatures, or to denigrate those who we were aiming to portray; this was simply us dressing up as two successful sporting siblings, as authentically as possible. As such, this incident is entirely distinct from a recent incident, to which comparisons have been drawn in the media.

I (Michael) posted the photo onto social media on Sunday morning, with the intent of sharing a photo of myself and two of my closest friends enjoying the 21<sup>st</sup> event. The caption too, had no malicious meaning behind it, and I didn’t realise the gravity of the comment at the time. I do however now realise the insensitivity of my comment for which I regret.

As young South Africans, we are proud of the fact that our democracy allows us to express ourselves. That being said, it was never our intention to offend or insult any person or group of persons. It is our hope that the sensitivities brought to bear by our costumes not be used as a blunt tool with which to impart insult to what was an entirely legitimate and lawful depiction of two sporting heroes. We are aware that this has caused a lot of hurt at our University and throughout South Africa, and we would like to reassure you that there was absolutely no malicious or racial intent in what we did; it was an error in judgement on all our behalves, and we regret this.

We realise that we have the responsibility to engage further with our university community and with citizens of our country and in that sense we will engage with the SRC and with our residence, Simonsberg.

**Mark Burman, Ross Bartlett & Michael Weaver**