

Varsity boss tackles

ANC MP

Rhodes VC angered by "dangerous" remark from Bisho

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A WAR of words has erupted between Rhodes University vice-chancellor Dr Saleem Badat and a senior ANC member of the Eastern Cape provincial legislature, Mzoleli Mrara, over the state of the country's education.

This comes after Badat wrote an open letter to Mrara, who chairs the education portfolio committee, expressing dismay at comments Mrara reportedly had made about Badat.

Badat was quoted by the Dispatch last week labelling the country's education system as "a tragedy" for having failed the youth, and that even poorer African countries such as Zimbabwe and Kenya provided better quality education in their schools.

In a subsequent report in the Die Burger newspaper, Mrara, who is also South African Communist Party provincial chairperson, hit back at Badat.

Apart from questioning Badat's struggle credentials and his right to criticise the education system, Mrara claimed that most South Africans were not given admission to Rhodes University.

In the open letter, Badat said he was "most puzzled" by Mrara's "angry re-

"To my astonishment and great sadness, you don't contest my description of the tragedy, indeed, scandal, of much of our schooling.

"Instead you mount an attack on Rhodes University and me that is as intemperate and dangerous as it is misinformed," Badat said.

"The reality is that when I became vice-chancellor in 2006, international students made up 24 percent of Rhodes University; today they make up 20 percent."

He also dismissed as "simply untrue" that most South Africans were not given admission at his university.

"Eighty percent of Rhodes students are South African. Pertinent to equity, in 2006, 51 percent were black and now 57 percent are black."

Badat said during apartheid he had occupied leadership positions in student political organisations.

"I spent various periods in political detention and was thereafter restricted and prohibited from entering any educational or media institution," he said.

Badat insisted that the right to freely express views and criticise was a constitutional right.

"To seek to restrict criticism to only

for national liberation and democracy is dangerous and untenable."

"We have a schooling system to urgently remake. The quicker we grasp this fact and courageously and determinedly do so the better we will serve our youth and country," he said.

Mrara said his comments in the Die Burger were made in passing.

"I acknowledged I did not have his full speech.

"The intention was not to question his credentials. It was to contextualise the fact that the impression created was as if a person has not acknowledged the problems inherited from the past."

Mrara also said the Dispatch article where Badat was quoted referring to the "education system in tragedy" did not refer to problems of the past.

"It was just a reaction that nothing is done to education and (that) in fact, it has collapsed," he said.

"It would be better if my learned friend would acknowledge the problems from the past and the progress made thus far," Mrara added.

However, Mrara welcomed progress by the university to reduce the number of foreign students and increase the intake of South African black students.

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