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### **Independence Day: Renewed call for fully-fledged human and trade union rights in Swaziland**

On 6 September, Swaziland commemorates the day it became independent from its colonial rulers and joined the international community as a sovereign country. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents more than 175 million workers through its 305 affiliates in 151 countries and territories, including Swaziland, wishes to seize this opportunity to draw your attention to a number of issues.

Unfortunately, Swaziland's people do not have a lot to cheer about, as their lives continue to be marked by serious violations of democratic, human and trade union 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 pretrial detentions, restrictions on freedoms 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 worker rights. On a number of occasions throughout last year, the police forcibly dispersed demonstrators, which resulted in injuries.

As denounced by the ITUC time and again, trade union rights remain a matter of particular concern in Swaziland. Among many other violations, Swazi trade unions suffer from surveillance of their activities by hired security officers, both in and outside the workplace. Workers' councils stacked with employer-picked representatives are used to prevent genuine worker representation. Police officers with the rank of subinspector or higher have the authority to conduct a search without a warrant, a power which they have used on many occasions.

On 23 June 2010, 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 Association in your country, 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 only 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 members of civil society. It banned political groups, trade unions from Swaziland and South Africa, and a local journalist. 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 Mathebula, and its Head of Campaigns, George Mahlangu, and deported them.

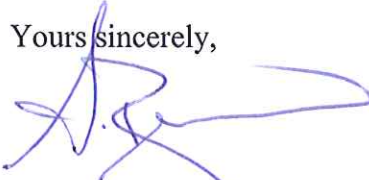
On 12 April 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations were again met with violence and arrests. The protests, which were announced correctly and well in advance, and conducted in a peaceful way to support legitimate demands for more democratic rights for Swaziland's citizens, were suppressed by heavily armed police and military, which occupied the city of Manzini as well as other important centres with ostentatious displays of power. In Manzini, security forces used teargas and rubber bullets against protestors and arrested hundreds of people, including at least eight trade union leaders. Other union leaders were threatened or placed under house arrest. Everyone seen wearing a political party T-shirt or cap was arrested. Students at the Swaziland Kwaluseni Campus were confined to the campus. Teachers were barricaded inside the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) offices to prevent them from marching. Buses were prevented from going to the meeting points and the police arrested everybody on them, reportedly without even checking if they were going to take part in the demonstrations. A number of buses transporting demonstrators were even driven to far away forests and left people in remote places without transport, a practice which 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, where some 500 armed police stood guard. 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 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, transported to far corners of the country and dumped without resources in remote areas. A number of young student union leaders were detained. The ITUC demands to know whether they have been released and, if not, insists that they should be without delay.

M. Prime Minister, it was exactly this kind of brutal repression and further violations of human and trade union rights which was exposed and for which your government was reprimanded during the discussion on the application of Convention 87 on Freedom of Association in Swaziland at the 2010 International Labour Conference, and again in 2011. Upon returning to Swaziland, your Minister of Labour expressed his "surprise at the lobbying capacities of the Swazi labour unions". In fact, this letter in itself proves that it's not just a matter of lobbying by Swazi unions; the international community has taken note. We urge you to finally take into account the legitimate demands of the Swazi people for constitutional reform, multiparty democracy and the full respect of trade union rights. Further violence and oppression will not be tolerated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

General Secretary