

## **VC's PUBLIC FORUM**

**16 October 2008**

Allegations of political interference in the National Prosecution Authority and the judicial process and expressions of doubts in the independence of the judiciary

Concerns about the obliteration of the distinctions between political party, government and the state

Threats of killing for Zuma and anarchy

Recalls, redeployments, resignations, retirements and suspensions

Claims of a coup and a slide towards banana republic

Suggestions that those who have hitherto supported the ANC should not vote or spoil their papers

Calls for a national convention, for the direct election of the President of the republic, and for constituency members of parliament

Speculation about the creation of a new political party by disaffected members of the ANC

By any account, a momentous past ten months following Polokwane and past month in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of post-apartheid democracy in South Africa!

Momentous, but perhaps also bewildering for many of us!

Should the president have been recalled?

Should he have resigned?

Is this the politics of vengeance or very much a normal feature of democracy?

Will the ANC split? Does it matter?

Are the fissures in the ANC about differences in politics and policy or contestations linked to personalities and their supporters?

What are implications for politics in South Africa?

What are implications for democracy in South Africa?

How are we to make sense of recent events?

This evening's first Vice-Chancellor's Public Forum is a joint initiative of the Offices of the VC and the Dean of Students.

The Public Forum seeks to serve as a public space for members of the Rhodes community and the public at large to consider, discuss, and debate the important political, economic and social issues of the day.

The Forum also seeks to advance understanding and critical citizenship through the free public expression of views, opinions and arguments in an atmosphere of respect for difference and diversity of thought.

This evening we feature a panel of three public figures who have been invited to briefly address us and, more especially, engage with us on the recent events.

Prof. Steven Friedman is Director of the joint new Rhodes University/University of Johannesburg Centre for the Study of Democracy. A well-known and respected political commentator and analyst, Prof. Friedman has extensively commented on recent events on radio, television and newspapers.

Dr. Thabisi Hoene, is a lecturer in the Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes University. He is a regular commentator on contemporary political issues. His special research interest is on South African political parties. His doctoral research undertaken through the University of Witwatersrand was on South African elections.

Advocate Izak Smuts was president of the Rhodes University SRC of 1978, and is a local advocate who specialises in administrative and constitutional law. He participated in the early 1990s *Convention for a Democratic South Africa*, which was part of the negotiations process leading to the first democratic elections in 1994. More specifically, he was a member of Working Group 2 of COODESA, which dealt with constitutional principles. He is the chairperson of the Eastern Cape Society of Advocates and an executive member of the General Council of the Bar of South Africa.

We also sought to have with us this evening Dr. Judith February of the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa but were unfortunately not able to secure her.

Each speaker will address the Forum for no more than 10 minutes. Thereafter the Forum will be opened to questions, comments and contributions from you the other participants in this Forum.

## **Post-Forum**

Thank you to the panel – Steven Friedman, Thabisi Hoene and Izak Smuts for addressing and participating in this first Forum.

Thank you to you for participating in the Forum.

And thank you to all the different divisions at Rhodes for helping with the holding of this Forum.

On afternoons and evenings at Rhodes there is a rich variety of events and activities – seminars, workshops, public lectures, film, theatre, music and sport. We are often spoilt for choice.

The VC's Public Forum is not intended to become a regular weekly, monthly or even quarterly event alongside all the other activities.

Instead, the idea is for it to be an occasional public space for members of the Rhodes community and the public at large to discuss significant contemporary political, economic and social issues.

Its success will in large part depend on students, academics, support staff and the public in general making suggestions for issues that should be covered, speakers that should be invited, the format that should be used and so forth.

A space will shortly be created on the Rhodes internet home page where comments can be made on this Forum and suggestions made for topics and speakers for future Forum's.

In the meantime any comments that you have on this evening's Forum and suggestions for future Forum's can be emailed to [e.hodges@ru.ac.za](mailto:e.hodges@ru.ac.za).

Earl Hodges is in the Communication and Development Division and he will load all comments onto the internet site in due course.