



DEPARTMENT
International Department
ADMINISTRATOR
Leif Isaksson

DATE
12 April, 2023

Cleopas Siphon Dlamini,
Prime Minister,
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Eswatini
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State repression against trade unionists and the murder of trade union and human rights lawyer, Thulani Maseko in Eswatini

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) representing 1.2 million workers in Sweden, we condemn the brutal killing of trade union and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko on 21 January 2023 in your country. We also condemn the continued intimidation, assault, harassment, arrests of trade union officials, the extra-judicial killings of more than 80 protesters since June 2021 and the banning of public gatherings.

Mr Prime Minister, we also note with regret that on 11 January 2023, the name of Sticks Nkambule, the Secretary General of the Swaziland Transport, Communication and Allied Workers Union (SWATCAWU), was published by the police as a wanted person for alleged criminal conduct. This follows the union's announcement of a 'job stay away, 13-14 December 2022 with a demand to improve wages and working conditions of the workers.

Furthermore, we are also alarmed by the security forces' disruption of a trade union workshop at the Global Village Guest hotel on 18 November 2022. On 11 November, Kayise Qwabe a former national executive member of the Swaziland Communication Workers Union (SCWU) was seriously injured following the shooting at her car by security forces, and on 17 November 2022, Denzel Maziya, a student from John Wesley High School was tortured by security forces.

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The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

We are also concerned by the withdrawal without justification of the salary of Mbongwa Dlamini, President of the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) in October 2022. He has since been forced into hiding/exile. Earlier in April 2022, Mbongwa's home was attacked by security forces with live bullets. Your government has also threatened to stop the collection and remittance of trade union subscriptions for SNAT members and has already refused a check-off system for its new members.

We are shocked to learn that your government banned public gatherings in October 2021 and continues to defy a court order that lifted the ban in February 2022. The security forces deployed around the country continue to use brutal force against citizens who are conducting their business. The situation is akin to an undeclared state of emergency.

We recall the events of October 2021 in which public sector workers were also brutalised by the security forces on their way to hand over a petition demanding a living wage. Scores of others were injured after the security forces fired tear gas canisters onto the bus they boarded while others were attacked with rubber bullets.

Mr Prime Minister, the above incidents indicate a worrying trend of rights abuses and a lack of respect for the rule of law, civil liberties and human rights in your country which is contrary to your obligations under ILO Convention 87. We are deeply concerned that the climate of fear and violence is aimed at preventing trade unionists and human rights defenders from exercising their trade union and human rights. Furthermore, these attacks continue despite your government's and the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland's (TUCOSWA) agreement to submit such disputes for mediation through the ILO under Case No. 3425 pending before the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.

We reiterate that workers and trade unions calling for democracy is in line with the legitimate expectations of your obligations under ILO Convention 87. We recall that the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) "...considered that a system of democracy is fundamental for the free exercise of trade union rights."¹ and that 'a genuinely free and independent trade union movement can only develop where fundamental human rights are respected'.

Prime Minister, we demand an end to the ongoing intimidation, extrajudicial killings, threats of arrests, raids, and unprovoked brutal beatings of workers and others engaged in the exercise of civil liberties and the release of those arrested and in detention. We demand an independent judicial investigation under the international supervision to bring the perpetrators to justice.

¹ See ILO CFA 2018 digest at para 69-71

We urge your government to immediately speed up the ILO-initiated mediation process and engage in meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders to address the pressing issues that face your nation.

Yours sincerely,
The Swedish Trade Union Confederation – LO



Susanna Gideonsson
President

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