
SOUTH AFRICA: Hoax call to deport Zimbabwe graduates

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17 January 2010

Issue: 45

A statement that appeared in the press calling for the repatriation of Zimbabwean graduates of South Africa's University of Fort Hare, has been dismissed as a hoax. But last week a dozen students who had presidential scholarships withdrawn by Zimbabwe's government for engaging in political activity, slammed the university for "allowing them to be victimised", London-based [SW Radio reported](#).

The graduates and students were beneficiaries of a scholarship scheme initiated by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, a former Fort Hare student, to help bright disadvantaged students.

The recent statement purportedly signed by senior Zimbabwean political official Gadzira Chirumhanzu, urged the South African government and ruling African National Congress to cancel the work permits of 71 Zimbabwean graduates and send them home.

But Chirumhanzu denied sending the statement or being spokesperson in South Africa for Mugabe's Zanu-PF party, *Dispatch* newspaper reported. He said the statement was a hoax and he had "nothing to do with it".

Chirumhanzu told the newspaper he was currently in Zimbabwe and was Zanu-PF's director for science and technology. He added that someone could have sent the e-mail from an internet café and registered his name as the user.

"This is a national programme run by government geared for poor, mostly rural youth. It has nothing to do with the party," said Chirumhanzu, distancing Zanu-PF from the presidential scholarship.

Fort Hare agricultural economics lecturer Abyssinia Mushunje, and a past scholarship beneficiary, also dismissed the statement saying the sender was mischievous and the Zimbabwe government would have communicated any such directive to South Africa.

Last year provincial governor and Fort Hare Scholarship Programme executive director Chris Mushowe wrote to the university advising it that government had withdrawn the scholarships of more than a dozen students.

The students were accused of engaging in political activity and lampooning their 'sponsor' Mugabe (though the scheme used taxpayer's money), violating their contractual agreement.

On Tuesday, SW Radio reported speaking to one of the students. Tapiwa Shumba, secretary-general of the newly formed Zimbabwe International Students Union, argued that Zimbabwe's government was violating its contract with Fort Hare to pay the fees.

Shumba said the students were being denied exam results because of unpaid fees - standard policy at South African universities. Students who had completed their degrees could not graduate until their debts were paid, and others would not be able to continue with their studies, according to SW Radio.

One of the students has received funding to study abroad from Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change victims' association. Others have said they fear for their lives if forced to return to Zimbabwe.