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Dear Professor Makgoba

**ASHWIN DESAI – PROMOTE ROBUST ACADEMIC DEBATE AND ACTION**

I have learnt through the media of the banning of Ashwin Desai from employment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My attention has also been drawn to the open letter to you from the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa.

I am shocked and worried about the banning of Dr. Desai.

Even though he is a personal friend, I have often found myself in strenuous disagreement with the positions taken and the arguments elaborated by Dr. Ashwin Desai. But, I can find no justification for banning him from employment.

Desai is an academic committed to social justice and rigorous research. Academic freedom is critical to foster diversity of ideas, opinions and democracy. Democrats on our continent have a special duty to affirm this principle. Often African academics have anguished in jail or exile for their opinions and commitment to justice. Many fear to speak the truth or to publish research that offends because they might lose their jobs or research grants.

Indeed your own interventions against the AIDS denialism in our government stand as an important example of academics who voice views that are uncomfortable for people in power and institutions.

The employment ban on Ashwin Desai also violates his constitutional right to academic freedom. If the ban is allowed to stand a precedent will have been set that could well do major damage to our hard won democracy in years to come.

I trust that the ban will be revoked at the soonest opportunity. I hope you and the University of KwaZulu-Natal have a productive and fulfilling 2006.

Yours faithfully

Zackie Achmat  
**TAC CHAIRPERSON**