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OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

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Students are consulted before university fee increment

I write to respond to a commentary "*Students should be consulted before university fee increment*" that run on 26th May, 2011. I thank Ms. Barbra Natifu for raising the issues that she did. This shows the commitment Ugandans have towards education as the yard stick for growth and development.

I however emphasize to all Makerere University Stakeholders, that the University Management **HAS NOT** approved any proposal to increase tuition fees for the next Academic Year, starting August 2011/2012.

In her commentary, Ms. Natifu expressed the need to improve communication between management and the university stakeholders and to also consult them in the university's decision-making policies.

Makerere University has a vibrant Public Relations and Communications team that has successfully bridged the gap between the university and its stakeholders. The Public Relations Office communicates all deliberations at Makerere University through press briefings, the Makerere University website, intranet, face book (<http://www.facebook.com/Makerere?ref=ts>) and twitter accounts (<http://twitter.com/#!/MakerereU>), where current students, prospective students, parents and well wishers share ideas on how to steer the university forward.

Therefore, the issue of participatory communication has come a long way and we strive to hold continuous consultation aimed at enhancing participatory communication.

Ms. Natifu talks about taking necessary steps to have all stakeholders' concerns adequately addressed. I am glad to inform you that these steps have been taken. The *Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001*, streamlines the establishment, administration and standards of Universities and other institutions of Higher Education in Uganda. It inculcates the idea of having all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process, as highlighted in its constitution of the University Council.

The University Council is, according to this Act, the supreme organ of a Public University and as such is responsible for the overall administration of the objects and functions of the University, including the responsibility for the direction of the administrative, financial and academic affairs of the University. The Council is therefore mandated by the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001, to fix the scales of fees and boarding charges, provide for the welfare and discipline of the students, and approve the University budget proposals and the final accounts submitted by the University Management. Here, students of the university, one of whom **MUST** be female are represented. The government members, minority-groups' members like the disabled and members of the convocation are also represented.

The students' representatives on Council relay council decisions to their colleagues in ample time, and bring feedback to the Council. This communication system has further been refined with the establishment of the eight (8) colleges and two (2) independent schools, each with a Communication officer and Web administrator whose main purpose is to communicate to stakeholders, especially students, at the college level. This in the long run will see the use of strikes as a form of communication, coming to an end.

It is therefore clear that all concerns and policy approvals that are arrived upon at the university, have all stakeholders' participation and consent.

We, at Makerere, are on the fore-front of fighting the levels of poverty and illiteracy especially through our Corporate Social Responsibility of establishing Knowledge-transfer partnerships and intensive research aimed at the betterment of our communities and the nation at large.

Also, plans are underway to start online degree programmes where students can access university education at a place of their convenience. The online degree programmes will be affordable as students will not incur transport and accommodation costs. With the online degree programmes running, we expect to reach a target students' intake of 100,000 by 2015.

At Makerere, we appreciate that the country still needs to have many of its populace access higher education to advance development. We also appreciate that students from poor backgrounds can indeed liberate themselves from their historical plight as Ms. Natifu highlights. This is why the university opened out to those that cannot afford to study at the main campus in Kampala, by starting up campuses in Jinja and Fort Portal. The university also has a plan to open up more campuses, after the college system is fully on board.

We Build For The Future.

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