

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS AT RISK IN SWAZILAND

Since 6 September, human rights defenders, trade unionists and political activists in Swaziland have been arbitrarily detained, harassed and intimidated, as the authorities tried to disrupt two days of planned pro-democracy demonstrations. There are fears of continuing human rights violations following these demonstrations.

On the afternoon of 6 September, police broke up a peaceful meeting of activists in the country's largest city, Manzini. A broad coalition of activists had been meeting to finalize plans for two days of pro-democracy demonstrations scheduled for 7 and 8 September. Nearly 50 activists were arrested, including human rights defenders, lawyers, trade unionists, and political activists. Police also arrested at least one journalist covering the event and assaulted a human rights defender who was taking photos of the police actions.

Most of those arrested were released without charge within hours. However, visiting South African trade unionists among the group were deported. Items confiscated following the arrest, including a laptop computer, have not been returned. One political activist among the group, **Sikhumbuzo Phakathi**, was released but then re-arrested again later that evening. He has been detained without charge since then at Hluti police station, in a remote rural area south of Manzini. Amnesty International regards his detention as unlawful.

The demonstration by civil society organizations and political activists took place in Manzini, as planned, on 7 September. But prior to the march, police officers searched the office of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions, one of the organizers of the demonstration, confiscated material and deported a further 15 South African trade unionists. During the march, police maintained a heavily armed and intimidating presence, along with members of the military, conducted searches at road blocks throughout the country and detained at least one key political activist to stop him from participating.

Amnesty International is concerned that demonstrators are at risk of further human rights violations during and following another pro-democracy demonstration planned for 8 September in the country's capital city, Mbabane.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Expressing concern at the arbitrary detention of trade unionists, civil society activists and others and the breakup of peaceful meetings from 6 September prior to the planned demonstrations;
- Calling on the authorities to respect the rights of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and to cease all harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrests of non-violent activists campaigning for political reform and human rights;
- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all activists who have been arbitrarily detained, including Sikhumbuzo Phakathi, and remind the authorities of the absolute prohibition on torture and other forms of ill-treatment under international law.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

Prime Minister

Dr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini

P O Box 395,

Mbabane,

Swaziland,

Fax: +268 404 3943

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Commissioner of Police

Mr Isaac Magagula

The Royal Swaziland Police Service,

P.O. Box 49,

Mbabane H100

Swaziland

Fax: +268 404 4545

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. **Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.**

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Political activists, human rights defenders and trade unionists have been harassed, threatened, ill-treated and detained by the Swaziland police over the past year, including under draconian counter-terror legislation.

In June and early July 2010, dozens of human rights defenders, trade unionists and political activists were harassed, ill-treated or detained as the authorities investigated a spate of government-targeted petrol bombings. Testimony and other information received by Amnesty International at the time indicated that several political activists had been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment during interrogation. The searches and interrogations of high profile human rights defenders and trade unionists appeared deliberately intended to intimidate and undermine their lawful advocacy work.

On the morning of 1 May 2010, a group of political activists were arrested at a May Day workers rally in Manzini. They were taken to Manzini Regional Police Headquarters where they were held for several hours. Most were released later that day without charge in what appeared to have been an effort to keep them away from the rally. However, one of the men arrested at the rally, 35 year old Sipho Jele, was not released that day and died in suspicious circumstances in prison on or around 4 May. An inquest that was established to investigate the cause of death is expected to conclude its findings before the end of the year.

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