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Rwandan student fights to avoid deportation from SA

Fanisa Masia

Time is running out for a University of KwaZulu-Natal doctoral student who could soon be declared a prohibited immigrant and be deported.

Seth Hakizimana, a PhD entomology student, helps undergraduates at the university with their studies.

His assistance has seen the pass rate increase from 16% to 86%, he says.

Entomology is the study of insects although the term is often expanded to include other creepy crawlies.

He is a refugee from Rwanda and is recognised as such in Zambia but in June next year the Zambian government will be cancelling Hakizimana's refugee status, which will make him a prohibited person in South Africa.

This will be a blow to the university since he helps about 300 undergraduate students with their work and also to prepare them for exams.

The initiative to help students started in 2010 and has since been expanded to providing three-hour weekend workshops aimed at motivating pupils at Sinevuso secondary school.

"My hope is that the authorities can grant me permanent residence so that I can maintain this initiative," he said.

He said conditions were bad in Rwanda and he may face detention or harassment as he is "someone who speaks his mind".

UKZN's Pietermaritzburg campus has written to the department of home affairs requesting them to grant Hakizimana permanent residence in South Africa.

In a letter addressed to the home affairs minister, UKZN's deputy dean of students, Khanyisile Nyembezi, described Hakizimana as a valuable asset to the university who has demonstrated his skills in assisting undergraduates.

"The university believes that these testimonials will satisfactorily demonstrate Mr Hakizimana's extraordinary valuable and scarce skills, hence qualifying him for a permanent residence permit," said the letter.

Academic co-ordinator for undergraduate studies at the university's school of life sciences, Dr Terry Everson, said that she had helped Hakizimana with his application for permanent residence.

"We submitted the initial letter directly to (then minister) Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in 2009," said Everson.

Everson said they had since written to the department several times but haven't had a response.

Home Affairs spokesperson Lunga Ngqengelele said that they will have to investigate the issue.

"In the meantime, we would need details of the person in question, passport number, and reference number as well as contact details," said Ngqengelele.