

Communique

Planet Earth Institute Foundation - AGF PhD Programme

In the light of an article published in L'Express on 30th November 2016, the Chief Executive Officer of the Planet Earth Institute Foundation, Mr. Mauricio Fernandes, wishes to make the following clarifications:

The Planet Earth Institute (PEI Foundation) Mauritius was launched in November 2015. In April of this year 2016, the Foundation announced the launch of HE Ameenah Gurib-Fakim PhD Scholarship Programme, which awards funded research placements to Mauritian researchers in the fields of energy; agri-business; health; water & sanitation and blue skies research. The Programme was accordingly launched with the support of the African Academy of Sciences and a number of world class universities in the United Kingdom and Africa.

The pilot Programme was launched in July 2016 and constitutes of 10 Scholarships to Mauritian researchers, with the commitment of \$1,000,000 USD. Ten candidates were selected on merit and allocated a grant to complete the PhD Programme in the above mentioned themes and preferably in African Universities.

The newspaper article insinuates that since the launch of the PhD Programme, the universities which are now being offered for placements to the Awardees are not those originally advertised. Following protracted negotiations for four months, the Foundation managed to secure placements for the Awardees at the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria and the University KwaZulu-Natal and the Awardees were kept informed all throughout the process.

These are leading academic institutions on the continent. Other partner universities such as Cambridge and Edinburgh have also been identified, on the condition that there would be co-funding of the placements, given the high cost involved of study in such institutions. Unfortunately, co-funding did not materialise. Negotiations are ongoing with these partner universities.

In the circumstance, the Foundation, in fulfillment of its charitable objectives and its commitment to support the Mauritian researchers, was under the obligation to turn to the top African universities, including South Africa.

However, the recent hugely disruptive events in South Africa, including violence, student riots and demonstrations, has made us rethink this strategy. The safety and security of the Mauritian researchers remains and will continue to remain our top priority.

Again, taking into account the security risk and severity of the situation in South Africa and the lack of co-funding from the UK universities, the Planet Earth Institute had to, in a short span of time, identify appropriate and reputable universities, to keep the commitment of starting the Programme in early 2017, in the larger interest of the students' interests.

On 23rd November 2016, the Awardees were convened by the Foundation and were informed, in a one to one meeting, of the prevailing circumstances and were in total transparency given at least three options to pursue their research in their areas of interests. These options were identified in consultation with the African Academy of Sciences and include the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, the Nelson Mandela Institute of Science and Technology in Tanzania and sandwich programmes with other Southern African universities should the security situation improve. The Foundation also secured opportunities in marine science, in the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, one of the world-leading universities in this area.

The Planet Earth Institute Foundation would like to reaffirm that following the meeting, seven out of ten students have already accepted the proposals offered, and are now preparing their academic registration. In this regard, it is opportune to quote the messages that the Foundation has received this morning following the publication of the above mentioned article in L'Express today.

QUOTE 1: “As a recipient of the said scholarship, I wish to disassociate myself with the contents of the article. I have been in constant communication with PEI regarding my application process for a seat in University and I wish to confirm that my application is in progress.”

QUOTE 2: “I wish to applaud the excellent initiative of the Planet Earth Institutes for working out excellent opportunities for the PhD programme. This is an excellent opportunity for me and I think this programme will fully meet my expectations as a PhD student.”

Regarding the insinuation about the selection process for five Awardees to attend the Grand Challenges meeting in London in October this year, the Foundation would like to clarify that the whole exercise was overseen by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as hosts of the event, based on the research areas being aligned with the themes of the event.

The Planet Earth Institute Foundation wishes to reiterate that, despite the wrong perceptions and unwarranted confusion that the article in question has created, the Foundation remains fully committed to the successful implementation of the AGF PhD Scholarship Programme as well as achieving the scientific independence of Africa through the generation of 10,000 PhDs within the next ten years.

Mauricio Fernandes

Mr Mauricio Fernandes
Chief Executive Officer
Planet Earth Institute Foundation

press@pei-foundation.mu