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CORRUPTION IS POSTPONING THE DESPERATELY NEEDED DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prof Sakhela Buhlungu, one of our esteemed Black Academic tasked with leading the iconic University of Fort Hare, has learned the tragic way that you cannot discharge that noble duty without a bodyguard in South Africa. It is not only him that has to have a protector at Fort Hare. His academic staff members also have to hire bodyguards. For development's sake, how is teaching, learning and research supposed to take place at this university? Your attention is drawn to the fact that we are here talking about a Black university.

Buhlungu escaped death – yes, he escaped death – when his car was attacked on 6 January with the result that his bodyguard Mboneli Vesele was shot and killed. The tinted car was parked outside his official residence when gunmen opened fire on the vehicle, including the window where Buhlungu would have been sitting. Unknown to the hitmen, he had earlier disembarked and vanished into the residence. Vesele had been protecting the Vice Chancellor's life since 2018. True to the dangers of his duty, Vesele had to come between his principal and the bullet even if his principal was not in the car. Indeed, heartfelt condolences to Vesele's family and relatives. Put yourself in Buhlungu's shoes and imagine the disorientation and defocus he should be undergoing having to work under such conditions that resemble a war zone than a place of teaching and learning.

In March last year, Buhlungu's residence and the homes of two Fort Hare officials came under attack when bullets were shot at them. No one was hurt. The university's transport manager was not that fortunate two months later when he was assassinated after he moved to investigate the corruption that was taking place with regards to the fleet under his management.

All this would be laughable if it wasn't tragic. The irony is that there is no outcry in South Africa in spite of the fact that the leaders of tomorrow are trapped in an environment that is not conducive to learning. In a sense, the volatile situation at Fort Hare is reminiscent of the schooling environment in Gaza in which the Palestinian learners are caught in the crossfire. All the United Nations and the Western superpowers

do is to issue statements calling for restraint and calm. The South African political authorities are conspicuous by their absence. They hardly raise a finger while criminals are running riot and terrorising the university community. The taking hostage of Fort Hare by criminals reflects the general life in South Africa. It took Buhlungu's protest for President Ramaphosa to give the besieged Buhlungu some "PR" call, which led to yet another "PR" where Ministers Blade Nzimande, Mondli Gungubele and Zizi Kodwa were dispatched to visit the university five days after the killing of the Vice Chancellor's protection officer. Like fire engines, the politicians respond when there is a report of a fire. In their case, they wait and ensure that the building on fire is burned down to ashes before they show up in their expensive suits and smile to the TV cameras.

Speaking at Vesele's memorial service, Buhlungu registered a public outcry to Ramaphosa: "I have a question Mr President of the Republic, are we safe? Am I safe? Is my executive safe? Are my staff safe? At the end of the day there's only one person that can answer that question and it is important that I appeal to the top authority of the country". At least that public outcry extracted some phone call to Buhlungu by Ramaphosa. Not even that tame phone call is received by the citizens as the whistleblowers of corruption are gunned down one after another. The murder of Babita Deokaran last year on 23 August is still fresh in our minds. She was the senior financial officer at the Gauteng Department of Health when she was a critical witness to PPE corruption that linked powerful politicians. Her killers are still roaming the streets, and probably involved in the other killings.

But why is the alma mater of Robert Mugabe, Govan Mbeki, Nelson Mandela, Herbert Chitepo, Mangaliso Sobukwe and Nyameko Barney Pityana under siege? Buhlungu, who was given a thumbs-up for a second term since being at the driving seat since 2017, had initiated a forensic investigation to probe the irregularities and corruption in:

- Awarding Honours Degrees and the irregular enrolment of politicians and public servants in some fields of study.
- Cleaning and gardening services between 2012 and 2019.
- The leasing of student accommodation since 2013.
- The service provider appointment for the maintenance and repair of air conditioning systems in 2018.

When it became clear that the forensic investigation was hitting a snag because the investigators were incapacitated by some limitations due to lack of statutory powers to undertake some aspects of the investigation, the university approached President Ramaphosa to authorise the investigation of corruption at Fort Hare between 2012 and 2022. Accordingly, Ramaphosa issued the Presidential Proclamation of 5 August 2022, which led to the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) launching the investigations.

Perhaps, not many people are paying attention to why a university is called a "Fort". The gullible "new" South Africa asked no critical questions. They absent-mindedly retained the name "University of Fort Hare" without asking whose "Fort" was this; and against whom was it used? They never bothered to ask who or what was "Hare". "Fort Hare" is an anti-Black institution that was built in 1835 by the British colonialists from which to mount a genocide against the Azanians in an effort to dispossess them of their

land. This "Fort Hare" was built during the 8th Land War waged by a section of the Azanians then called amaXhosa from 1779 to 1879. These Azanians resisted the armed robbery of their land for 100 years. No wonder that the British colonialists built a number of forts like Fort White, Fort Hare, Fort Cox, Fort Murray and Fort Wilshire in the area the colonialists called "British Kaffraria". Missionaries took over "Fort Hare" and started a missionary school from which the present-day "University of Fort Hare" evolved. "Hare" was a British military officer associated with the slaughter of Black warriors who fought for their land Azania. "Fort Hare" is therefore the celebration of British colonialism and its robbery of our land and their genocide against Black people.

It is only the slave mentality of the "new South Africans" that could lead to the proud embracing and continuation of the celebration of Black Pain. That's what happens when a Black person suffers from an acute deficit of Black Consciousness. No wonder that "Fort Hare" continues to be "fort hare" in the "new South Africa".

With that said, the government needs to demonstrate a bit more seriousness in fighting corruption of which the University of Fort Hare is a victim. However, the conundrum in the fight against corruption is that those that are supposed to fight this anti-development monster are in courts answering questions about their involvement in the corruption.