



Press Release:Eswatini: No investigation opened a month after the murder of Thulani Maseko.

Addis Ababa — February 27, 2023. It has been exactly five weeks since prominent lawyer and human rights activist Thulani Maseko was murdered in Eswatini in front of his wife and two children, causing the world to wake up and become aware of the flagrant violations of human rights that are committed in the last absolute monarchy in Africa. This tragic event was the subject of a plethora of condemnations from high personalities including, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), the Namibian President Dr Hage G. Geingob, the President of the Union Commission African Union (AU), Moussa Faki Mahamat and institutions such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), various representatives of special mechanisms at the international and continental levels, as well as a considerable number of civil society actors, leaders and governments around the world. However, it is unlikely that King Mswati III, the government and the violent security apparatus (composed of private military companies that report directly to the king) that he leads will ever heed the many pleas for reason and justice. This situation gave rise to the launch of an extensive petitions campaign through which more than 180 organizations demanded concrete actions from the government of Eswatini.

The petition, a copy of which has been sent to the AU, the UN and several Heads of State and Government, aims to encourage the taking of effective measures to strengthen confidence in the procedure of diligent investigation and translation bring to justice those responsible for the assassination of Thulani Maseko, as well as to guarantee respect for the norms in force which govern and protect the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all African citizens (including those of Eswatini).



“A month after the heinous killing [of Thulani Maseko], the government of Eswatini has taken no action to show any commitment to bringing Thulani’s murder to light. Instead, it has become entangled in inherent contradictions in its tactics of intimidation and threats against defenders of democracy and human rights, as well as entities and individuals who adhere to these values,” the petition reads.

It is reported that some civil society actors and colleagues of Thulani Maseko are intimidated and shadowed on a daily basis by government security agents and mercenaries from private companies serving the king. The petition emphasizes the safety of these people, which is increasingly threatened. Lawyers representing democracy advocates (whom the government labels as terrorists) have been murdered and those lucky enough to escape death face unlawful arrests, intimidation and systematic harassment, which forced to abandon their clients. There is also no sign of the government's intention to relax its grip, especially with regard to all forms of repression of the opposition.

The petitioners made the following demands to the government of Eswatini:

1. Immediately authorize the establishment of a group of international experts who will carry out a thorough, independent and rapid investigation into the circumstances of the assassination of Thulani Maseko.
2. Release all political prisoners and prohibit excessive use of force to disperse protesters, routine arbitrary arrests and killings of peaceful protesters and activists expressing dissenting views.
3. Immediately cancel all contracts and end the policy and practice of recruiting private military companies to suppress protesters and democracy advocates, branding them as terrorists, making them "legitimate targets" to be eliminated.
4. Immediately end the rhetoric of violence against pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders.



Context :

Since June 29, 2021, Eswatini has been plagued by recurrent crises and there are at least one hundred [100] innocent civilians (including school children and women) killed by the army and security forces under the clear orders from the Head of State and Government, His Majesty, King Mswati III. More than 200 citizens have serious injuries and sequelae as a result of gunshot wounds and assaults and more than 700 people are in detention, the majority of whom have no representation, which has as a corollary the explosion in the number of conviction, heavy fines and custodial sentences. The state is inexorably pursuing its policy of targeted assassinations. Protesters are targeted for elimination, as confirmed by a certain Arno Pienaar, who coordinates the Bastion Group, a private security company registered in South Africa, which according to his statements was recruited by King Mswati III for the summary execution of terrorists (pro-democracy activists). Three weeks before Thulani Maseko was removed, two other people were killed by state security forces and their cronies. One was abducted, then found dead in a ditch and the other was chased by a helicopter and shot from the sky. This last practice has become very common, a kind of macabre sport practiced to intimidate the population. This is how diabolical the situation is in Eswatini right now. The June 2021 crisis and the resulting massacres mark the culmination of years of failure to uphold the principles of respecting, protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the African Charter on Human Rights. of Man and Peoples [ACHPR, African Charter]. This policy allowing the commission of murder with impunity was announced by King Mswati III and released four hours before the brutal assassination of Thulani Maseko on January 21, 2023.