

Unhappy academics

THREE Namibian academics in the US are unhappy with the University of Namibia for various reasons. Together they have written a long letter with regard to their grievances which The Namibian will publish in three parts. We request readers not to take this as a precedent, for such lengthy communications have to be summarised in the normal course of events. - Editor.

ON 11 February 1994 we spoke out about the lack of genuine effort by Unam's leadership to recruit qualified Namibians. We stated our concern that non-Namibians have enjoyed higher priority in filling positions at the university - in faculty and management.

In reference to that letter, Zac Kazapua, Registrar of Unam, responded on 18 February. As for his monophonic statement, it failed to address the issues raised and we find it to be lacking essential details and therefore totally misleading. We refute his version of a 'straight record'. We detail our individual accounts of job searches at Unam then close with a summary statement.

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(POLITICAL SCIENCE)

On 2 December 1991 the Department of Political Studies at the Academy made me an offer of a position of lecturer. I had accepted the position and was ready to return to Namibia in the course of 1992. Before my return, the then Vice-Chancellor Designate, Dr Peter Katjavivi, asked me to stay on in the US and start a fundraising campaign for Unam. I was told that was as good as working at the university itself, and I accepted the challenge as I myself was not too comfortable with the Academy.

At that time, Katjavivi himself communicated to the Department of Political Studies in the second semester of 1992 that I was no longer coming because he, as the new chief executive officer of Unam, gave me a new assignment in the US. My appointment as Director of the Fund for the University of Namibia in New York after the person Katjavivi first appointed and under whom I was going to work, was rejected

Letters to the Editor

by Friends of Namibia in New York. Many people in New York refused to accept that I, as a black Namibian with two doctorates, and with specialised knowledge of Namibia's history of education, was appointed to work under a person whose only claim to fame was that she was an American white woman. This person was Ms Melissa Bruemmer, a friend of Katjavivi's who at the time had just completed her masters degree at Columbia University. My appointment was to be from June 1992 to June 1993 after which I would be either retrained in New York or recalled to take up teaching at Unam. To this date, my salary as per contract has not been paid. Bruemmer, who did not even sit one day in an office to do fundraising for Unam, was paid US\$12 000 simply because Dr Katjavivi promised her that salary.

I stayed on as director of the campaign for the whole year without pay. Upon inquiry into my future in June 1993, now Vice-Chancellor Katjavivi advised me to stay with fundraising until a decision was made in October at a meeting with the Advisory Board of the Fund of the University of Namibia in New York.

On 3 August Dr Hugh Africa, the Dean of Studies, wrote to me informing me that Professor Gerhard Totemeyer had recommended that the 1991 Academy offer be reactivated. Africa wanted me to indicate whether I was interested. On 2 November, after my dismissal from the Fund, I wrote to Africa indicating my interest and requesting more information, especially because the offer was made by the old Academy which was no longer in existence and in the light of the recently completed faculty evaluation exercise. I indicated that it would be appropriate for me to respond to an offer made in writing by the new Unam structure. On 10 November Africa wrote to me that he was not in a position to make me an offer and that he knew that a position of senior lecturer in the department of political and administrative studies would soon be adver-

tised. He said in the letter that he was going to advise the faculty to send me the advertisement as soon as it was ready. I did not deem it necessary to send my curriculum vitae at that time since Unam was already in possession of it.

The Registrar's statement is contrary to what the true record shows. Before writing this response, I telephoned both Profs Gerhard Totemeyer and Andre du Pisani to find out what they knew about this matter. Totemeyer (formerly Dean) referred me to Du Pisani (Acting Dean of Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences) who told me that the post was not advertised as yet, and that he would welcome my application once they were ready. According to Du Pisani, the post I would be considered for is only a contract post, such as those filled by non-Namibians at present. It is rather interesting that Unam's Registrar states that I have turned down a post that was neither offered nor advertised.

The meeting at which my position with the Fund would be determined took place on 5 and 6 October 1993. During the meeting the Advisory Board requested Katjavivi to let me direct the campaign until September 1994. Katjavivi and his team, Africa and Ms Judy Diers, agreed to the request. The Advisory Board raised strong objection to the fact that I worked for more than a year without a salary. Dr Katjavivi promised to take care of this matter as soon as possible. On 14 October 1993, before Dr Katjavivi and his team left for Namibia, at a meeting to plan the direction of the fundraising campaign, the Board wanted to know why we were receiving conflicting information regarding my salary from him and from the Bursar, Mr Sanie Majiedt. Katjavivi was asked to explain why, in the opinion of the Bursar, I was not entitled to the payment in the contract. Unable to furnish a satisfactory explanation as to why a Namibian in his employ was being treated like someone without rights, Katjavivi and Diers walked out of the meeting angrily. At the urging of Africa they

returned two hours later and Katjavivi promised the board he was going to pay me before 15 December 1993. This promise has yet to be fulfilled.

On a number of occasions, Katjavivi told me that Unam would recall me as soon as my role with fundraising ended. On 6 October 1993 the Advisory Board sanctioned a private meeting between Katjavivi and myself. This came about when it was very clear to the Board members in the room that Katjavivi was treating me inhumanely and was uncomfortable with me as the head of a successful and honest operation in North America. In a private conversation that day, Katjavivi told me that Unam had already decided to call me back sometime in 1994.

In the meantime he said, I would be interviewed by the American Council on Education in Washington DC. He continued to let me understand that Unam was already in contact with a company that would transport me back home in the first three months of 1994. Africa joined us and reiterated that it would be difficult to take me away from the fundraising effort after a commitment had been made to the Board to have me direct the campaign until the Board had deemed otherwise.

On 14 October Katjavivi recommitted to keeping me as Director, and paying my salary before December 15 1993. On 30 October he sent me a letter dismissing me as director of the fundraising campaign. The reason given was that there was no money at Unam to pay my salary. The Board objected in the strongest terms to Katjavivi's action in the light of decisions made scarcely two weeks before. The Chairman of the Board wrote a letter to President Nujoma in his capacity as Chancellor. President Nujoma wrote to the Chairman saying he had referred the matter to Katjavivi. On 13 December, the president of the African American Institute (AAI) Mrs Vivian Lowery-Derryck, wrote to Katjavivi asking whether Unam could give me a joint appointment as an academic at Unam if an American uni-

versity would pay my salary. On December 14 Katjavivi responded that he could not appoint me at Unam.

Katjavivi's action regarding fellow Namibians in a foreign country and his lack of understanding of the laws that regulate a tax exempt organisation such as the Fund for the University of Namibia, led the Board to suspend Unam legal fundraising status and close the office. Katjavivi told untruths, about the circumstances of the closure of Unam's office in the US, or that he fired me. He even misled the public that fundraising had been unsuccessful when the overwhelming feeling of the advisory board was that it was more successful than other fundraising organisations established in the US that had the necessary financial backing from their parent institutions.

Katjavivi and Africa promised the Board that a line item for fundraising would be included in Unam's budget request to the government. Two weeks later, without informing or consulting the board of his efforts, Katjavivi reneged on his commitment and communicated to the chair and the AAI that he does not want fundraising in the US to be led by a Namibian. It seems to me that Katjavivi and his team are unable to distinguish fact from their own defence mechanisms designed to protect themselves. I challenge Katjavivi to stand by what he says in private meetings. There are documents and minutes to attest to what I have said here and am willing to say even more.

It is very dangerous for the life of the institution when its leaders have to resort to less than honest statements and fabricated facts in order to protect their interests and friends. A university is and should be about truth, learning and debate. The university is not there to serve a group of individuals but the nation, now and in the future. The time has come for the nation to believe in its university.

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Note: The second part of the letter will be published next week.