

PRESS STATEMENT

In connection with the incident that took place on our campus yesterday surrounding the screening of a documentary film by a student organisation, the University of Hyderabad wishes to place the following facts before the media and the public by way of a clarification:

- At the outset, we would like to clear the air about the particular film that was scheduled to be screened by the student organisation concerned. University administrators were aware that this was a national award-winning documentary by an acclaimed filmmaker that was also broadcast on Doordarshan and had no objection to its screening on campus. As a matter of fact, this was screened several times in the past on our campus, both as public screenings as well as in classrooms for academic discussions. On some of those occasions, the filmmaker also visited the campus and interacted with students during screenings.
- The Vice-Chancellor held meetings today and received reports from senior officials to review yesterday's development. According to these reports, students had sought permission from the Dean, School of Social Sciences to screen the film in the New Seminar Hall of the School. He apparently denied their request on the grounds that School spaces cannot be given for events by student organisations. Subsequently, the students seem to have tried to screen the film in one of the lecture halls of a department, whose administrators were given to believe that this was being done by students of their own department. This was when the University security tried to convey to the students that they had no permission to use the space for the event. Students were apparently agitated and started heckling and abusing the security staff. Afraid that the situation would spin out of control, the security called the police for support. The police intervention seemed to have resulted in the cessation of the activity and police personnel detained and took a few of the students to the police station. Almost immediately, the University informed the police that they would not press charges against the students and would deal with the issue through internal processes. The students were then let off by the police, who clarified that there were no formal arrests.
- It gives the University administration no joy to see our students being detained by the police, even if temporarily, as in most cases we would not like to invite the police to resolve issues with our own university community, especially students. There are robust internal mechanisms, including negotiations and dialogues initiated by the DSW's (Dean,

Student Welfare) Office and campus security to deal with minor scuffles and protests by students. It is only under extreme provocation and apprehension of disturbance to peace on campus that the administration has had to resort to calling the police. We would like to emphasize that calling the police for resolving issues within the campus is not normal University policy.

- With respect to this latest incident and other similar events recently, we would like to reiterate that our University has, over the last four decades of our history, combined scientific and academic excellence with social and political consciousness. This has meant that we have always welcomed the spirit of debate, dialogue, and discourse on our campus, whether initiated by our academic units or by various student groups, irrespective of their ideologies. There is a process in place for student organisations to seek permission from University authorities to organise events in designated spaces such as auditoriums, with an eye on maintaining peace and order and also to avoid disruption to others using open-air, common spaces. There is no need for student organisations to mislead or use subterfuge to hold events to gain transitory political gains in a competitive environment.
- The University is currently in the process of sharing with all sections concerned, including heads and deans as well as student organisations, the norms to be followed for organizing events on campus. We would like to appeal to all the student groups to take pride in the University's position among the top institutions in the country and join us in fostering a climate of academic excellence in a democratic setting where peaceful and orderly dialogue and debate would be the norm.