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Muslim to sit on Christian council

By DAN DHLAMINI

POTCHEFSTROOM Mayor Ebrahim Sooliman – a Muslim – made history this week when he took his seat at a predominantly Christian university council, amid strong objections from the Gereformeerde Kerk.

Dr Sooliman was among those who were appointed three months ago by Education Minister Sibusiso Bhengu to serve on the conservative Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education (Puche) 17-person council. But Dr Sooliman's nomination hit snags when white Christians countrywide objected.

The university received numerous letters of objection, saying that the appointment of a non-Christian would reflect negatively on the university's Christian character.

Despite the objections, Dr Sooliman's appointment was confirmed last Thursday.

Sooliman, a medical practitioner, will serve on the council for four years.

He shot into the limelight last year after he was appointed mayor by members of the Potchefstroom Transitional Local Council.

"I respect the Christian character of the university and I have no objections to it so long as it does not discriminate against others. I will not withdraw just because some people want me to," said Sooliman.

A statement from the office of Professor Carools Reinecke said the council reaffirmed the varsity's Christian character.

"It was clear from Dr Sooliman's viewpoint that he respected the Christian character of the university and the activities of the council would in no way be affected," said the statement.

Potchefstroom Gereformeerde Kerk's dominee Callie Coetzee, who lodged the objection with the university, could not be reached for comment this week.

But Coetzee was earlier quoted as saying that his church council and the curators of the Theology School would discuss the matter again in November.