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MEDIA RELEASE

Immediate release

SA Academy condemns remarks by Minister of Higher Education and Training regarding the Afrikaans language community

The SA Academy for Science and Arts dissociates itself emphatically from the outdated stereotyping of the Afrikaans language community by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, as reported on Netwerk24 on 14 October 2019. To still try and argue in 2019 that the use of Afrikaans, an indigenous language that has fully developed as an academic and scientific language, is “a means of pursuing a narrow and racist Afrikaner-nationalist agenda like during apartheid” is not only insulting to our language community, but a poor attempt at trying to score political points off the judgment by the Constitutional Court on the language policy of Stellenbosch University.

The SA Academy takes cognisance, but is concerned that the Minister seemingly regards the judgment as “a victory” over an alleged Afrikaans hegemony. We would like to point out to the Minister that the hegemony of Afrikaans that existed in higher education 30 years ago, in the eighties, has now been replaced by the hegemony of English – at the expense of all our indigenous languages. There is no sign any longer of an Afrikaans hegemony. Until recently, Afrikaans was in fact used on only a few university campuses together with other languages.

Dr Nzimande, what will the inadvertent consequences and damage be in the major attempt to get rid of Afrikaans as medium of instruction? If it is said Afrikaans is used to exclude, who is then excluded by English? Don't all languages exclude non-speakers or second- and third-language speakers in the end?

Dr Nzimande, the Afrikaans language community is the most diverse language community in South Africa. This community has already travelled a long way on the road to reconciliation and inclusivity, both inside and outside the community. We regard our young language as an invaluable asset to her speakers and fellow South Africans in pursuit of nation building in a context of diversity. We manage our language

and cultural assets with great care. We are proud of the constructive role our community plays in rebuilding our country. You reportedly want to “save Afrikaans from a white rightist agenda”? Rather save our education system, please.

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