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Third Term Report of the [Speaker/Chairperson]

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# Introduction

This is the term report of the Speaker of Student Parliament written in accordance with the Student Constitution and Student Parliament Constitution of the University of Stellenbosch. This report will speak of the goals achieved by Student Parliament in the third academic term. This term report will also critically analyse the milestones set out and achieved by Student Parliament, the challenges we faced in our third term as well as our plans and goals for the fourth term.

# Third term over view

This term started and as a committee there was a lot we set out to achieve. With the SRC 2020/2021 term drawing to a close, there was a lot that we needed to finalise with the outgoing SRC, chief being the Accountability Committee enquiry into the SRC. I want to take this time to thank my Deputy Speaker Ms Mngadi for the immense effort and planning that went into this enquiry. For full details regarding the process, its outcome and subsequent responses from the SRC, the full report can be found on our website, alternatively please refer to Deputy Speaker Mnagdi’s report

This term we set out to host both our third ordinary sitting as well as an extraordinary sitting. The third sitting is one which is earmarked for Speaker elections, to avoid a lengthy third sitting we opted to have an extraordinary sitting as well. The third sitting however had to be cancelled (I will expand on this point, under the ‘Sittings’ subsection of this report.)

This term was also one where I had envisioned laying the ground work for our Constitutional Review, however this proved to be far more challenging than I had anticipated. This term was largely dedicated to the finalisation of our co-curriculum application, the process, decisions and rational will be expanded on later in this report. Lastly, this term the SRC elections were held, the latter portion of this report will expand on the controversies surrounding these elections.

# Sitting(s) and Speaker applications

We held our extraordinary sitting on the 9th of September 2021 at 18:00. The attendance of this sitting left a lot to be desired, particularly from our delegates. Attendance by our delegates is mandatory, this however was flouted by many of our members who either did not pitch or arrived late. Any disciplinary measures taken against these members at this point of their terms was rather futile and petty. However I do want to thank the members who took the time to apologise for their absence at this sitting. During this extraordinary sitting, the Accountability Committee Chairperson (Ms Mnagdi) delivered her Accountability Report. There was great House engagement during this portion of the evening. I want to thank the SRC for their willingness to engage during this session and for accepting accountability. Additionally during this session Deputy Speaker Kritzinger, delivered her report on her Policy forum. I want to thank her for facilitating that session. For a full account of the forum, its purpose and outcomes please refer to her report. Once more I want to thank the house for their willingness to engage. Thank you to each policy officer who took the time to attend and for their submissions. Once more, thank you to the House for great levels of engagement during this session as well.

During this sitting we voted in and finalised the list of priorities for the SRC 2021/2022. This list was accepted through a simple majority. This list serves as a guiding light for the SRC in the construction of their budget and in the organisation of their activities. I want to thank my fellow maties for their contributions and ensuring that their SRC works for them and their needs.

## The list of priorities voted in—

- For GBV to be an integrated part of each SRC Portfolio.

- For the SRC to maintain and uphold their constitutional obligations as well strengthening their internal procedures and consequences, as Student Parliament should be last resort for any constitutional inconsistencies.

- Improved communication, not only using social media, ensuring a concerted effort in communicating meetings and portfolio updates.

- Creation of a definitive mandate and objectives, not only broad visions but ones that have measurable duties.

- Actively prioritising accountability and transparency, at minimum through the publication of minutes and constitutions of all ex officials structures within the SRC.

- Ensuring all projects have Covid and non Covid plans, so as to ensure that the pandemic not be an unreasonable excuse for failure to perform.

This was once more a very successful Parliamentary sitting. Our third ordinary sitting was scheduled for the 16th of September 2021. This sitting was envisioned to serve purely for Speaker Elections. Speaker applications were opened on the 1st of September and closed on the 10th of September, during which time we received zero Speaker applications. This unfortunately led to us having to cancel this sitting, this was further supported by the fact that we had not received any agenda point submissions during this time. The statement provided for this cancellation was as follows—

It is with profound regret that we announce the cancellation of our third ordinary sitting of Student Parliament, which was scheduled to take place on the 16th of September 2021.

According to Section 6 (a) of the Student Parliament Constitution (hereafter referred to as the ‘Constitution) :

“The Election of the Speaker must take place at its third normal sitting in the third

academic term.”

It was with this in mind that the Student Parliament committee (SPC) and I took the resolution as per Addendum G, Section 2 (d) to facilitate an extraordinary sitting on the 9th of September. The reasoning behind this was to avoid a lengthy third sitting during test season. As a committee we had envisioned this Sitting to purely serve as Speaker Elections.

However, Speaker applications were opened from the 1st to the 10th of September 2021, during which period we received no speaker applicants. Additionally, during the allotted time frame for agenda point submissions for the 3rd ordinary sitting, we received no agenda points from the student population.

Having had an extraordinary sitting, in which we addressed many of the points and constitutional obligations that would have been addressed at the third ordinary sitting, the SPC and myself reached the axiomatic conclusion of cancelling this sitting.

Speaker Applications will be reopened and the Speaker elections will be held at our 4th ordinary sitting in the 4th academic term ( date TBC). This decision is supported by Section 6 (b) of the Constitution which holds:

“If the election does not occur due to unforeseeable circumstances the election will

commence at the fourth sitting in the fourth academic term.”

This was not an easy resolution to reach, but it was the only plausible one.

Speaker applications have since been reopened, they will close on the 18th of October 2021. The fourth ordinary sitting at which we aim to elect our new Speaker will take place on the 21st of October 2021. The office of Speaker has been one that historically has been very hard to fill. I attribute that to the the expansive requirements that many members fail to meet, coupled with the disproportional rate of remuneration this will continue to be an issue for my successor (should I find one).

# Constitutional Compliance Committee (CRC)

The Constitutional Review of Student Parliament is proving to be far more of a challenge than I had naïvely first thought. This process is not only the construction of one Constitution, but two, as well as a reimagining of the functionality of Parliament. At present I am still struggling to grapple with the complexities and intricacies of the inner and inter workings of the two Houses of Parliament. As a body we simply do not have the capacity to successfully see this review through.

Recently a member of the committee had to resign due to health complications, which has resulted in a stagnation of the process. Capacity building is a top priority for us. In the coming days we aim to compile a document in which we set out our struggles, where our bottle necks are, the need for assistance and guidance in this process. This list will be submitted to Student Governance and the Policy Officer of the SRC, in hopes that these members will be able to provide assistance in the completion of this process.

I feel rather apathetic towards this process as the issues we’re currently running into were issues we foresaw from the outset of this proposed readjustment of our structure. Our grievances were clearly articulated to the SRC Review Committee. I fear the deadline of November 1st for the completion of this review will not be met, which was always apparent to us as a committee. As aforementioned we simply do not have the capacity to successfully see this through.

# Co curriculum application

I want to thank Kate Roodt and her team for the immense support and guidance provided during this process. Student Parliament decided to opt out of submitting an application this year. The salient motivation behind this was a fear of placing some of our other leadership positions which do not have co curriculum recognition into disrepute. Many of my committee members serve on committees that do not offer co curriculum recognition, thus it was decided that an application for recognition this year would result in further harm than good for many members of my committee.

Not seeing this process through, with the hours invested into it was disheartening and feels like a stain on my tenure as Speaker. It was a large struggle to which I conceded, but it was for the greater good of my committee members and for that, it is a decision which I do not regret.

# SRC Elections

The elections came with its fair share of controversies. From claims of nepotism from the election convenor and the murky decisions and process that occurred. In the final days of voting one of the candidates was removed from the voting ballot after a guilty finding from the CDC. As an accountability and transparency body many questions were thrown our way and we put out a statement. The statement given read as follows—

## Statement re: Zizo Vokwana

Dear Members of the SU Student Body

Statement from Student Parliament

RE: Zizo Vokwana’s Discontinuation of SRC Candidature & Related Matters

Student Parliament has recently been made aware of the Central Disciplinary Committee and Election Committees’ sanctions against Zizo Vokwana after a guilty finding of contravening the Disciplinary Code for Students of Stellenbosch University.

We are disheartened to hear that Ms Vokwana was put under intense stress and feelings of victimisation during the course of the CDC proceedings. We are especially concerned at how she was allegedly denied due process insofar as her enquiry stood to impact her campaign for the Student Representative Council. We are of the opinion that Ms Vokwana and the broader student population should have been given more certainty in relation to how this disciplinary action would impact her ability to run. We note that Ms Vokwana’s series of hearings began in May 2021, and submit that, at the very least, the process should have been expedited. Her sentence should have been handed down early enough to grant Ms Vokwana the avenue of an appeal prior to the opening of voting.

This lack of consideration for Ms Vokwana’s interests has not only led to a de facto end to her campaign, but has also caused considerable uncertainty among students. Voting closes at the end of today, 3 September, and the CDC’s decision was only reached on the 31st of August. Ms Vokwana was only informed by the Election Committee of her formal disqualification in the days thereafter, and this news only reached voters on the afternoon of the 2nd. Much confusion has been created among the student population regarding the legitimacy of their votes already submitted, and the integrity of the election as a whole.

Further, Student Parliament is concerned by the ongoing confusion experienced by the student population, in their capacity as stakeholders and voters. We are of the opinion that this uncertainty is directly perpetuated by the CDC’s failing to make public the results of Ms Vokwana’s hearing. We note that a component of Ms Vokwana’s sanctions includes the publishing thereof via Student Affairs. Despite this, the results of Ms Vokwana’s hearings are not readily ascertainable by the student body and are largely passed on by word of mouth. In cases that affect the public, and especially in situations impacting sensitive processes like SRC elections, Student Parliament believes there is an obligation to act swiftly and transparently.

In relation to Ms Vokwana’s guilty finding by the CDC, we are not entirely familiar with the content of the transgression and do not have access to the social media post that gave rise to the hearing. However, we have been informed that the basis of the disciplinary sentence was on her publicly expressing her unhappiness with a supposed lack of support, by SU, for a GBV survivor. Student Parliament, as a structure grounded in values of transparency and accountability, in no way supports the silencing of those who speak out against gender-based violence. As such, the harshness of Ms Vokwana’s sentences (i.e. removal from SRC candidacy and a suspended expulsion) are distressing. Student Parliament supports Ms Vokwana challenging these findings, through the Disciplinary Appeal Committee.

Lastly, we implore members of the student population to lodge any complaint about the running of the election with the Student Court, within a reasonable time and in accordance with Section 26 of Schedule 1 of the Student Constitution, in addition to the rules of Student Court.

Together with this statement we delivered commentary to our friends at Matie Media with regards to the election process and the concerns raised. This resulted in a lot more harm than good, I will expand on in the subsequent challenges subsection of this report.

# Challenges

## Media

One of my main goals as Speaker this year was to be more accessible to the public. With that came the decision to offer commentary and interviews to various on campus news publications. When asked for commentary regarding the nepotism allegations against the election convenor, my words and commentary were misconstrued and caused a bit of friction between myself and my peers.

I want to thank the Editor and Chief of Matie media for assisting me in a retraction of the false statement that was being circulated. Although the statement was retracted it resulted in an erosion of the outward perception of Student Parliament which we had worked very hard on this year and nearly saw it all come crumbling down in a matter of hours, but we luckily were able to successfully navigate through this.

## CRC resignation

The end of the third term/beginning of the fourth started with a resignation of a member of our CRC. Being pressed for time we do not have the opportunity to fill this vacancy, this has a ripple effect of the efficiency and functioning of the committee. Being a member down is going to require more time and effort from everyone else, time and effort that my committee members do not have. With the the looming final examinations I’m weary about how much effort I require from my CRC members. Myself as a final year student, Speaker, chairperson, member of the Accountability Committee and a member of the SRC Review Committee simply do not have the time to properly invest in this process. Striking the balance of how much of myself to give to the CRC, the larger Student Parliament Committee and my studies is something that weighs heavy on me. It is a balance that I have not been able to strike hence the lacklustre progress of the CRC. At every turn when I feel as if progress, I run into an issue which results in me having to take 5 steps back.

## Office break in

During this term our offices were unfortunately broken into. This has resulted in us not being able to make use of our office during this past term, which was frustrating. Our computer was unfortunately also stolen during this time. Having to deal with that was a rather traumatic experience and has led to me not wanting to work in the office due to the issues of safety that we face on the third floor. I want to thank Student Governance for all their support during this time.

# Fourth term goals:

- Elect a new Speaker

- Facilitate our final sitting, which will serve as an accountability session for myself where I deliver my final report, one which I expect will be met with a lot of scrutiny.

- Have a successful handover process with the new Speaker.

- Have an end of year dinner with the committee and the newly elected Speaker.

- Design Student Parliament merchandise

# Conclusion

This term by far has been my most challenging. It was shrouded by a lot of disappointment, resignation, incomplete tasks, misconstrued commentary, theft and a cancelled sitting. However in spite of all of that we finished the term strong. My committee is a group of phenomenal individuals who I want to thank for all their effort this year. As I wrap up my term as Speaker it’s a bitter sweet moment and one that comes with a lot of anxiety as there’s a lot I want to accomplish and with the limited time I’m not sure I will be able to.