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Fear for safety

14 July 1995

SWAZILAND

Jan Sithole, trade union leader

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Jan Sithole, the secretary general of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU), has received anonymous telephoned death threats during July 1995. The threats have occurred in the context of increasing tension between the government and the unions.

There have been a number of disturbing incidents during the past year indicating that Jan Sithole's life is under threat. In August 1994, during a strike by sugar cane plantation workers, the police detained him for about 5 hours. During January 1995 he received a number of telephoned death threats, in which the caller said that his days were numbered if he continued to frustrate and challenge the authorities. The following month three men in plain clothes came to his home one night looking for him. He was not at home. After waiting for about 30 minutes the men left in vehicle which carried the police emblem on its doors. A witness noticed that one of the men had a gun concealed inside his jacket. The phonenumber to the house had also been cut.

At 1 am on 3 June 1995 the police came to his home and handed him a letter from the Chief Immigration Officer ordering him to surrender his passport after he returned from a trip abroad where he was to attend an International Labour Office (ILO) conference. Following his return to Swaziland, he was summoned to appear before the Citizenship Board to be questioned about his nationality. The government claimed that he was a Mozambican and were threatening to deport him. The hearing before the Citizenship Board was postponed until 20 July 1995.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Unionised workers in Swaziland announced on 9 July 1995 that they will embark on a national "mass stayaway" on 17 July unless the government accedes to "27 demands" which the trade unions submitted to the government in 1993. They include issues relating to unfair labour practices, work conditions and wider societal concerns including the harassment of journalists. During the past year there have been a number of strikes and stayaways called over the government's failure to respond to the "27 demands", and more recently over a draft Labour Relations Bill which will add new restrictions on freedom of association. Political parties are still banned in Swaziland and the trade unions have increasingly been forced into a position of articulating more widespread opposition to government policies.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Jan Sithole, secretary general of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, who has received anonymous telephoned death threats as a consequence of his trade union activities;
- expressing concern that these threats appear to be part of a pattern which have included arbitrary detention by the police and surveillance by armed men who may be acting with the acquiescence of the police;
- urging the authorities to order an impartial investigation into these abuses and to bring the perpetrators to justice promptly;
- urging the government to ensure that the rights of non-violent freedom of expression and association are fully respected.

**APPEALS TO**

Head of Government  
HRH Prince Mbilini  
Prime Minister's Office  
PO Box 395  
MBABANE, SWAZILAND  
**Faxes: +268 43943**  
**Telexes: 2276**  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Mbabane, Swaziland**  
**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration  
Rt. Hon. Prince Sobandla  
PO Box 432  
Mbabane, Swaziland  
**Faxes: +268 42669**  
**Telexes: 2036 WD**  
**Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister, Mbabane, Swaziland**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

- Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, Headquarters, PO Box 1158 Manzini Swaziland

- The Editor, *Times of Swaziland*, PO Box 156, Mbabane, Swaziland

and to diplomatic representatives of Swaziland accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 August 1995.