

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: AFR 55/2001/2015

01 July 2015

Swaziland: Release of journalist and human rights lawyer long overdue

The release of journalist Bhekithemba Makhubu and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko from prison is a victory for human rights and freedom of expression in Africa's last remaining absolute monarchy, Amnesty International said today.

Bhekithemba Makhubu and Thulani Maseko, whom Amnesty International regard as prisoners of conscience, were released on 30 June 2015 after the State conceded that it had no case against them. The Swaziland Supreme Court ordered their release.

Amnesty International believes that the two should have never spent a night in jail from the beginning.

The two men had been in prison since March 2014 and were serving a two year sentence for contempt of court, after a blatantly unfair trial.

They were sentenced to two years imprisonment that arose from two articles published in *The Nation* magazine in February 2014 in which they had raised concerns about the lack of judicial independence and impartiality in Swaziland. The sentence against the magazine and the company was also overturned on 30 June 2015.

During their trial last year, there was a clear conflict of interest as the presiding judge, Mpendulo Simelane, had been named in one of the articles. Also, prior to the judgment being handed down in court, the Minister of Justice at the time, Sibusiso Shongwe, reportedly had a meeting with the judge in his chambers.

Amnesty International has been calling for their immediate and unconditional release since March 2014. The organisation had also campaigned against previous politically motivated charges brought against them.

The human rights organisation also continues to be concerned about the ongoing detention of political prisoners, Mario Masuku and Maxwell Dlamini, who have been in custody since May 2014. They are held under charges brought against them under the Suppression of Terrorism Act and the 1938 Sedition and Subversive Activities Ac. Both laws violate the principle of legality and are used by the government to crush freedom of expression and association. Their appeal against denial of bail will be heard on 14 July 2015 by the Supreme Court.

Public Document
