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Your Excellency,

Renewed call for fully-fledged human and trade union rights in Swaziland on the Occasion of the Celebration of the Kingdom's Independence: An Urgent Call on South Africa to act decisively on the side of the Swazi People and Democracy

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) conveys its warm courtesies to the President and people of South Africa and wishes to draw Mr. President's attention to issues connected with the subject matter.

On 6 September, Swaziland commemorates the day it became independent from its colonial rulers and joined the international community as a sovereign country. The ITUC-Africa felicitates the people of the Kingdom and wishes to seize this opportunity to draw the attention of the South African government to a number of issues.

Indeed, it is supposed to be a time of celebrations and back-slapping, unfortunately, the Swazis currently do not have a lot to cheer about. Yes, the country, government and people have just been bailed out from a financial crisis by the people and government of South Africa, which we commend greatly.

However, ITUC-Africa has information provided by its counterparts in the Kingdom that, this bailout package is laced with lots of conditions that will further damage jobs, worsen social protection situation and deepen poverty. Also, sadly, our counterparts had hoped that the South African government will come out clearly and unequivocally on the issue of genuine and urgent democratisation of the Kingdom, but rather conditions on enthroning true and genuine democracy were vaguely made.

Mr. President, ITUC-Africa is convinced that the genuine democratisation of Swaziland is one critical issue at the heart of the financial crisis. We note that the King and the government continue to live a luxurious and ostentatious life-style while the people wallow in poverty and despondency. The absence of effective consultation, participation and avenue for alternative views on sundry issues, coupled with weak transparency in governance led largely to the crisis.

Mr. President, the Swazi people are not celebrating as their lives continue to be marked by a large dose of problems in the field of democratic and human rights. These include extrajudicial killings by security forces, mob killings, the use of torture by the police, beatings and the use of excessive force on detainees, police impunity, arbitrary arrests and lengthy pre-trial detentions, restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and movement, prohibitions on political activity and harassment of political activists, discrimination and violence against women, the harassment of labour leaders, and restrictions on workers' rights. On a number of occasions throughout last year, the police forcibly dispersed demonstrators, which resulted in injuries.

As denounced by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) time and again, trade union rights remain a matter of particular concern in Swaziland. Among many other violations and problems, Swazi trade unions continue to suffer from surveillance of their activities by hired security officers, both at the workplace and outside. They are confronted with the use of workers' councils stacked with employers-picked representatives to prevent genuine workers' representation. Police officers with the rank of sub-inspector or higher have the authority to conduct a search without a warrant. The police enter homes and businesses without judicial authorization.

On 23 June, only five days after the conclusion of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, where the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) deplored the numerous violations of Convention 87 on Freedom of Association in Swaziland, police raided the home of Barnes Dlamini, President of the ITUC-affiliated Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) and an internationally acknowledged and well-respected trade unionist. The search warrant specified the "removal of any bomb-making materials", but during the raid, the police confiscated political literature.

On the occasion of last year's Independence Day, on 6 September 2010, the police dispersed meetings of political and labour activists, detaining and later releasing them. It banned political groups, trade unions and a local journalist from Swaziland and South Africa. Among the labour leaders and activists arrested by the police were Vincent Ncongwane, Secretary General of the Swaziland Federation of Labor (SFL); Wandile Dlodlu, President of the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO); Sikhumbuzo Phakathi, Deputy President of the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO); Sibusiso Lushaba, General Secretary of the Swaziland National Association of Nurses (SNA); Musa Hlophe, head of the Swaziland Coalition of Concerned Civic Organisations (SCCCO); and Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) Country Manager Muzi Masuku.

Furthermore, the police detained five South African trade unionists, including Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Deputy International Relations Secretary Zanele Matebula, and its Head of Campaigns, George Mahlangu, and expelled them across the South African border.

On 12 April 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations were again met with violence and arrests. The protests, which were announced well in advance, and conducted in a peaceful way to

support legitimate demands for more democratic rights for Swaziland's citizens, were suppressed by heavily armed police and military, which occupied the city of Manzini as well as other important centres with ostentatious display of power. They used teargas against protestors, reportedly fired live ammunition and arrested hundreds of people, among which at least eight were trade union leaders.

In Manzini, paramilitary police in full riot gear, including shields and rifles, marched through the streets. Hundreds of people were arrested, including eight trade union leaders. Other union leaders were threatened or placed under house arrest. Everyone wearing a political party T-shirt or cap was arrested. Students at the Swaziland Kwaluseni Campus were confined to the campus, which amounts to arrest. Teachers were barricaded inside the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) offices to prevent them from marching. The police used rubber bullets to disperse the crowds. All buses going to the meeting points were stopped and all the people on them, reportedly arrested, even without checking whether they were going to take part in the demonstrations or not. A number of buses were even driven to far away forests where the people on them were left in remote places without transport, a practice which furthermore appears to be recurrent in your country.

On 28 July 2011, hundreds of trade unionists marched through Swaziland's cities to protest against your government's plan to lower the salaries of civil servants. Some 400 people joined the demonstration in Mbabane, while about 300 marched in Manzini. In Manzini, some 500 armed police stood guard, almost twice the amount of demonstrators. The unions had only won the right to protest just the day before, after a court overturned a government order that would have prohibited their strike.

On 23 August 2011, dozens of lawyers joined civil society and marched in the streets of Mbabane. The march was remarkable, given that until then, judicial personnel had remained aloof from this kind of popular protest actions.

On 24 August 2011, students protesting about the closure of the University of Swaziland were viciously attacked by the police and forcibly dispersed. Activists were detained without reason, and – indeed – transported to far corners of the country and dumped without resources in remote areas. A number of young students' union leaders were detained.

Mr. President, the list of human and trade union rights infractions are endless and not abating. There is a renewed move by the government to cut public workers' salaries and cut jobs as part of the strategies to curtail the current financial crisis hitting the country. ITUC-Africa strongly believes that the size and style of governance in that Kingdom should be the target of restructuring as government officials spend a sizeable number of national resources on administrative overhead. Public administration expenses are top heavy, yet workers who support large numbers of unemployed family members are targeted for austerity measures.

Swaziland like South Africa is a member of the African Union as well as the Southern African Development Community and is signatory to all the principles and treaties on human rights and democracy of these organisations. However, political parties remain banned in Swaziland.

Citizens are persecuted and suppressed for expressing preferences for political parties of their persuasions. Practices that are akin to and bear reminders of the apartheid era are common signs in Swaziland under the present Monarchical regime in that Kingdom. We have received passionate appeal and call for solidarity support from our colleagues in Swaziland to demand that your government, party and country act to intervene in restoring true constitutional participatory democracy in Swaziland.

ITUC-Africa hereby wishes to implore you Mr. President, to use your good offices to address the sundry issues raised in this letter, notably, the following:

1. The immediate commencement of genuine democratic reforms, which must include the unbanning of political parties and restoration of multiparty democracy under a people-driven and centred constitution.
2. The full and unconditional release of all political detainees, including student leaders
3. The abrogation of the operation of labour brokers
4. Withdrawal of a circular awarding hefty salaries and benefits to politicians.
5. Non taxation of workers' terminal benefits
6. Judicial and press freedom
7. Demand for the urgent and quick re-opening of the closed University of Swaziland

Mr. President, we are persuaded to write to you given the sense of history that your party, people and country endured to achieve its current democracy that many on the African continent is proud of and many seeking to emulate. South Africa neither can be indifferent to nor in anyway be seen to be supporting non-democratic government such as the one currently in Mbabane. It is our expectation that the South African government will continue to monitor developments in Swaziland, especially its process of 'building confidence' towards democratisation. We trust that our appeal will meet your profound understanding and favourable reaction.

Yours Sincerely,



Kwasi Adu-Amankwah

General Secretary