



Press Release 26 August : Issued by the Swaziland Democracy Campaign

International Representatives Denied Visits to Swazi Detainees, Treated Like Criminals and Spied Upon! Students Attacked Again!

Yesterday, a 21 strong representative group drawn from the Development Community, Human and Civil Rights Organisations, and Peace and Democracy Campaigners were denied the right to visit political detainees and prisoners being held by the Swazi regime.

The regional delegation comprising representatives from Swaziland, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique and from respected organisations such as the ACTION Support Centre, PROPAZ, Forum Mulher, SCCC, Soweto Concerned Residence, Swaziland Democracy Campaign, Swaziland United Democratic Front, YIDEZ, and the Zimbabwe Peace Project numbers 21 representatives.

They had intended to visit **Maxwell Dlamini** and **Musa Ngubeni** in Manzini Remand Centre, both of whom are student leaders who are being illegally held by the Swazi regime for participating in peaceful protests for a democratic Swaziland earlier this year. They were also denied access to **Amos Mbedzi**, **Bheki Dlamini** and **Zonke Dlamini** who are imprisoned in the Sidwashini Maximum Prison after being convicted on very dubious grounds using draconian legislation that has been universally condemned.

The Visiting Delegation wanted to talk to those being held to make an assessment of the conditions they are enduring, and also to reassure them that they were not forgotten and that the campaign for their release is gathering momentum.

Authorities Renege on Agreement

Despite having secured prior permission, and made their intentions completely clear, the authorities renege on the agreement to allow the visit and instead subjected the visiting group to delay, illegal surveillance and unreasonable treatment.

Despite the presence of legal representatives of those detained, the authorities refused to provide reasons for denying access, however it was possible, despite the obstructive behaviour of the authorities to gather important information.

While the Government denies that those being held are political prisoners, it does not afford them the same rights, access to visitors and other facilities as it does for ordinary prisoners. For example, they have restricted the number of people allowed on to their registered visitors list from seven to five. Each registered visitor is allowed to have only 3 minutes for conversation which is closely monitored by a police officer. This means that the

prisoners have very little time for outside contact compared to ordinary prisoners who are also not monitored. Visits to the prison shop are also denied them, and more worrying, they are kept in isolation and not allowed to communicate with one another.

This treatment is not only inhuman and against acceptable prison norms, it is cruel and completely unnecessary. It is clear that the intention is to break the spirit of those imprisoned. If these comrades are not political prisoners, why are they not given the same treatment as other prisoners?

An indication of the inhumanity the political prisoners have to experience is illustrated by the treatment received by Musa Ngubeni who is suffering from very high blood pressure. Instead of being given access to a doctor, a prison nurse instead administers panado.

Spies Used to Infiltrate Delegation

The 21 strong delegation is primarily in Swaziland as part of a sector to sector learning exchange workshop, but they have been subjected to levels of surveillance and spying that once again indicates the paranoia and fear of exposure of the ruling elite regime.

Of particular concern has been evidence that spies have been deployed to the delegation posing as representatives of World Vision. According to its own sources World Vision is an evangelical relief and development umbrella organisation whose stated goal is ;,

"to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God."^[3]

The names of the spies are now in the possession of the Swaziland Democracy Campaign, who will be contacting World Vision to ask whether the deployment of police spies is part of its brief, and what it intends to do to salvage its reputation in Swaziland amongst the democratic community.

The Global Week of Action Approaches

The Global Week of Action on Swaziland **5 – 9 September 2011** is now an established part of the democratic movements agenda. Thousands of people in many parts of the world are preparing to take action to draw attention to the undemocratic character of Swaziland, and the abuse of power and resources that characterises the ruling elite regime.

Last year, scores of democracy activists who went to Swaziland to give solidarity to the trade union movement were arrested, abused and forcibly deported, despite the fact that the ILO has condemned this as being against ILO Conventions. It is clear, that the economic and political crisis currently preoccupying the regime is deepening. Following the advice of the IMF and World Bank it is attempting to make the already impoverished people of Swaziland pay for a crisis not of their making through retrenchments and austerity measures.

However, it is now widely understood that the crisis is a result of mismanagement and unadulterated corruption, and attempts to further undermine living standards will be firmly resisted. The South African Government, despite having forwarded a R2.3bn bailout to the regime, is increasingly sensitive to accusations that it is propping up a vicious and despotic regime, and it remains to be seen if the regime will dare to mistreat those in September who once again will want to express their solidarity with the workers and poor of Swaziland.

Attacks two days ago on students protesting against the continuing closure of their learning establishments indicates that the regime believes that it can continue to get away with brutalising citizens, but the world is watching, and the students have shown great courage and discipline by insisting on their right to protest.

One thing is certain. The democracy movement inside and outside Swaziland is growing. There is no turning back. The regime has exposed its complete inability to respond to the needs of the people, and increasing numbers of Swazi people themselves are aligning themselves with the democracy movement.

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