

## Vice Chancellors` message to the entire UOR community in the aftermath of IUSF attack on 25.05.2022

As I informed on 24.05.2022 the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF) protested against the administration of the UOR on 25.5.2022 in front of the UOR on Matara-Tangalle main road. As predicted it was against punishing the 18 students caught for ragging of Mr. Darsha Udayanga in the FHSS in 2018 who were remanded for nearly six months following an internal inquiry. This protest was against the implementation of the legal decisions made at the Council of the UOR even before the decisions were communicated to the accused. Therefore, this protest is not only illegal but morally and ethically unjustifiable.

Because, there is an option for them to exercise democratically and legally, if the aggrieved party believes the punishment is unfair. That is to take legal action in the Court of Appeal or Supreme Court of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka against the decision of the Council of UOR. Without doing that, they resorted to street protests to use thuggery and political power to change the decisions of the disciplinary authority. I wish to challenge IUSF to take legal actions in this instance without engaging in street battles.

As predicted in my last message on 24.5.2022, the IUSF tried to forcibly enter the UOR premises perhaps with the intention of attacking the VC and damaging the property of the UOR. This was prevented by our brave security staff with the assistance of police and other staff members. They could not enter the premises, nor were they able to damage even the main gate. I am very proud of our security staff and others who supported them. Further, not a single student of UOR participated in the protest from the street side with IUSF in this instance. I appreciate this and I am proud of the students who defied the IUSF orders despite the risks to not support them. The crowd IUSF was able to muster was less than 150 people. They mostly appeared not to be university students except for some young monks who appeared to be first year students of a university. Therefore, for the fourteenth time the IUSF was politically defeated at UOR.

IUSF protesters tried to grab the camera of a one security officer and he was able to pass it onto another colleague before the IUSF tore his uniform into pieces. However, they were able to attack several of our security staff members and one very badly, needing hospitalization. Security Inspector Mr. Senaratna a colleague of ours was hospitalized. He was surrounded by about 20 IUSF members and brutally assaulted demanding the key of the main gate while trying to grab his pen camera. I wish to condemn the assault whole heartedly.

This attack was led by Mr Wasantha Mudalige the Convener of IUSF, Mr Shehan Shalinda President of the UOK students union and Ven Galwewa Siri Damma, Convener of the IU Bhikku Federation. Crowds were brought in three buses by them.

Initially the crowd started to hold placards on either side of the road one meter apart which appeared peaceful. When the crowd increased to be little over 100, the IUSF members became violent and started abusing the police and security officers in obscene/uncivilized language to provoke them. Mr Mudalige and two others made provocative speeches. Our security officers acted with severe restraint under my instructions. They did not attack the IUSF members although staff members were brutally assaulted. This showed the discipline of our security officers. The police officers did not act or were unable to prevent it.



After abusing the VC, DVC, CSO, security, Proctor, Chief Marshall, police and all the possible staff members of the UOR they left the scene at about 700pm. The entire episode was shown live on you tube by IUSF. We have lodged the complaints against the attackers and process digital evidence with identifications to police. We have requested legal action to be initialized by police as soon as possible.

There were several other incidents. The police instructed us to keep the main gate closed to prevent entry of IUSF into UOR. This resulted in staff being held up after work without being able to leave the premises. This was unanticipated originally as the protest was to be held at 1200 noon which later got shifted to 2.00pm. However, it started at 300pm. I believe the IUSF tried to get the staff and students leaving after work to increase the numbers on their side. We allowed the staff to leave through the playground as an alternative arrangement. More than 98% of the staff and students accepted this offer and left. We witnessed the students running away from IUSF students to escape. This was a very encouraging sign. That courage to run away from protesters was heartening to witness. It expressed their dislike towards the protest and liking towards the UOR open and continuing education policy. Some staff members refused to take that route insisting to leave only through the main gate. Few of them also confronted the security staff and the proctor. I believe this was unwarranted and showed lack of understanding of the grave danger for UOR property and lives of staff in that situation faced. We should feel ashamed about this behavior as even the security staff are our brothers and sisters trying to perform their duties under difficult circumstances. As this might happen again time to time our staff and students need to understand this in the future.

A group of third year management students led by one person who has a complex background shouted the same slogans of IUSF from inside the UOR premises. Out of nearly 11000 students inside the university, this crowd was less than 20. This issue is now being handled by student counsellor service and proctor.

I wish to salute and respect the student community of UOR for being independent in thinking and taking responsibility for their own behavior without falling to be victims of IUSF and FSP. I also wish to salute the security staff for their courage and determination to prevent IUSF entering the UOR. Their patience, resilience, common sense is exemplary.

All these protests by IUSF/FSP are ultimately aimed to disrupt the education system of Sri Lanka both at school and university level. They are likely to come repeatedly in the near future and every time we have to deal with it. Hence, I wish to request all the UOR students to be vigilant to protect the freedom in life they are enjoying today and never to sacrifice that freedom for someone else's political game. This freedom was brought into UOR under my leadership with the support of entire community of UOR which has witnessed all the ragging and violence in the forty-year history of the University. No one will be able to get that freedom back to you, if you give it up today.


All the trade unions and teachers associations which condemned the attack against the protesters in front of temple trees on 9.5.2022 in no time after the incident and even go on strike against it, have not condemned this brutal attack on security staff of UOR by IUSF.

There is a demand by the IUSF in this case is to get rid of VC and current administration. The very same organization demanding the duly elected President of Sri Lanka to go home for corruption, abuse of power, failures in economy and nepotism is demanding the removal of the VC UOR for being clean, effective to maintain education in UOR and maintaining law and order. This demand surprisingly appears politically contradictory.

However, if anybody believes that I am corrupt, abuses power and failed as VC, one could file legal action in the Court of Appeal or Supreme Court to remove me as VCs are not above the law. One could also complaint to UGC, MOHE, HE the President with evidence but the complaint cannot be anonymous. By using these two options one could get rid of a corrupt VC from the system. That will not disrupt the education of students. IUSF is not using this democratic and legal approach. I request anyone who believes me to be corrupt to follow that approach rather than violently protesting on the streets.

The current convener of the IUSF submitted a complaint against me to the bribery commission. UOR submitted evidence to counter the allegations. I am aware that the bribery commission summoned Mr Wasantha Mudalige several times to record a statement. He did not go. Because, he knows that, his complaint is false and these are just political gimmicks. The punishment for making a false complaint to police if proven in courts is seven-year imprisonment according to the penal code. Hence, they never give verbal statements to police or bribery commission. I have already complained to IGP to investigate this as a false complaint. I intend to pursue this complaint further.

I salute entire UOR community with great respect for supporting to protect this great institution and for being tolerant. They also need to be vigilant further in the future as this will happen repeatedly until my term ends legally in March 2025.

  
07.06.2022

**Senior Prof. Sujeewa Amarasena**

**Vice Chancellor**