

■ STUDENTS

# Call to private sector for accommodation

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PARLIAMENT has called on the private sector to assist the government in providing accommodation for students at institutions of higher learning, after widespread protests at universities across the country.

This comes after different bodies, including the South African Union of Students (Sasu), Universities SA and National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) were in Parliament to brief the committee on higher education and training on the situation at universities.

Sasu president Misheck Mugabe detailed to the committee how the lack of accommodation was affecting students, leading to unrest.

Committee chairperson Connie September said: "Regarding accommodation, the committee believes that the private sector should play a meaningful role to complement what government is doing to provide funding.

"However, the committee also condemns the destruction of property and violence on South African campuses."

Last week, the student representative council from tertiary institutions in Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal gathered to mobilise a national shutdown.

Meanwhile, yesterday, Cape Peninsula University of Technology students put up shacks on the Bellville



Naledi Pandor

campus to highlight problems with accommodation.

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Higher Education and Training, deputy director-general Dr Diane Parker said it was unreasonable to expect institutions to be held responsible for accommodating all students in university-owned or managed residences.

Parker said the department had plans to address students' grievances.

"The department's student housing infrastructure programme has been developed to enable the construction of 300 000 beds over the next 10 years to alleviate the accommodation shortage.

"The department is working with the Department of Human Set-

tlements and Public Works to explore options for off-campus social housing" said Parker.

Some issues raised at the meeting included historical student debt, academic exclusions and increases in higher education costs as problems common to all tertiary institutions.

The committee also heard that students owed universities about R9 billion, consisting of debt that had accumulated over the years before fee-free Higher Education was introduced.

The DA has called on Higher Education Minister Naledi Pandor to address the issue of historic debt for both students who are not on NSFAS, and those who are beneficiaries.

DA MP Belinda Bozzoli said: "Minister Pandor needs to make it clear that she will provide universities and students with urgent assistance to deal with the debt they are carrying.

"The ANC's fee-free higher education will not address the plight of senior students with sky-high debts and this matter therefore requires urgent attention from the minister.

"With almost 10 million unemployed South Africans, this crisis will no doubt add to this growing number."

During the State of the Nation Address debate on Tuesday, Pandor called on institutions of higher learning to make every effort available to find solutions to students' ongoing concerns, saying she would do everything she could to assist.