Students’ scorched earth policy

Professor Salim Abdool Karim reflects on what the destruction of UKZN’s law library through arson means to him

It THIR, many weeks on yesterday, Professor Salim Abdool Karim went to the law library, as the students set it on fire.

I walked through the burnt ruins of the Howard College law library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which had been set ablaze as part of student protests.

I listened as witnesses recounted the previous day’s events. At around 5pm on Tuesday about 50 students protested near the main library and the nearby law faculty.

I wondered what the destruction of this library means to me.

I was dismayed at the senseless destruction of this library, which was not an isolated incident. The torching of the main hall on the Pietermaritzburg campus and the Howard College library in the hours leading up to the student protest saw the burning of the law library.

I was able to get in and out of the law library, which is the lifeblood of the best and brightest minds in the legal fraternity.

I was in despair: Have we grown so numb to the destruction of the sources of our knowledge that we cannot even understand what’s happened?

I was also appalled at the sense of loss. The charred remains of books shown in the law library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was set on fire this week.

The fire at UKZN’s Howard College law library destroyed an international resource built up over nearly a century. Social media reaction was unanimous: Future generations of South Africans have been robbed.

The Israeli book display in the law library at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was set on fire this week.

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From Facebook

Facebook fans: We spent so many hours. It was the one place where we could be focused and really get work done. We’re dollars.

Menzi Ntshapheka: You’re damaging the right thing.

Malibongwe Malb Majola: I really don’t think we should destroy property when we’re on a protest.

From Twitter

Nokuthula Dlamini-Mbanjwa: This is beyond devastating. I have no idea what law books cost.

It’s time she’s 18.

On Twitter

@Suhaifa29: This is beyond devastating. I wonder whether anything will be left by the time she’s 18.

@SureKamhunga: Law library burnt by #FeesMustFall. Despicable, mindless behaviour of those committed to destroying the source of information and knowledge in law.

@Moloisrj: An entire library set alight. What does this?

@lizell94: My heart is broken.

@Mogalled: I cannot believe a reasonable person from the government then? Are we building or destroying a country?

@edefine: No problem, the temple and businessmen should just replace them. Money grows on trees.

@Sivakumaran: Law library burnt by #FeesMustFall students._yield book is expensive to replace. What kind of a mind the government?

@alex: Has the era of libraries as a means to have books, what the hell are you doing at a university in the first place?

@aloha: I, as a scholar of South Africa, am unable to accept my colleagues’ actions, and I am sure our future with sage wisdom will allow us to better understand each other, redoubling our constructive efforts.

@karim: We need to understand each other, and the students who don’t understand each other will have no future. The students’ actions herald a new low in which nothing on earth will be sacred.

@Alma: The students’ actions herald a new low in which nothing on earth will be sacred.

@deva: I’m registered for my new/next year classes.

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