



17 August 2022

The Campaign for Free Expression condemns assault of protesters in eSwatini

On Wednesday, 10 August 2022, the Royal Eswatini Police reportedly heavily assaulted and injured activists who had gathered in Msunduzi for a protest in support of two jailed pro-democracy Members of Parliament (MPs) who were appearing at the High Court in Mbabane.

Nkhululeko Gamedze and Muzi Gwebu, both members of the Swaziland Liberation Movement (SWALIMO), sustained serious injuries and had to be treated at the Mbabane Government Hospital. Gamedze's leg was broken and is now in a cast, according to SWALIMO spokesperson Thantaza Silolo.

Silolo said: "The police came and attacked the protesters who were mainly SWALIMO members. They discharged teargas and stun grenades. In the skirmish they held two members of SWALIMO and beat them up severely, using a taser on one comrade and also beating him up with batons."

eSwatini has been in a state of political unrest since May 2021 when one Thabani Nkomonye died allegedly at the hands of the police. Protestors demanded police accountability, with many across the country delivering petitions to their MPs demanding democracy and an accountable government. However, in June 2021 then-acting Prime Minister Themba Masuku issued a decree banning the delivery of these petitions. Widespread protests would ensue in June and July, leading to injuries, arrests and deaths. By mid-August 2021, the Foundation for Socio-Economic Justice had tallied over 70 deaths, while the government's Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration insisted on only 36.

On 25 July 2021, two members of the House of Assembly, Bacede Mabuza of Hosea and Mthandeni Dube of Ngwempisi, were arrested for calling for democratic reforms. They have been denied bail a number of times and remain in jail. A third, Mduduzi Simelane, fled to neighbouring South Africa. He remains in exile, and a warrant for his arrest is still out.

The police continue to persecute protesters. On 15 August, they violently dispersed a crowd in Mbabane that had come out to support Mbongwa Dlamini, president of the Swaziland National Teachers Union, who the government is accusing of misconduct. On 7 August, Dlamini warned teachers against going to school as there were [reports](#) that there would be attacks by an organisation called the Swaziland International Solidarity Forces.

Articles 24 and 25 of the Eswatini Constitution provide for freedom of expression, assembly and association. The Campaign for Free Expression condemns the attack on the protesters in Msunduzi and calls upon the Eswatini government, especially the police, to operate within the ambit of international human rights law and the country's Constitution to enable its people to exercise their right to free expression.

The Campaign for Free Expression (CFE) is a non-partisan, 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.

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