

URGENT ACTION

SWAZILAND GOVERNMENT CONDONES ABUSE

The Swazi government appears to have condoned human rights violations of activists that took place between 6 and 8 September. Activists remain at risk as the security forces seem to have been granted additional licence to silence "dissent".

Between 6 and 8 September, human rights defenders, trade unionists and political activists in Swaziland were arbitrarily detained, assaulted and intimidated, as security forces disrupted two days of pro-democracy demonstrations. In seeking to crush planned protest marches, the security forces conducted mass arrests with no legal basis. They held human rights defenders, political opposition leaders and foreign trade union officials in unlawful detention. They seized camera equipment, threatened and detained one journalist and assaulted another. Those arrested were all released without charge, most within a few hours. Some of the arrests appear to have been designed to intimidate activists, disrupt planning meetings and keep organisers away from the demonstrations. About 30 civil society activists who were visiting from abroad to support their colleagues in Swaziland were deported over the course of the three days.

On 8 September, in a demonstration in the capital city, Mbabane, two trade union officials and a political opposition leader were assaulted and briefly detained by the police. One of the trade unionists was beaten by police officers who dragged and pushed him into an armoured vehicle. The political activist had his jacket torn to pieces as some 30 police attempted to pull him out of a protective crowd and throw him into the same vehicle. He was verbally threatened by the same police officer who, 12 months previously, had allegedly abducted and tortured him.

Instead of holding the security forces accountable, the government appears to have condoned their actions and encouraged further violations of national and international law by suggesting that torture be used to silence opposition voices. Prime Minister Sibusiso Dlamini, who is also the Minister of Police, is reported as stating at a press conference on 8 September that torture involving beatings on the soles of the feet should be considered to punish meddlesome foreigners and dissidents.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Expressing concern at the arbitrary detention and assault of trade unionists, civil society activists and others by police between 6 and 8 September prior to and during two days of planned and lawful demonstrations;
- Expressing concern at that statements made by the Prime Minister which appear to suggest that torture should be considered to punish foreigners and dissidents in Swaziland and calling for an unequivocal statement denouncing the use of torture, which is a crime under international human rights law;
- Appeal for those responsible for human rights violations between 6 and 8 September to be brought to justice, and for the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and peaceful demonstrators to cease.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

Prime Minister

Dr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini

P O Box 395,

Mbabane,

Swaziland,

Fax: +268 404 3943

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the 1st update of UA 194/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR55/003/2010/en>

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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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