

to go back to classes, so as not to lose the entire school year. Six weeks of strike and no prospects of success forced student leaders to end the strike without any written agreement.

The students had wanted to achieve the following goals:

- a 50 percent cut in tuition in exchange for four hours of community work per week from any student interested in doing so—an arrangement previously available to only 10 percent of the students;
- subsidized loans covering both tuition and living expenses;
- 12,000 additional beds in the dormitories; and
- setting up a committee to deal with reforms in the Israeli higher education system.

In spite of the fact that no document was signed, the students did obtain the following promises during their negotiations with the prime minister:

- a 50 percent cut in tuition in exchange for five hours of community work—not discussed was the number of students who would be able to take advantage of this program and therefore there is serious doubt about the outcome;
- nonsubsidized loans for tuition only (not including living expenses), to be repaid one year after graduation; and
- a committee to deal with the building of additional dorms—with no date for completion specified.

A special committee will be created, not be headed by professionals but rather by the prime minister himself, to deal with major reforms of the Israeli higher education system. In past experience, this is a sure way to bury the issue for a very long time.

In mid-December, the students came back to campus, and the semester started. After a six-week strike, we are back to square one. I am pessimistic about the chances of Israeli students launching another ideological fight any time soon. I worry when I see their sad faces and sense their disillusionment. Their window of opportunity for reform has been shut in their faces by cynical politicians who were willing to go along for the ride but unwilling to fight the students' fight. The chair of the National Union of Israeli Students expressed these sentiments when he said: "we feel deceived because the prime minister did not keep his promises to us. . . . We found ourselves facing a government that refused all our demands. We feel bitter and let down."

I believe the students deserve our admiration for standing up to an uncaring government and for having the decency and the integrity not to sign a fake document that would only have offered them more empty promises. It is a sad ending for a naive dream of changing society for the better. This fight was lost, but the students have promised that the war is ongoing and that they will continue their struggle from within their campuses. It is up to them to do so, and it is up to society to help them. ■

## Higher Education in Uganda

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In Uganda there are two types of institutions providing higher education today: universities and other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics and institutions of higher education. In the first category, we have both state-owned and private institutions, the latter of which have emerged since the late 1980s. Among the state-owned institutions, Makerere University is the oldest and was once one of the most prestigious institutions in Africa. The origins of the private institutions are varied; some are commercial ventures, whereas others are institutions with a clearly defined mission. As a result, the situation is rather confused and there is an urgent need for clarification and guidelines from government regarding the setting up and running of all institutions of higher learning.

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### Overview

One can say that there are enormous differences among the various universities. Most private universities rely heavily on part-time staff (generally from Makerere), except for Uganda Martyrs University, which has a current residential staff of 28 academics for 250 students. The fact that Makerere University has admitted privately funded students has brought with it specific problems. Last year Makerere admitted 6,000 privately sponsored students. The main problem is a lack of facilities and staff to cater for such a large number of students. One wonders what is going to happen in the forthcoming academic year when another 6,000 privately funded students will be admitted. Although Makerere suffered tremendously during the civil unrest of the 1970s and 1980s, it remains the choice institution for aspiring university students. It is situated in the capital city of Kampala, and city life holds an attraction for young people, no matter what their material circumstances may be.

In an attempt to control this situation, the Ministry of

Education, together with the Forum of Vice-Chancellors of Uganda, has introduced before Parliament two bills on higher education intended to streamline policies and ensure that high standards are maintained in all tertiary institutions. The first bill deals with the setting up of a Commission for Higher Education, which will be a kind of watchdog agency, while the second bill deals specifically with universities and the rules to be followed in order for a school to be recognized as a university. Stricter rules for the setting up of new universities are contained in the document, and it is hoped that Parliament will complete the process of voting on these bills before the end of the calendar year. If state guidelines are not established quickly there will most likely be further unchecked growth of universities and other institutions of higher learning, which carries with it the risk of destabilizing the whole educational system.

#### *Strategies*

If universities want to survive in the future, some new approaches must be considered.

- universities have to be relevant to the needs of the population of Uganda;
- universities have to have a community orientation and be involved in community work;
- universities must have clear objectives and orient their curricula accordingly;
- universities have to be practical in their outlook so as to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship among their students, who should be job creators rather than job seekers—in any case, government jobs are no longer available;
- universities must create links with one another with a view to alleviating the burden of both staff and students and establishing a sharing of knowledge and expertise; and
- universities have to foster the creation of international links so as to fully enter into the international university community. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) or the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) are good examples for fostering such collaboration.

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A definite effort will have to be made in Uganda to get away from the commercial aspect of a university education both on the part of individuals themselves and on

that of institutions. As long as financial survival remains the first priority, academic work will suffer heavily. It is already the case that some academics have more than one job in order to increase their income. More students mean more money and low salaries mean two jobs, no time, and less effort and dedication. This situation could be disastrous for the country and it is hoped that the new bills before Parliament will curb some of the many abuses presently seen in Uganda.

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Infrastructures in many institutions are far from what they should be, and heavy investment will be needed in all institutions in order to measure up to internationally recognized standards. The government of Uganda cannot do much to assist in this effort, and this is one of the reasons why Makerere University is admitting so many privately sponsored students. Uganda Martyrs University deliberately keeps the infrastructures simple but tries to make them of high quality. The number of students admitted is in direct relation to the material structures available, and this has an effect on the financial situation of the institution. A university is neither a money-making venture nor is it a charity. A middle position between the two must be found.

#### *Conclusion*

One can conclude by saying that the situation in Uganda is no worse than that of any other African country. It is important to ensure that quality be preserved, and it is my conviction that, in time, some institutions will either disappear totally or join hands with another to create strong institutions with high academic standards. One way forward would be the creation of “centers of excellence” whereby each institution would build upon its strong points rather than attempting to provide training and education in all disciplines. While government legislation is important to guide universities toward the future of education, the dedication of men and women of vision is a prerequisite to ensure that all institutions move forward in the right direction in order to be relevant to the current and future needs of the country. ■