

Thank you for your email and the concerns that you raise.

Having on Wednesday had the entire senior administration of Rhodes openly, honestly and critically discuss the conduct of Rhodes from many different angles, including ethically and legally, I regret that I am not able to accept your assertion that Rhodes "did not do everything in its power to protect the first year and the students on the campus".

At moments like this, we must be extremely careful to not do violence to the facts. The young woman was given every support by a number of people and institutions, including being visited by me the next day and being encouraged to pursue the matter with the police, to be strong in the face of the trials and challenges that would inevitably follow and was assured of whatever support we could provide.

I must also reject as baseless your assertion that implies we do not take rape seriously - there is ample evidence to the contrary. We must be cautious that we do not in anger, frustration or despair belittle the efforts of many at Rhodes to ensure that rape is taken very seriously.

Your hope is that "the University will do more in the future to protect someone who is brave enough to report rape". I wholeheartedly concur that reporting rape takes courage and bravery. I, however, would sincerely love to be advised what "more" we can do "in the future to protect someone" who has reported rape.

It is clear that the main issue for you with respect to protection is "allowing an alleged rapist onto campus after the alleged rape survivor has laid charges".

Well here you perhaps need to think deeply about the "basic human rights" you refer to in your last sentence - because our wonderful Constitution and Bill of Rights and various laws require us to uphold the rights of all - including, and no matter how unpalatable this may be to you, the "alleged rapist".

If protection comprises of simply immediately expelling or suspending an "alleged rapist", this would be kangaroo court justice and a violation of human rights. Even if we could, pending an investigation and hearing, suspend a student or staff member, this cannot be indefinitely.

You can rest assured that there was an investigation (that included a respected woman academic), and a committee was established (majority of women academics) to consider the matter. The reality was - as unwelcome as it may be to you - that there was insufficient evidence to suspend. The state itself withdrew the case soon after.

We must be extremely careful that we don't visit injustice on people and violate basic human rights in the name of 'protection' and a clamour to "do more"!

Since my arrival at Rhodes I have repeatedly stated, including at the Orientation welcome for new students on 4 February, that "Patriarchy and sexism stifle the realization of the talents of girls and women and the contribution they can make to the development of our society. Crime, rape and abuse of women are pervasive, morbid, ills that wreak havoc in our country". I have continuously insisted that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, human rights and respect for human dignity, equality and non-sexism must be the fundamental bedrocks of conduct and behaviour at Rhodes and will continue to do so.

You can be assured that if there was evidence to suspend the "alleged rapist" I would have done so. It would have sent a clear signal to those at Rhodes and in our society who seem incapable of treating others with respect and dignity. It would, as importantly, have also sent a positive message to rape survivors and given courage to those who keep silent when they are raped.

However, I cannot in good conscience and in violation of the human rights that both you and I take very seriously act in the absence of evidence. This would have been unjust and a violation of the very human rights that we seek to uphold.

In the light of the recent incident, I agonise deeply now about the willingness of persons who have been raped to come forward - and as Rhodes we have worked hard to encourage and support persons in this regard. You and I know that those who are raped must walk through fire to get a conviction and let justice prevail.

Yet you and I and all justice-loving people cannot accept defeat and become demoralised. We simply have to continue to work hard to ensure that rape survivors are not intimidated and silenced because otherwise this would be a declaration of open season for rapists.

Thank you as a concerned alumane and citizen for writing and expressing your disquiet and concerns.
Best wishes