

Nanso says Unam strike disadvantaging students

■ Onesmus Embula

WINDHOEK – The Namibian National Students Organization (Nanso) leadership has announced its support of the nationwide industrial action instituted at the University of Namibia (Unam) at a crucial time when students are busy with year-end examinations.

Nanso's primary mandate has been to ensure equitable access to tertiary education. Hence, in instances such as these, the leadership said, although they support the strike, they are particularly worried whether students are being allowed to fully practise their right to education or are being denied that right.

In a media statement issued by Nanso president Ester Simon, the organization indicated it has been monitoring the situation on the ground and was seriously concerned about the impact of the strike on student welfare.

Unam employees are demanding a six percent salary increase backdated to January this year.

Nanso says the strike means administrative and academic services are being disrupted at the expense of students.

"For instance, the start of the examinations on the 29th and 30th of October 2018, began extremely late due to a challenge of absent examination officers, absent invigilators and delayed examination scripts. With the absence of lecturers, most students are denied their right to consult and seek clarity on examination questions; students are denied their full rights to study until late as the library services were shut early in the afternoon; no payments are being processed at the admin and finance office," reads the statement.

More so, it referred to a notification that the Unam Otjiwarongo exams centre will be closed

for the duration of the strike, stating: "This has a negative effect on the students as now their exams are postponed to the special/supplementary period."

Additionally, "we are also informed that the current high school learners have not been admitted to the university because of the strike. A process which initially by now should have been completed."

But in full support of the strike, Nanso said: "Before we are students, we are first part and parcel of the broader community, from which we understand and share a clear background, for the very workers are our parents, guardians and breadwinners at home."

"As students, we rely greatly on the support we receive from our parents – support which depends on the wages and salaries that their employers give to them."

It added: "We cannot remain silent on the strike of the University of Namibia employees ... the cries of our parents are our cries too. Their needs are equally ours. It is for that reason that we are in solidarity with the academic and administrative workers, in their quest to secure their 6% salary increase."



Photo: Onesmus Embula

Determined... Unam staff are engaged in a nationwide strike which commenced a week ago.

In addition, they warned that should the strike not be resolved soon, there is a chance that exam scripts will not be marked on time to register year-end results, thus delaying the start of supplementary exams. "This will be a dire situation we cannot allow, it will be a situation that will force our hand to either launch or join the workers in the picket lines."

They called on Unam management to demonstrate leadership and further urged

the need for the government's urgent intervention in reaching a consensus that will ultimately resolve the dispute and allow normal university services to resume. Failure to resolve this dispute on time, the student body said, "will indeed be a very sad state of affairs, which will reflect badly and compromise the quality of higher education and the academic performance of students".



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