



JAFFNA UNIVERSITY SCIENCE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

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07-02-2017

To the Chairperson and the Members of Council
University of Jaffna
Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Jaffna University seeks Fairness in the Selection of Vice Chancellor

The Ex-Co of the JUSTA met to discuss the controversy that has arisen over Prof. S. Thiagalingam's application for the position of Vice Chancellor that falls vacant in the next couple of months. JUSTA learnt from Council members that the application was received a day after the closing date, which fell on 16th January 2017; and further that the application was sent well on time, on 27th December 2016, by registered post as stipulated in the advertisement. However, it took three weeks to arrive owing to postal irregularities, instead of the normal three or four working days. It is certainly matter over which the applicant had no control. JUSTA also learns that the Evaluation Committee, which was impressed by the applicant's credentials, decided unanimously to schedule his application, along with those of other applicants, for consideration by the Council.

Nevertheless, JUSTA is disturbed to learn of strong indications that Thiagalingam's application may be rejected, despite the fact that he has acted reasonably, and done what is in his power to ensure that the application is received well before the closing date. Such a rejection would be contrary to the spirit in which the University uses a search committee to seek competent applicants for this important position from all corners of the globe, and invites nominations. A closing date in applications for this important position should not be confused with practices governing commercial tenders. Although his services were available, neither Prof. S. Thiagalingam, nor anyone else, was found by the search committee.

It is our good fortune that he was made aware of the advertisement and an application takes considerable time to prepare. His application adds significantly to our choice towards enhancing the quality of this University; and it is incumbent upon the Council, which we are sure has this same aim in view, to do justice to the choice that is available to us. Rejecting Prof. S. Thiagalingam's application on the grounds of a fortuitous postal delay would leave the larger community, to which we are answerable, feeling that there is a conspiracy to deny them the quality that they long for, and is justly their due.

At this point it is proper to recall that JUSTA took strenuous efforts since 2014 to clean up the degradation of our academic environment by challenging prevalent abuses in the recruitment of academic and support staff. It investigated a number of detailed cases and presented them to the authorities. After the change of government in 2015, copies of a volume comprising these cases were also distributed to the authorities and to elected regional representatives. JUSTA duly submitted its compilation of abuses to the new Council. We could see from the start that although there was a change of regime in the country, there was none in the University. The old regime by showering its patronage, and punishing those who did not toe its line, was successfully reasserting itself. The unions and academic staff were cowed by the vindictiveness of this disposition.

JUSTA reported in 2013 the details of the Vice Chancellor's election that was a truly bizarre affair with members of the Council being told by a political party how to cast their votes, with the dummy candidate becoming the close second. We trust things are not so bad now, but we see attempt to constrain choice by disqualifying Prof. S. Thiagalingam by questionable and ad hoc legal arguments.

We appeal to the Council and our leaders to make this a real possibility. In this regard, the coming Vice Chancellor's election is an opportunity where we dare not fail in our duty. Three years more of the present would find us in an irremediable situation.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely,



President, on behalf of JUSTA

Copy to: Chairman/UGC
 Secretary/FUTA
 Minister/Higher Education & Highway