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Press statement on the Occasion of the Global Week of Action for Swaziland: ITUC and ITUC-Africa solidarity with working men and women and citizens of Swaziland in their legitimate demand for true multiparty democracy - 6 September, 2012, Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear friends and colleagues from the press,

This is a press statement by leaders of the African regional organisation of the International trade union confederation and our 18 million members who are deeply concerned about the worsening state of democracy, human and trade union rights situations in Swaziland.

We share the conviction that a better world should be built on respect for human rights and democracy. Furthermore, we are mindful and conscious of the rights conferred upon citizens and workers and their organizations, on respect for civil and political freedom, which have been severally pronounced in national and international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The absence of these liberties as it is the unfortunate and present conditions in Swaziland, removes all the meaning from the concept of Human and Trade Union rights, which are essential for normal exercise and enjoyment of rights.

This is more so as the country will today be marking her independence from her former colonial master. Sadly, a sense of internal colonisation continues to fester through the manipulation of culture to the detriment of the people who are yearning for the real gains of self-determination and governance. Indeed, we note that it is parts of this manifestation of cultural manipulation and exploitation that has made Swaziland to remain the last and only absolute Monarchy in Africa, and one of the last ones in the world, to the detriment of its people.

We also note that since 1973, the Emergency Proclamation decree by the King, which will be 40 years old in a few months from now, continues to ban political parties and stifle the spaces for genuine participatory democracy. We are concerned that where popular participatory democracy is absent, trade union rights and other human rights are likely to suffer. The right to freedom of association in Swaziland is suffering and deteriorating as the government continues to outlaw and ban TUCOSWA - the only national trade union centre in that country, as well as outlawing and disrupting all its activities. We condemn these actions as we know that it is the eternal right of workers to associate and form organisations of their choice to further their economic, social and political interests.

We know that the economic situation of Swaziland is in a dire state at the moment, which is a sad reflection of the failing management of the economy by the Tinkhundla system.

A Call for Multiparty Democratic Elections and A People's Government Now! - is a call we recognise and support. We fully and strongly support and re-echo the legitimate and progressive demands of the workers and citizens of Swaziland, which include:

1. The immediate and unconditional unbanning of the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA)
2. For government to enter sincere negotiation with striking workers in the public sector with a view to amicably resolve the industrial crisis, and by so doing stem the worsening hardship on the people brought about by the withdrawal of public services.
3. The immediate unbanning of all political parties, freeing of political prisoners, and the smooth return of all exiles.
4. Due recognition to the Swaziland students' organisation and a cessation to the persecution and prosecution of their President, Maxwell Dlamini.
5. Freedom of expression and opinion and free media
6. An independent judiciary
7. A genuine and all-inclusive political dialogue to end the over 39 years of Tinkhundla system.
8. Put in place a process towards a democratic and all-inclusive interim government to prepare the ground for democratic elections.
9. The introduction of an economic recovery plan to address poverty and hunger, driven by a democratic government and civil society.

We call on the African Union to demonstrate genuine commitment to democracy and human rights as envisioned in the reform priorities of the continental body. We also call on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as the South African government to give real and firm commitment to their prioritization of regional integration through responsible and responsive accountable and democratic government.

We salute the progressive position of the South African government's insistence that the economic R2.4 billion bailout requested by the Swaziland government will only be granted only and until when there is true and genuine democratic reform driven by the Swazi peoples and their organisations. However, we urge them to continue to put all legitimate political, social and economic pressures to achieve the changes the Swazi people desire and need.

Happy anniversary to the progressive forces and citizens of Swaziland just as we commend all progressive forces for their support and solidarity for the Swazi people's struggles.

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