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CAPE TOWN Dec 24 Sapa

UNION TACKLES FNB ON 'RACIAL' BURSARIES

(SUBS/NEDS: LEAD TO ADD FNB COMMENT)

Trade union Solidarity has launched a campaign to pressure First

National Bank into scrapping what it says is a "racial" allocation

of education bursaries for employees' children.

The union said on Thursday the bank had decided white employees

would not qualify for the bursaries.

It was reacting to the November edition of FNB's employees newsletter TreeTalk, in which the bank offered the support to African, Indian, Coloured and Chinese employees earning less than R100,000 a year.

"White employees who struggle and earn less than R100,000 are simply excluded, purely on the basis of their race," union spokesman Dirk Hermann said in a statement.

"This is surely the most insensitive Christmas present an employer could give a certain portion of its employees. The white

employees at FNB are getting a black Christmas stocking that they

are not allowed to open, because they aren't black."

He said members of the public could complain to FNB through Solidarity's website at www.solidarity.co.za/ and join a Facebook protest.

He said Solidarity urged FNB clients and the public to continue

the campaign until the racial criteria were removed from the

3's employee support trust, which would administer the bursaries, was children at primary school level, who could not be said to be beneficiaries of apartheid.

The right approach would be to let anyone who earned less than R100,000 qualify for study aid.

The FirstRand Group Limited, of which FNB forms part, in a statement denied that it practices racist policies. It said the bank was compliant with government legislation on Black Economic Empowerment and employment equity.

"FirstRand launched a far-reaching BEE scheme comprising 9.5 percent of its issued share capital as announced in February 2005.

The FirstRand Staff Assistance Trust was part of this overall scheme," the statement read.

"The scheme was formed for the benefit of black South African employees of the FirstRand Group. By definition, the BEE scheme was limited to Black, Indian, Coloured and Chinese employees (as defined by the Financial Sector Charter)."

The purpose of the staff assistance trust was to support the needs of black, Indian, coloured and Chinese employees in education and health care.

Access to the funds was based on a "needs analysis" and evaluated by trustees to ensure the scheme achieved its upliftment objectives.

The November 9 to 13 issue of TreeTalk tells employees that if they are struggling to meet the demands of rising education costs, "then we may just have some good news for you".

"FNB is commit[t]ed to ensuring education for all, and as part of this initiative, offers financial assistance to black employees (as defined by the FirstRand staff BEE Scheme: African, Indian, Coloured and Chinese) earning R100,000 or less per annum."

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