

Alumni support NMMU academic completion plan

THE student protests that have swept the country since September 20 have received widespread coverage in the media. Higher education has been rocked by these protests and no one could have predicted the manner in which the situation has unfolded.

Various media, including the pages of The Herald, have reflected the different concerns of parents, staff, management, students and the community at large. The publication of divergent views lent a rich texture to the national dialogue and no one can complain that the democratic right of all citizens to express their views has been denied.

However, in these times, a deep understanding of the complex issues at play, coupled with temperate analysis and critical thinking, is required.

The alumni of NMMU represent an important part of the university community. NMMU and its constituent parts have conferred 128 763 qualifications. Of these, more than 50% have been conferred since the merger of the institutions that now make up NMMU.

Many of us are not only graduates of NMMU, but we are also staff members and parents. It is time the voice of this important stakeholder group was also heard.

The Alumni Association executive committee recently met to discuss the situation in higher education and, in particular, the situation at NMMU – especially after a fire destroyed the Alumni Campus Boma on the Summerstrand South Campus on Thursday October 20.

While little is known at this stage about this incident and other violence and damage to property at NMMU in recent days, any semblance of intellectual discourse has been diminished and the label of a just cause that was applied to student protests has been tarnished.

As an association, we support free higher education for the poor and advocate for more investment and better management of resources in the entire public education system to ensure that many more school leavers can enter the further and higher education sectors. But we do not support violence, intimidation and damage to property. It cannot be condoned.

It is our belief that the court-mandated mediation process at NMMU

In my View



Randall Jonas

offered the best opportunity for students to pursue their call for free higher education for all while completing their 2016 academic year.

This is evident from the terms of the interdict, which clearly allowed those students who wished to protest to do so, while those wishing to return to class could also exercise their right to do so.

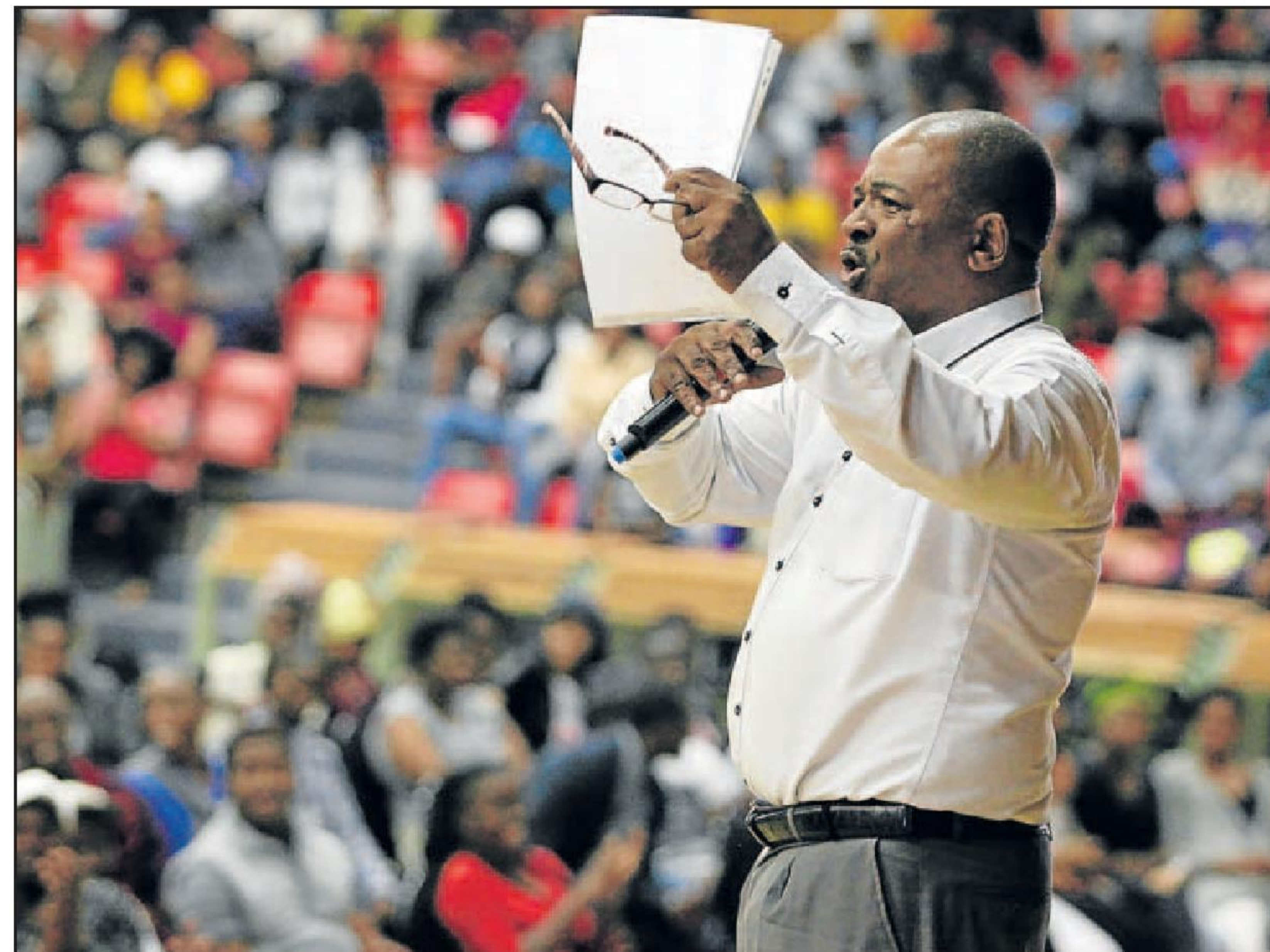
The students who disrupted classes and violently forced out

non-protesting students acted in a manner that is profoundly undemocratic and undermines our constitution.

We have noted that management of the university constructively engaged with students to find beneficial and progressive solutions to their demands, while also making a commitment to resolve the issue of free higher education for all.

It is regrettable that, despite this, some protesting students failed to recognise this and act in good faith.

We support the collective efforts of the NMMU leadership to find a workable solution and to facilitate



DISRUPTED CLASSES: Higher Education Parents Dialogue secretary Mthi Ndube addresses students at a mass meeting at the NMMU Indoor Sports Centre last month after a mediation process failed Picture: BRIAN WITBOOI

the completion of the academic programme for 2016 in the current circumstances. We also support those moderate student leaders of the coalition who wish to peacefully end the protests.

We appeal to our government and

stakeholders to act swiftly and decisively to resolve this impasse amicably and responsibly.

We exhort our students agitating for a just and equitable funding model for access to higher education to give the process of national

dialogue and government intervention a chance, while preparing for and making a success, against all odds, of the 2016 academic year.

We believe that all stakeholders must urgently convene pursuant to the development of a more effective and efficient public education and training programme for our country.

To this end, we call on all who are imbued with the skills and resources to play an active part in whatever capacity to help develop and support our people and our country. It is the duty of all parties to ensure that the hopes and aspirations of individuals and families, whether to be admitted to university or to enter the job market, are not

stymied by obduracy and brinkmanship.

As part of our call for support for the poor, we ask for efficient administrative systems to ensure that those vulnerable students receive funding, textbooks, accommoda-

tion and subsistence timeously.

It is of no use that a student is funded, but resources for essential academic material arrive several weeks into the academic programme.

The Alumni Association remains committed to providing assistance to students in financial need through the support of our members and friends of the university.

Our student and graduate attributes should help contribute to creating a more inclusive and just university and society. Violent and criminal acts, including damage to property and injury to individuals, simply do not fit into the profile of a responsible student, graduate and citizen.

The NMMU Alumni Association is making a rallying call for rebuilding the academy and a resurgence of the spirit that makes us great as an engaged African university.

Dr Randall Jonas is president of the NMMU Alumni Association

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