

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

11 March 1997

LESOTHO Candi Ramainoane, newspaper editor

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Candi Ramainoane, the editor-in-chief of the privately owned Sesotho language newspaper *MoAfrika*, after a series of suspicious incidents at his home and office which have followed criticisms of his journalism by members of the government.

At about 9.45pm on 7 March 1997, after Candi Ramainoane had returned home, he became aware that his car was being tampered with outside his house. He saw five men in plain clothes, several of whom were standing guard at his door while others were pushing the car towards the gate. The journalist used his licensed pistol to fire two shots in the air and the men fled. He called the Maseru police station and officers arrived within 30 minutes to investigate. To date no-one has been arrested. There are fears that, in the context of a pattern of harassment against Candi Ramainoane, the incident was not a simple case of attempted robbery.

The incident came several days after Candi Ramainoane had been publicly criticized by the Minister of Information for his reports on the ruling Basotholand Congress Party's (BCP's) annual general conference on 1 March 1997. Candi Ramainoane, who is a correspondent for the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service*, the *South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)*, and *Agence France Presse (AFP)*, reported that the conference had resolved to remove Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhele from his position as party leader. In the following days government officials accused him of having reported that the BCP "dismissed" the prime minister as party leader. They further alleged that the journalist had been implicated in a recent attempted coup and described him as an "anarchist", an opponent of peace and someone from whom the "entire nation" should distance themselves. On 4 March the SABC broadcast a discussion between Candi Ramainoane and the Lesotho government Minister of Information, Mr Monyane Moleleki. The Minister repeated the allegations against the reporter and stated that he "is knocking on the prison door".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Other recent disturbing incidents indicate a pattern of harassment against Candi Ramainoane. On 18 September 1996 he was summoned before a parliamentary committee and accused of "negative reporting" on the government. On 20 September, some 10 men came to his office in Maseru looking for him. He was not there. According to his colleagues, the men insulted them, scattered papers about, threatened them and said that they would kill Candi Ramainoane for his negative reporting of the government. His colleagues identified a number of the men, including a BCP Youth League member and a person said to be working in a bank next to the police station. Candi Ramainoane reported the incident that day at the Maseru police station. Several days later, when no action had been taken by the police, the journalist returned to the police station. The police told him that they had not opened a case file as they assumed that he would not be pursuing the matter. He replied that he expected the police to do their job of investigating a crime reported to them. To date the identified perpetrators have not been apprehended.

On 5 August 1996 a directive was sent out by the Government Secretary to all government departments instructing them to ensure that all ministries, government institutions and parastatals avoid placing advertisements in

MoAfrica "because of the negative stance this paper has adopted towards the Government". A number of government ministers have also instituted defamation proceedings against Candi Ramainoane arising from his reports on the shooting of workers at the Lesotho Highlands Water Project worksite at Butha-Buthe on 14 September 1996 (UA 228/96, AFR 33/02/96, 27 September), and have also sought a court order restraining Ramainoane from publishing *MoAfrica*.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of journalist Candi Ramainoane, noting the incident of 7 March 1997 and the threats against him on 20 September 1996;
- expressing concern that public statements by government officials, including by the Minister of Information on 4 March 1997, attacking Candi Ramainoane for his reporting creates the suspicion that these incidents are politically-motivated and officially inspired;
- recalling that Lesotho has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes Article 19 guaranteeing the freedom to inform and be informed, and similarly the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which includes Article 9(2) guaranteeing freedom of expression and dissemination of information;
- recalling also that, under Article 14(1) of the Constitution of Lesotho, every person shall enjoy freedom of expression, including the freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference;
- urging the authorities to ensure that those responsible for the threats against the safety and life of Candi Ramainoane are brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 527, Maseru 100, Lesotho
Fax: +266 310 444
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Maseru, Lesotho
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Monyane Moleleki
Minister of Information and Broadcasting
PO Box 36, Maseru 100, Lesotho
Telegrams: Information Minister, Maseru, Lesotho
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Pakalitha Mosisili
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs
PO Box 174, Maseru 100, Lesotho
Fax: +266 310 444 and +266 310 319
Telegrams: Deputy Prime Minister, Maseru, Lesotho
Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

- Mr M K Tsekoa, Government Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 527, Maseru 100, Lesotho. Fax: +266 310 102
- Lesotho Council of NGOs, Private Bag A445, Maseru 100, Lesotho
- The Law Society of Lesotho, PO Box 478, Maseru 100, Lesotho
- Transformation Resource Centre, PO Box 1388, Maseru 100, Lesotho

and to diplomatic representatives of Lesotho accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 April 1997.