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ESWATINI JUSTICE FOR KILLING OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

Thulani Maseko was a courageous human rights defender, lawyer and state critic who refused to turn a blind eye to the government's oppression of the people of Eswatini. On January 21, he was shot and killed by unknown gunmen at his home in Luyengo, Mbabane. The Eswatini authorities must promptly, thoroughly, impartially, independently, transparently and effectively investigate the killing and bring to justice anyone suspected to be responsible. The victim and his family must be provided with access to justice and effective remedies.

Although the motive behind his killing remains unclear, Amnesty International has reason to believe that he was attacked in relation to his work as a human rights lawyer and defender as he regularly stood up against the state's abuse of power, including what many see as the mismanagement of the country's resources, and called for the authorities to prioritize national development. Prior to his death, he chaired the Multi-Stakeholders Forum, a group of political parties and civil society groups calling for democratic reform in the country. He has previously been targeted by the state for demanding justice and criticizing the country's judiciary.

The day before Thulani Maseko was killed, King Mswati III reportedly said in a public address that those who are calling for democratic reform in the country would be "dealt with".

Write to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs urging her to:

- ensure that the unlawful killing of Thulani Maseko is promptly, thoroughly, impartially, independently, transparently and effectively investigated and that anyone suspected to be responsible is brought to justice in a fair trial.
- ensure that the victim and his family are provided with access to justice and effective remedies.

Write to:

Hon. Pholile Dlamini-Shakantu
Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
927 Mhlambanyatsi, Usuthu Link Road
5th Floor, Mbabane
Swaziland
Email: ps@justice.gov.sz / pholile@swazilaw.com

And copy:

Embassy of the Kingdom of Eswatini
1712 New Hampshire Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C., DC 20009
United States of America
Tel: (202) 234-5002
Email: embassy@swaziland-usa.com

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2014, Thulani Maseko was sentenced to two years in prison, alongside veteran news editor Bhekithemba Makhubu, for contempt of court after publicly criticizing what they perceived as the judiciary's lack of independence and integrity. Amnesty International had declared him a Prisoner of Conscience.

Thulani Maseko's killing follows a spate of attacks on opposition leaders and pro-democracy activists, all of whom have been challenging the monarch and demanding political reform in the country since May 2021, including through nationwide protests. In response to the demonstrations, the government launched a brutal crackdown on human rights activism. Some politicians have been jailed merely for being suspected of joining calls for political reform.

Penuel and Xolile Malinga have been attacked three times in the last year only. Penuel is the National Organizer of the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), the biggest political party in Eswatini. His wife Xolile Dlamini-Malinga is the President of the same party's Women's league. In April 2022, Penuel and Xolile Malinga's home was reportedly petrol bombed by suspected state agents. In October 2022, 4 armed men invaded their home and fired over 48 bullets inside the bedroom and went on to burn the family car. The last attack was in January 2023, in which 35 bullets were fired into their bedroom by unknown people.

Maxwell Nkambule survived an assassination attempt in December 2022 after he was shot at while in his car. He opened a case at the police station and they never followed up with an investigation. Muzi Mmema was not as fortunate. He was abducted from his home on the night of December 27, 2022 and was found dead the following day several kilometers from his home with two bullet wounds on his chest.

Please take action at your earliest convenience!