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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 329**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 17/02/2023**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 2 OF 2023**

**Ms N N Chirwa (EFF) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

Following public reports made on 8 February 2023 across social media that a needy student who was in need of placement at the University of Venda was subsequently requested to pay for accommodation by a staff member, and in response to the debauchery, the Deputy Minister of his department reported on Twitter that the specified staff member was duly suspended for their role in the event, what (a) further repercussions, beyond the suspension of the staff member, will follow as a result of the event, (b) steps has his department taken to prevent the incident from occurring again and (c) number of similar incidents have been reported to (i) his department and/or (ii) to him?

**NW344E**

**REPLY:**

1. 1. On the 03 February 2023, the University of Venda successfully traced and apprehended one of its Junior Administrative staff members who was allegedly soliciting bribes from prospective students. His modus operandi was to contact students who had applied for admissions at the University and had received notification to accept admission to the programme of their choice. He called students, informing them that they would not be admitted since the spaces are being taken up, but if they paid him money, he would enable them to be admitted. The staff member concerned was immediately suspended pending the finalisation of the contemplated disciplinary action against him. It is important to note that the staff member had no access to admission and registration process since the whole process is conducted via the Online System.
   2. On 08 February 2023, the University learned through social media reports (Twitter) of the allegations of a needy student seeking admission and placement at the University of Venda. Upon receipt of the allegations, the University through its Legal Services Department conducted an investigation which revealed the following:-
      1. The alleged victim posted on a Facebook page called **UNIVEN-Students UPDATES & Fun**, asking for assistance to apply for PGCE at the University. This page called **UNIVEN-Students UPDATES & Fun**, does not belong to the University of Venda.
      2. In response thereto, the victim received an inbox message on her Facebook account from one Amukelani who indicated that there is Skhumbuzo Venda who could assist the victim with application, as he (Skhumbuzo) also assisted her (Amukelani) to apply for PGCE and she is waiting for admission. Amukelani also provided the victim with contact numbers of Skhumbuzo Venda, and the victim started communicating with Skhumbuzo.
      3. According to the victim, Skhumbuzo is the one who assisted her throughout the application process to the completion stage. Co-incidentally, within a period of ten minutes of the completion and uploading her application on the University application portal, the victim received a WhatsApp text message from one Tshilidzi Isaac Mulidzi soliciting a bribe amounting to R3 500.00 for her admission to the program.
      4. The University of Venda does not have a staff member by the name of Tshilidzi Isaac Mulidzi, nor does the University have an employee and/or student by the name of Skhumbuzo Venda.
      5. When 2023 admissions commenced, the University issued a communique to members of the public advising them to communicate with Univen officials via the University contact details appearing on its website for information and assistance. Skhumbuzo Venda and Tshilidzi Isaac Mulidzi are not amongst the University of Venda contact persons.
      6. The investigation revealed that the victim never communicated with the University official/s regarding her application. The University is in possession of screen shots of the victims Facebook posts on **UNIVEN-Students Updates & Fun**, WhatsApp conversation between the victim and Skhumbuzo Venda, and Mr Tshilidzi Isaac Mulidzi.
      7. From the information gathered, the complainant was a victim of a Facebook scam.
2. **RESPONSE TO PARLIAMETARY QUESTIONS RAISED:**
3. Following the suspension of the Staff Member, the University of Venda Management initiated disciplinary action in accordance with its Disciplinary Code and Procedure against the staff member. The staff member will be subjected to a disciplinary enquiry. If the staff member is found guilty of misconduct, he will be dismissed, this should deter other employees from committing a similar offence.
4. **steps his department taken to prevent the incident from occurring again**

All staff members at the University of Venda have been warned against any corrupt activity within their sphere of operations in the Admissions Section. The whole University Community was also warned against such activities. Media statements were issued to the public against such involvement or engagement.

1. **number of similar incidents have been reported to (i) his department and/or (ii) to him?**

There is just one incident which the University of Venda is attending to currently.