



11 December 2008

Professor Malegapuru Makgoba
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
University of KwaZulu-Natal
SOUTH AFRICA

makgoba@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Professor Malegapuru Makgoba

Re. the cases of Professor Nithaya Chetty and John van den Berg

I am writing to you in my capacity as the General Secretary of the University and College Union (UCU) in the UK.

The UCU represents 117,000 further and higher education lecturers, managers, researchers and many academic-related staff such as librarians, administrators and computing professionals. We are also affiliated to Education International, the voice for the education sector world-wide.

The UCU is concerned at reports of repeated violations of academic freedom and labour rights at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Back in May 2007, we wrote to you about the dismissal of prominent union activist Fazel Khan, though unfortunately we did not receive a reply. Through our links to the National Tertiary Education Staff Union (NTESU), we are now writing to you with our concerns about the treatment of Professors John van den Berg and Nithaya Chetty.

As we said in our 2007 letter, higher education systems in the UK and South Africa have, and continue to, benefit from academic freedom, and the ability to voice criticism without fear of unnecessary reprisal. It is normal for academics sometimes to be critical about the governance of our institutions. In doing so academic members of staff are continuing an important tradition that keeps our universities lively, challenging and operating at the frontiers of education. This is to the benefit of students and civil society generally, even if it is sometimes uncomfortable for the establishment to have to face. Without the ability or willingness to face criticism, universities become weakened and provide less of

an educational experience to their students and a less supportive environment for academics to practise teaching and research.

We, therefore, call on you as the vice-chancellor at UKZN:

- to allow academics, students and other groups to freely meet and to freely express opinions and concerns;
- to uphold the internationally accepted standards of academic freedom, the constitutional rights of South Africans for freedom of expression and affirm the role of academic freedom in fostering collegiality, and critical debate, within the university;
- to recognize, in accord with the 1997 UNESCO declaration on the rights of higher education teaching personnel, that Academic Freedom must include the right to criticize the management of the University and to discuss these criticisms with the wider interested public and the media.

We will be working closely with the NTESU and others in their campaign to protect academic freedom and labour rights at UKZN.

Yours sincerely

Sally Hunt
General Secretary, UCU