

PRESS STATEMENT

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CSO, SOAI Faults UNN/UNEC's ₦30,000 Development Fee and Denial of Students' Exam Access, Calls for Reversal, and Publication of Budget Breakdown Justifying the Levy.

...says education is a right, not a privilege; urges FG to caution UNN authorities.

Education is not merely a service; it is a fundamental human right. Every child, every youth, deserves equitable access to learning, regardless of socioeconomic status. This principle becomes more urgent when educational institutions wield financial burdens that exclude, intimidate, or punish students to the extent of denying them access to writing exams.

It is with deep concern and moral urgency that Speak Out Africa Initiative (SOAI) condemned the recent developments at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC) surrounding the imposition of a compulsory ₦30,000 developmental fee. Reports indicating that students, especially in the Faculties of Medical Sciences, Basic Medical Sciences, Health Sciences, and Dentistry, were barred from writing their examinations for failure to pay this levy strike at the heart of justice, fairness, and the right to education.

We, SOAI, unequivocally fault these actions and call on university authorities, honorable minister of Education, and oversight bodies to intervene swiftly. Our following statements represent both our principled stance and concrete demands for redress.

Our Statement of Concern & Condemnation are as follows:

Unjust Imposition of Additional Fee

Students allege—and video evidence supports—that they were coerced into paying an extra ₦30,000 developmental levy despite having already paid mandated school fees. In a country beset by inflation, unemployment, and hardship, such additional charges are not just burdensome, they are an affront to dignity. The term used by protesting students—“daylight extortion” resonates strongly because it captures the moral wrong of levying fees beyond agreed terms without justification.

Denial of Access to Examinations

The cruel act of preventing students from writing exams due to failure to pay the levy announced in less than three (3) weeks is particularly egregious. Once a student meets the existing tuition and fee requirements, barring them from exams constitutes a breach of contract, a violation of their rights, and an academic injustice. No student should lose academic progress or suffer institutional punishment under such conditions.

Lack of Fair Representation and Due Process

The committee that approved this fee met on 22 September 2025 comprised 14 persons, of which only **one** represented the student body (the SUG President). Such a 1:13 ratio cannot ensure fairness, equity, or accountability. Decisions of this magnitude demand wide stakeholder consultation not rush implementation. That the fee was enforced within days of the committee's meeting reveals an insensitive, hasty process disconnected from students' lived realities.

Economic Hardship on Students and Families

Nigerian households already operate under severe economic stress: food insecurity, rising fuel costs (PMS), inflation, and fragile livelihoods. Imposing an extra ₦30,000 burden on families, many of whom may barely cover minimal expenses, is cruel and unjust. For many, this amount can mean choosing between education and basic survival.

Erosion of Trust and Institutional Legitimacy

The integrity and credibility of Nigeria's premier universities rest not on revenue streams but on fair governance, accountability, and commitment to students' welfare. These actions harm institutional reputation and deepen the divide between university leadership and student communities. Furthermore, it is bizarre that a government pushes the responsibility of rebuilding its educational institution as claimed by the school management on the already impoverished and multi-dimensionally poor students who are only trying to survive – this is unthinkable.

In addition, the legal, moral, and human rights premise upon which UNN actions is condemnable are as follows:

1. Right to Education

Nigeria's Constitution, international covenants to which Nigeria is a signatory (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), and national education policies all affirm the right to education. Any policy or practice that obstructs or penalizes students for inability to pay extra fees is inconsistent with these commitments.

2. Contractual Obligation

When students register and pay their mandated fees, the institution enters into a contractual agreement: that students will have access to lectures, assessments, and examinations. Unilateral imposition of extra financial demands breaches that contract and undermines trust.

3. Procedural Fairness & Administrative Justice

Decisions affecting student welfare must abide by principles of fairness, transparency, due process, and meaningful representation. The absence of broad stakeholder consultation in imposing this levy violates these administrative principles and undermines accountability.

4. Equity and Non-Discrimination

Education must not discriminate or exclude. Punishing students who often come from underprivileged backgrounds for inability to pay additional levies is akin to exclusion. It entrenches inequality rather than dismantling it.

In light of the above, SOAI demands the following immediate remedies and recommendation:

1. Immediate Reversal & Cancellation of the ₦30,000 Fee

- The developmental levy must be fully and immediately rescinded.
- Any funds already collected should be refunded or converted into non-monetary value where appropriate.
- No student should be penalized, denied exams, or face academic consequences for non-payment of this fee.

2. Reinstatement of Affected Students

All students barred from examinations particularly the Nursing students must be restored, allowed to write without prejudice, and given equitable treatment. The institution must publicly affirm their academic rights.

3. Public Apology & Accountability

- The Vice Chancellor, **Professor Simon Uchenna Ortuanya**, should publicly disavow this policy, reconnect with student confidence, and commit to remedying this breach of trust.
- University management must explain how this policy was conceived, who authorized it, and how they intend to prevent recurrence.

4. Inclusive Dialogues on University Finance & Fee Policies

A new, representative forum—including students, faculty, administrative staff, civil society, and parents—must be established to review and design fair, transparent fee structures. Future fee changes should not bypass consultation, especially where students' welfare is at stake.

5. Oversight by Government & Human Rights Institutions

- The **Federal Ministry of Education** and associated regulatory bodies should intervene actively.
- The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** must investigate possible breaches of students' human rights and ensure accountability.
- University senates, academic boards, and internal audit functions must review past fee decisions rigorously.

3.6 Institutional Safeguards & Reform

- Any future “developmental levies” must be justified, transparent, and subject to oversight.
- A student welfare fund or means-based waiver scheme should be instituted such that students with genuine inability to pay are protected.
- University management should demonstrate fiscal accountability by publishing budget breakdowns and justifying development expenditures.

Broader Implications & Call to Action

This incident is not isolated—it is symptomatic of a broader trend in higher education where financial burdens are increasingly shifted to students under opaque schemes. Unless challenged, this will discourage access, deepen inequality, and demoralize students aspiring to professional careers, particularly in critical sectors like healthcare.

It is imperative for every stakeholder, parents, academia, civil society, media, and government—to unite in defense of educational rights. Universities must remember that their *raison d'être* is the advancement of knowledge, not revenue extraction from vulnerable youth.

SOAI stands ready to collaborate with student groups, policy makers, and oversight bodies to monitor implementation of fair reforms, support legal recourse where needed, and promote a higher education ecosystem grounded in justice, equity, and public service.

Conclusion

The imposition of a ₦30,000 developmental fee at UNEC, especially when used as leverage to deny exam access, is an affront to educational justice. We call on UNN/UNEC management to reverse this decision immediately, restore affected students, and commit to transparent, consultative policies. The right to education is not negotiable nor is the dignity of students.

Issued in Abuja by:

Speak Out Africa Initiative (SOAI) and other concerned CSOs on Educational Reforms



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Honorable Minister of Education

House Committee Chairman on Tertiary & Higher Institution

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Executive Secretary, National University commission (NUC)

Chairman, Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC)

Chairman Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC)

National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS)

Student Union Government (SUG), UNN

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#PublishBudgetBreakdown

#Education4ALL

UNNstopExtorsion