

Eswatini prison officers' assault reporter covering pro-democracy protest

Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is calling for eSwatini authorities to hold a full investigation into the brutal assault of journalist Nomthandazo Maseko.

On February 8, Maseko, a reporter for the privately-owned news website, *Swati Newsweek*, was assaulted by about 20 Correctional Services staff in Matsapha, a town about 35km from the capital Mbabane.

Maseko told CFE she was assaulted after recording and posting a live protest on *Swati Newsweek's* Facebook page. The protest was by members of the Swaziland Liberation Movement (Swalimo) activist group outside the local prison where two pro-democracy Members of Parliament have been detained since July 25, 2021.

"When officers spotted me in my car, they dragged me out, slapped, kicked, beat me with sticks," Maseko said.

Maseko added that an unidentified officer pointed a gun and threatened to shoot at her. Maseko lost her two cellphones during the incident.

Swati Newsweek editor Eugene Dube told CFE that he would press charges. "No officers have been arrested or punished yet for having attacked the journalist," Dube said.

In the 13-second video livestreamed on Facebook, Maseko is heard saying, "Mama, they (officers) are now beating someone." Thereafter the broadcast was abruptly cut. Then she was forcibly taken out of her vehicle and assaulted.

"As they were beating me, they kept asking questions like 'Why did you come here? Is this your grandparents' house?'" Maseko said.

Maseko said the officers then took her behind a market, where they were beating protesters, and told her to lie down.

CFE believes journalists should be able to do their job without fear and harassment. The safety of journalists is intertwined with the general safety and wellbeing of communities whose stories they are out to cover.

CFE calls on eSwatini police to investigate the assault and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

*The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting and expanding the right to free expression for ALL, and enabling EVERYONE to exercise this right to the full, whether it by speaking out, by protesting, by revealing information, by blowing the whistle on wrong-doing, by arguing, debating, writing, painting, composing or just by shouting out an opinion. More information is available at:

<https://freeexpression.org.za/>

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