

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA distressed by withheld student certificates amidst R59 billion higher-education debt crisis
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is dismayed by reports that more than 165 000 student certificates are currently being withheld by institutions of higher learning owing to an escalating student-debt crisis amounting to approximately R59 billion.

This alarming situation disproportionately affects students from poor and working-class backgrounds who are amongst the most vulnerable in society. These students face significant financial barriers in accessing higher education and are now further deprived at the completion of their studies. Withholding academic certificates effectively locks graduates out of employment opportunities, internships, and professional registration processes. This practice entrenches cycles of poverty and inequality, preventing qualified people from contributing meaningfully to the economy and improving their livelihoods.

The PSA is particularly concerned that many of these students have relied on financial-aid schemes such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme but still find themselves burdened by outstanding fees owing to gaps in funding, historical debt, or administrative inefficiencies. Penalising students who have completed their studies but lack the means to settle outstanding fees is unjust and counterproductive to national development goals.

The PSA calls on government, universities, and all relevant stakeholders to urgently intervene and find sustainable solutions to this crisis. Key measures should include an immediate moratorium on the withholding of academic certificates for financially disadvantaged students. Stakeholders must develop a comprehensive student debt-relief programme, particularly target poor and missing-middle students, and improve funding mechanisms and oversight to ensure that financial aid adequately covers the full cost of study. There is a need for enhanced collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training and institutions to prevent accumulation of unsustainable student debt.

The PSA emphasises that access to education must not end at graduation. True access includes the ability to utilise a qualification to secure employment and contribute to society. Failure to address this crisis threatens to undermine South Africa's efforts to build a skilled, inclusive, and equitable workforce. The PSA is ready to engage constructively with all stakeholders to ensure that no deserving graduate is left behind.

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