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IBPP Research Associates: Botswana

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Botswana been ripped off by "Africa Media University"?--by Ditso Anneleng

Nearly 30 Batswana students have been withdrawn from a so-called "African Media University" in South Africa after an investigation by Botswana's High Commission found that the school had no facilities. The 28 students had been enrolled at the "University" at a cost of over P4 million in tuition and accommodation fees to undertake higher diploma and degree courses in media studies. However, when the students got to the "University" in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, they found it was situated in a former old aged people's home sandwiched between Windybrow Theatre and a notorious brothel.

Students complained to The Gazette that during their brief stay at the 'University' they witnessed people being shot outside the building, as well as others being deliberately run over by cars. They said the "University" had less than 100 students enrolled, and there were no facilities. "For three weeks," they said, "we sat around doing nothing."

The students complained to the Botswana's High Commission in Pretoria which sent the education attaché to investigate. Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Charles Mogotsi, told The Gazette that "indeed some students have been withdrawn." He said that the students had been admitted for bachelors and higher national diplomas in media studies...and that the "Ministry thought they had a good package." He said following complaints by students, the education attaché went to inspect the school and found out that the institution had no facilities and that the curriculum was not appropriate. Mr. Mogotsi added that they had also found that the "security situation left much to be desired." He said after the Ministry had been "briefed about the situation and furnished with recommendations for withdrawal, the Ministry wrote to withdraw the students," he said.

The Gazette attempted to contact the principal of the Africa Media University, a Ms. Lisa Grotteit, but the school phone rang continuously without being answered. Officials in the Ministry of Education were also not available for comment as they were locked in meetings with aggrieved students. On Monday, the 28 students met with Ministry officials, including Deputy Director of Student Welfare and Placement, Mr. T.M. Molongwa when they were told that they would now only go to school in 2001. Another meeting is scheduled for next week.

The students--who were singing and dancing in the corridors of the Ministry --refused to speak on record saying that they were afraid that if their names were used they will be victimised and would never get to school. The Ministry of Education is also faced with a problem from another educational institution in South Africa which is understood to be contemplating taking legal action against the Ministry after Batswana students who had registered for courses failed to turn up.

The Ministry had paid Allenby College in Johannesburg P32 000 to reserve places for some 82 Batswana students to study a range of communications courses. However, the students failed to turn up and it is understood that they were sent to different educational institutions in South Africa. According to spokesperson for Allenby College, Ms. Stella Rossouw: "We came to Botswana in September last year

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and we accepted 82 students. We sent them confirmation and gave them students numbers. In addition the Department of Student Placement and Welfare paid us a registration fee of P32 000. "We subsequently built extra lecture halls and appointed extra lecturers, but the students did not arrive...we thought this had something to do with the floods," she said. Ms. Rossouw said that they had incurred costs amounting to R2.2 million. She complained that they are still waiting for response from the Ministry, adding that they want to recover their costs. It is understood that unless the College does reach an agreement with the Ministry of Education, legal action may be taken against the Botswana Government.

Earlier this year, The Gazette reported that as a result of a temporary cash flow shortage the Ministry of Education was sending an increasing number of Batswana to private South African educational institutions because they did not qualify for enrolment in South African universities. Debating the budget on Monday, the MP for Tonota, Mr. Pono Moatlhodi, argued that the Department of Student Placement should totally change guard, since the Department had been riddled with problems under the present leadership.

IBPP Comment. Globalization may be facilitating the developing world to emulate the worst as well as the best of what the developed world has to offer.(Keywords: Botswana, Media, South Africa.)