

TO: CSIR & Ministers of Science, Water, Environment, Local Government, and Trade & Industry

ANTHONY TURTON – AN ASSAULT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND WATER RESEARCH

We are academics, water researchers and activists as well as academic institutions and water research bodies and advocacy NGO's and social movements from all over South Africa and other parts of the world. We write to express our disbelief followed by our outrage at the actions evidently taken by the Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) against Dr Antony Turton, a highly respected CSIR scientist.

These actions include preventing Dr Turton from delivering his scheduled keynote address (attached) at the CSIR conference on 18th November 2008, entitled 'Science Real & Relevant,' followed a few days later by his suspension from work.

We recognise and respect that details of allegations that form the basis of disciplinary procedures are usually confidential but note that such confidentiality exists to protect the employee against whom the allegations are being levelled.

One of the allegations against Dr Turton is reportedly that he has brought the CSIR into disrepute. The CSIR has made public its reasons for its unheralded banning of Dr Turton from delivering his keynote address. These reasons are that some of Dr Turton's claims are unfounded and that he made use of disturbing photographs of public violence.

On the basis of this information, we are bound to say that it is the CSIR management that has manifestly succeeded in bringing the CSIR into disrepute.

Both of the two relevant photographs used to illustrate Dr Turton's address are in the public domain. Moreover, both are directly germane to the propositions Dr Turton would have put forward during his address. Banning Dr Turton could not have been to protect the sensitivities of the people attending the conference.

Furthermore, since Dr Turton's paper was widely available electronically before the Conference and even more so since his banning and suspension, preventing him from delivering his paper protected few, if any, people.

We pass no judgement on the accuracy of Dr Turton's claims in the paper he intended presenting. Such judgement is the proper prerogative of the conference that was denied the opportunity of doing so by the banning of Dr Turton. Debate, controversy and disputes over facts and interpretations are the very essence of academic and research conferences. That the CSIR with its proud record as a leading research institution should offer such an unpersuasive rationale for its action merely adds to our misgivings.

Dr Turton's paper is unusual in that it places the science of water quality and scarcity in what many of us consider is its proper context, that is, its intrinsic and unavoidable social and political context. We say this even though many of us would differ from the social and political analysis provided by Dr Turton.

This is where academic freedom and our constitutionally guaranteed right to be different stand supreme. We are accordingly deeply disquieted that the CSIR management should

have been so intolerant of difference as to take action that would have been unremarkable during the apartheid era; action that made apartheid South Africa such an international outcast.

The CSIR is a public body accountable to the public, ultimately through Parliament and the relevant departments of state.

We accordingly call on the Departments of Science, Water, Environment, Local Government, and Trade & Industry – all of which have a direct interest in various aspects of Dr Turton’s paper – to demand an explanation from the CSIR for actions so deeply offensive to academic freedom, human rights, scientific investigations into both the quality and scarcity of water no less than to South Africa’s good name and, ultimately, Dr Turton himself.

Finally, we demand that the CSIR drops all punitive action against Dr Turton, unless it has reasons considerably more substantive than the ones it has made public.

Signed