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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stellenbosch SRC statement on the recent Blackface incident

On Tuesday morning, the 23rd of September, it was brought to the attention of the Student Representative Council of Stellenbosch University that two of its students were involved in a Blackface controversy. This happened as they were attending a themed birthday party, on the evening of Saturday, the 20th of September. Photos were shared on social media, showing two male students of the university who covered themselves in what appeared to be dark paint. They were impersonating the tennis stars, Venus and Serena Williams.

The sensitivity of this incident called for an engagement between the student body and the Student Representative Council, where a discussion ensued later that day. The purpose of this discussion was to engage with the student body before issuing a comprehensive statement.

Various differing views emerged during the engagement with the student body. These views ranged from individuals calling on the SRC to lobby for the expulsion of the students in question, while other attendees dismissed the Blackface incident as an ill-conceived mistake, not to be taken seriously.

The seriousness of blackfacing, which originated as a form of racial stereotyping in 19th century America, is widely disregarded. The SRC considers blackfacing to be discriminatory and consequently deems it unacceptable in all its forms.

The Student Representative Council is of opinion that the action of blackfacing is insensitive and hurtful, and therefore requires accountability; which calls for the students in question to take responsibility for their actions. We support the



appointment of an independent disciplinary body to evaluate the matter in a fair and just manner. However, we also believe that the expulsion of these students would not resolve the issue at hand, as it would treat the symptom and not the cause.

As an SRC, we are mindful of the persisting sensitivity of racial issues in South Africa two decades into democracy. We acknowledge that there is a great deal of unresolved hurt, reaching far beyond the actions of these individuals. We therefore aim to unify the student body of Stellenbosch by creating awareness and understanding, engaging students on these sensitive topics and ultimately, becoming catalysts for reconciliation in Stellenbosch and in South Africa.