



**09 June 2011-06-09**

## **Why the Swaziland Democracy Campaign is Supporting the Mass Rally and March for Democratic Zimbabwe Elections**

The Swaziland Democracy Campaign is supporting the call for a march and rally at the special SADC gathering taking place on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June in Sandton, and urges all of its supporters and progressive forces to do likewise. The march has been called to draw attention to the need for a **clear programme for free and fair elections in Zimbabwe**, that are not subjected to intimidation, manipulation, or the anti-democratic measures of ZANU-PF and state military forces that have marred previous elections.

We hope this protest will serve as a wake up call to SADC. SADC has virtually destroyed its own reputation by prevaricating on the need for democratic change in Zimbabwe, and by endlessly pandering to the prejudices of Robert Mugabe. In the face of irrefutable evidence of violence, including physical abuse, blatant interference and widespread fraud, SADC failed to defend the democratic majority who voted for real change, and failed to unambiguously condemn the terror unleashed by forces loyal to Mugabe. A range of respected human rights organisations and many eye witnesses have drawn attention to the way that ZANU-PF supporters used the worst possible means to intimidate poor communities, including rape and illegal abductions.

We note the critical report that has been developed by the South African Government which now appears to have taken a reality check, and has produced a report that offers some hope. SADC now needs to make amends for its chronic indecision and appeasement, and especially so given the leading role of the South African Government in this travesty of justice. The SADC must now strive to rescue its reputation and put its weight behind the people of Zimbabwe so that they are able to exercise their democratic rights in a conducive environment. The South African Government must stand firm, and stop protecting Mugabe, and decisively side with the people of Zimbabwe against his barbarous rule.

Those campaigning for democracy in Swaziland share the frustrations of the people of Zimbabwe. The Swazi people have also heard endless excuses for inaction by SADC, have been shocked by the silence of SADC members when the Mswati Regime has illegally beaten, arrested and murdered its citizens rather than respect their democratic rights. How can the democratic protocols and policies of SADC and AU be respected when governments ignore them when it is politically convenient? There is however absolutely no doubt that a move towards democratic rule in Zimbabwe will immeasurably assist the struggles for democracy everywhere and that is why all democratic forces must mobilise for the march on Saturday.

As events unfolding in North Africa, and in the Arab states has indicated, there is a growing recognition that the only way to make significant changes in Zimbabwe, in Swaziland, and in all of those countries where undemocratic practices have taken root, is for there to be a vibrant mass based civil society, encompassing, trade unions, faith based organisations, youth organisations and social movements that is capable of defending democratic rights. Mugabe and Mswati know this

very well, that's why they spend substantial resources on state security services, and on the instruments of repression. That's why Mugabe arrests those innocently watching a film about events in Egypt. That's why Mswati murders and imprisons those who dare to wear struggle T-shirts. Dictators are terrified of a mass democratic movement emerging that can challenge their power and wastefulness. The actions of Mugabe and Mswati are the actions of those desperate to hold onto power at all costs, but their actions also expose their fragility.

SADC must make a decision. It can either continue to be part of the problem and effectively do nothing, or it can break with its own sorry past, and be part of a popular solution that puts the needs of the people first. Either way, the democratic forces of our Continent will push ahead and assert their rights. Down with Mugabe, down with Mswati. Forward with the People. Forward to Democracy.

**For more information please contact:**

**Stephen Faulkner (082 817 5455, [steve.faulkner@samwu.org.za](mailto:steve.faulkner@samwu.org.za))**

**Ntokozo Mbhele (072 370 0974 [ntokozo@publicservices.co.za](mailto:ntokozo@publicservices.co.za))**

**Philani Ndebele (076 942 3565 [philani@asc.org.za](mailto:philani@asc.org.za))**