



Liaison, Dialogue and Research

Reg no: 2006/020285/08

The Southern African Liaison Office (NPC)

Liesbeek House, River Park,
Gloucester Road, Mowbray, Cape Town 7700

Tel: +27 (021) 680 5306

Email: info@salo.org.za

www.salo.org.za

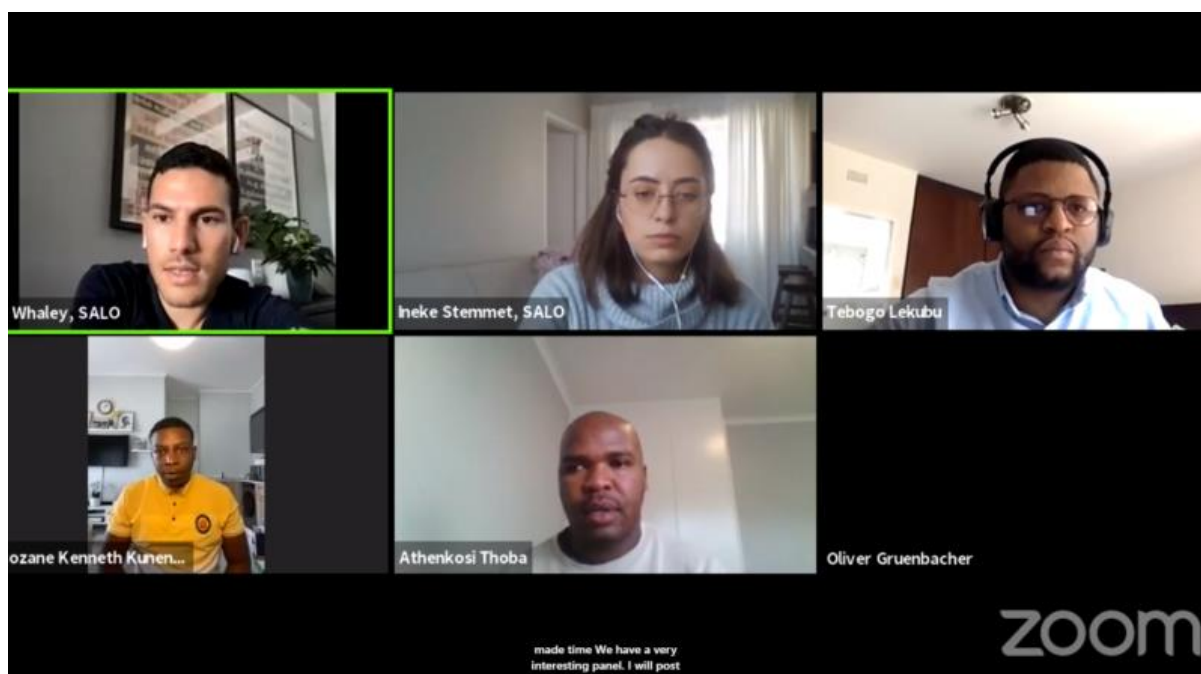
[@salo_info](https://twitter.com/salo_info)

Policy Brief

12 August 2021, Zoom Platform

SALO Public Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Eswatini

- By Resoketswe Tjie



Summary

The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) hosted a public multi-stakeholder dialogue on Eswatini on August 12, 2021. Speakers included Mlungisi Makhanya, president of PUDEMO; Sibongile Mazibuko, president of the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC); Thokozane Kenneth Kunene, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Swaziland (CPS); Abner Mosaase, convener of the Eswatini Emergency Response Team and member of the ANC IR Subcommittee; and Khulekani Skhosana, vice president for Africa in the International Union of Socialist Youth and a member of the ANCYL NTT. SALO board member Molly Dhlamini and SALO staff member Milisuthando Mbete chaired the dialogue.

This dialogue brought together African diplomats and dignitaries as key decision-makers and civil society. It was centred around a forward-looking agenda that explored the different options for achieving change in Eswatini and for civil society to share their views about what is taking place, what they think should happen, and the need for institutional support and international solidarity.

Context / Importance of the problem

Swazi citizens continue to be denied civil, political, economic, and social rights. Human rights defenders, activists, and protestors have been met with extreme force by the security apparatus. This has resulted in several serious injuries to protesters and bystanders exercising their human rights. Several regulations, such as the allocation of the national budget, which normally requires public consultation or intervention, are prohibited; human rights are limited in practice; and the level of inequality between the rich and the poor is stark, separating the country into two. Although the judiciary claims to be independent and subject only to the Constitution (the Constitution itself being under the supreme authority of the king) there seems to be no democratic method of recourse or space for citizens to express their discontent with the appalling state of governance in the country without being victimised, or worse, killed.

The 1973 Decree

The current struggle in Eswatini is about democratisation. Between 1968 and 1973 the Swazi people's will took precedence over the will of the royal family. This was revoked with the implementation of the 1973 decree. In 1968, Eswatini regained its independence from Britain, and an elected Parliament was added to the traditional monarchy. In 1973, King Sobhuza II repealed the 1968 constitution, ended the multiparty system in favour of a Tinkhundla (local council) system, and declared himself an absolute monarch. After Sobhuza died in 1982, a protracted power struggle ended with the coronation of King Mswati III in 1986. A new constitution implemented in 2006 removed the king's ability to rule by decree, but it reaffirmed his absolute authority over the cabinet, Parliament, and the judiciary. It also maintained the Tinkhundla system in which local chiefs control elections for 55 of the 65 seats in the House of Assembly and the lower house of Parliament. It maintained the ban on political parties. The charter provided for limited freedoms of speech, assembly, and

association, as well as limited rights for women, however, the king can suspend even those limited rights at his discretion¹.

During the unrest in mid-2021, over 80 Swazis paid the ultimate price for demanding political reforms in their country. The number of victims continues to rise because some have been assaulted, some have died, and others have suffered serious injuries. Some were admitted to hospitals in Eswatini, while others were transferred to South Africa. While the focus is currently on the continued detention and denial of bail for the two members of parliament, there are still many Swazis in King Mswati's jail, including underage children. The latest data indicates that there are over 400 people in jail. A few of them were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to ten years for looting.

Mlungisi Makhanya highlighted, *"we are also struggling with the issue of raising the necessary bail amounts because people accused of stealing or looting—things worth R100 or R130—have been given outrageous bail amounts of R3000 or R5000 each. The people's socio-economic situation in Swaziland, the majority of them, cannot afford to pay this bail. We [are] still trying to raise the funds to bail them out so that people can go back and try to rebuild their lives."*

The SADC Fact-Finding Mission

SADC's technical team carried out a fact-finding mission to Eswatini between 15 and 22 July 2021. This followed an earlier visit by the ministers of the SADC Organ Troika on Politics, Defence and Security.² Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi, who was the chairperson of the SADC organ on politics, defence and security at the time, said:

*"The mission will analyse the political and security situation in the country, with a view to support the people of eSwatini towards finding a durable solution."*³

In that regard, the mission held consultations with various stakeholders, including the government of Eswatini. However, PUDEMO and other political parties, including the Communist Party of Swaziland, were excluded. Many stakeholders were not reached due to time constraints. As a result, it was agreed that a second mission would be dispatched urgently to Eswatini to continue the consultation process with other stakeholders. Therefore, a short meeting was held with a few civil society organisations to assure them of a second mission to the country.

According to one of the speakers, the international community can do more to raise its collective voice in response to the atrocities occurring in Eswatini. Eswatini

¹ Freedom House. 2010. "Freedom in the World 2010 - Swaziland." Refworld. Accessed 21 June 2022 at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c23123821.html>.

² Chutel, L. (2021). SADC fact-finding mission wraps up visit to Eswatini - with mixed results. Accessed at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/sadc-fact-finding-mission-wraps-up-visit-to-eswatini-with-mixed-results-20210722>

³ Chutel, L. 2021. SADC team returns to eSwatini for 7-day fact-finding mission. Accessed at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/sadc-team-returns-to-eswatini-for-7-day-fact-finding-mission-20210715>

continues to disregard a wide range of human rights instruments to which it is a signatory, including restricting freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

A budget of no significance

The annual reports of government departments reveal a tragic story of reckless misuse of public resources, especially financial resources, over which elected representatives of the people have no control, with some departments overspending their budgets to the point that it is the new normal, given the lack of transparency and accountability in the Tinkhundla political system.⁴

Khulekani Skosana highlighted, “during so-called 'Independence Day’, the king of Eswatini renamed the country and gifted himself a R2.7 billion Airbus A340 as a birthday gift. The royal plane cost the Eswatini government 200 million dollars to purchase and another 500 million to refurbish, but there is also a R2 billion hangar at the newly constructed airport in eastern Swaziland to house the plane.”

In 2009, Forbes named King Mswati one of the world's top 15 wealthiest royals, and in 2014, one of Africa's richest kings. Despite the poor socio-economic condition of the majority of Swazis, the monarchy continues to plunder the state coffers for personal gain. The country has been subjected to humiliating situations, such as the national soccer team withdrawing from the AFCON due to a lack of funds. Even the Tibiyo Taka Ngwane Trust, which owns shares in major Eswatini companies, is used solely to support the monarchy, while hundreds of thousands of Swazis live in abject poverty.

In the absence of a democratic framework in a healthy political system, political parties have been banned, and people associated with political parties have been imprisoned. Several reports have been released outlining the severe shortage of food and other supplies in Eswatini. The recent COVID-19 pandemic adds to the scarcity and high cost of living. The monarchy's draconian security protocols have created an even greater scarcity. The country's numerous soup kitchens have been closed to prevent people from gathering, and generally, citizens are afraid of being seen outside for fear of being beaten or harassed by security forces.

Lack of support from businesses

South Africans own a large portion of the businesses that operate in Eswatini. Organisations or companies such as Pick 'n Pay and MTN continue to operate in Eswatini as if there was no humanitarian crisis. They continue to make millions of dollars while doing nothing to help the citizens of the country. This could be one of the reasons for the government's lacklustre response to the Eswatini crisis. MTN, sugar company Illovo, Johann Rupert's investment firm, Remgro, Sun International, and SABMiller are among the South African blue-chip companies that have forged

⁴ Subisi.V.(2019).Budget of no significance.Times of Swaziland.Accessed at:<http://www.times.co.sz/feature/122463-budget-of-no-significance.html>

relationships with the monarch. These companies have either given King Mswati or Eswatini investment institutions large stakes in their businesses⁵.

Unemployment in Eswatini

Sibongile Mazibuko pointed out that King Mswati holds the majority of shares in business enterprises, owns 60 per cent of national land, and pays no taxes. He is the one who determines who should be arrested and who should not. Due to his unreasonable demands, businesses and people in Eswatini are put under pressure. He is the sole buyer of any farm in Eswatini, thereby affecting the economy. This greatly affects the people of Eswatini, resulting in a high poverty rate and a high unemployment rate among the youth. She highlighted, *“due to the 28 per cent unemployment rate, poverty levels are purposefully maintained to keep Swazis hungry and obedient. Youth account for 55 per cent of those affected.”*

Although unemployment affects people of all ages, the effects are most visible among young people. The country's unemployment problems are exacerbated by the economy's inability to create new jobs at the same rate that job seekers enter the market, resulting in one of the highest unemployment rates on the African continent.

Eswatini Emergency Response Task Team

Abner Mosaase explained that the Eswatini Emergency Response Task Team deals with various tasks or developments affecting Eswatini. These tasks are observed as they occur and the response team then mobilises various stakeholders throughout South Africa, and some in Eswatini, to ensure that they assist in the mobilisation and put pressure on the situation to change. As part of the initiative, the team organises people from various organisations, including the Progressive Youth Alliance and trade unions other than the tripartite alliance that has been active in Eswatini, such as the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, former COSATU affiliates.

The task team's goal is to ensure that those fighting for democracy in Eswatini do not lose heart. They work with several organised legal formations, including the Pan African Bar Association of South Africa, and have representatives from the Thabo Mbeki Institute of Leadership, which is based at UNISA, to ensure that they adhere to the AU's principles of good governance and democracy. The Eswatini Emergency Response Team continues on the side-line to mobilise and facilitate the welfare of the people that have been affected by Mswati in the unrest.

Thokozane Kenneth Kunene highlighted that, in terms of security, the situation in Eswatini has deteriorated - the regime has declared war on the people. The rule of the royal family contains no elements of recognised political institutions. Whoever carries out missions to Eswatini - whether it is international bodies, SADC or other bodies -

⁵ Rees. M.(2014).SA firms keep Swazi king in regal splendour.Sunday Times. Published on 13 July 2014. Accessed at:<https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2014-07-13-sa-firms-keep-swazi-king-in-regal-splendour/>

have to deal with the rule of the royal family. Attempts have been made by the regime to deceive the world and create the appearance of democracy through sham elections. Economically, the regime is striving to keep the economy active, while continuing repression tactics.

Humanitarian crisis

Eswatini's social problems have become so severe that solidarity organisations need to deal with humanitarian issues. The situation has progressed from social devastation and poverty to a humanitarian crisis. The humanitarian crisis has progressed to the point of a scarcity of basic commodities.

Eswatini is impoverished and reliant on foreign aid. Every year, a significant number of its citizens require food assistance from international agencies, ranging from 30% of the population during good harvest years to 60% during drought years. Malnutrition is common. Two-thirds of the population is chronically poor, many of whom are subsistence farmers living on communal land administered by royally appointed chiefs, and one-third of all children under the age of five are stunted. Donor programs fill the voids in social services left by the government⁶.

Critique of Policy Options

- There is no security of tenure in terms of people's homes because the Swazi nation's land is under the direct control of the king. There are many evictions of people - sometimes in violation of court orders - due to his continued control over the country.
- Human rights issues include limitations on political participation and media freedom, corruption, forceful evictions, rape, and violence against women.
- The government rarely investigates, prosecutes, or administratively punishes officials who commit human rights abuses. Impunity is widespread and police brutality is common during political demonstrations.
- The SADC Troika meetings and fact-finding missions were not successful - Eswatini's royal family choreographed the consultations and it failed to meet with all legitimate stakeholders.

Questions from the floor

Ambassador Welile Nhlapo

The following questions were brought up by Ambassador Nhlapo regarding the role of solidarity movements in supporting the pro-democracy activists in Eswatini:

⁶ The new humanitarian. (2021). Weeks of rioting fail to force reform in Eswatini. Published on 13 July 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/7/13/weeks-of-rioting-fails-to-force-reform-in-eswatini>

- The Eswatini comrades have given certain indications about what they are expecting, would we be able to handle that task?
- In terms of taking action to support the events that are unfolding, are we able to respond to those demands?
- The goal of a solidarity movement is to provide support, can we now prioritise what we need to get done?
- We must also begin to plan to engage our government. What will they do differently from what has been happening so far?
- It is our responsibility as South Africans in the solidarity movement to raise these issues and mobilise others in the region because we cannot have an isolated bilateral solidarity movement. Will we be able to start with the region and expand beyond the borders of South Africa?
- How do we begin to rally and deal with that request so that it becomes much more than a bilateral matter?
- What are the implications for other countries so that it becomes a regional issue? Can it begin with a Southern African Customs Union (SACU) coordinated response? There are implications for SACU because Eswatini, among others, depends on the dispensary of money from SACU every quarter.
- The situation in Eswatini is referred to as pro-democracy, but is that the right term to use?

Comments from Panellists and the Way Forward

Bram Hanekom

"We need to put pressure on our ruling party, the African National Congress because time and again policy conferences have failed to resolve this issue. I [am] afraid policy and conference resolutions on Swaziland have never received support."

Bongani Masuku

"In my opinion, the work of the solidarity forces was coordinated between 1996 and 2008, when the Solidarity Movement was at its peak in South Africa. So, what will be important now is that we [are] systematic in identifying Mswati's power points. These are the organisations that have a significant impact, and so on. I wanted to point out how we can synergise the solidarity movement to have such a large impact because organisations each have their issues, but we need a consistent and focused solidarity movement."

and

"We may need to set deadlines within the country, such as holding a national convention by October. Something like the Harare Declaration in South Africa, or a

demand for a Constituent Assembly in various countries - so that the system has no leeway in permanent time. It must be constantly under pressure.”

Ambassador Nhlapo

“The cultural element - that [it] is a part of the entrenchment of this monarchy - is used to justify everything else. A solidarity movement must support the struggles that are being waged by the forces within the country. This would require a lot of education.”

Milisa Mbetse

“I think there is a lack of women's organisations speaking out about the situation in Eswatini. Perhaps it is also telling [that] in South Africa, we have not heard the ANC Women's League, in particular, speak out on these issues. There needs to be a broader call from women, both here and there, to talk about what is going on and how they can help.”

Recommendations

- The implementation of targeted economic sanctions that target the royal family and their lavish lifestyles, as well as businesses that directly impact Mswati, should be promoted.
- The main artery of the borders that the army and police rely on for petrol and ammunition should be shut down by working with the ANC Youth League and young people in South Africa, as well as those who are exiled and those who are part of the diaspora. A constant stream of supplies allows the regime to continue brutalising the people of Eswatini.
- International support and solidarity should be mobilised and assist in spreading the message from the people of Eswatini.
- Mass mobilisation efforts need to be heightened.
- The ANC needs to formalise party-to-party relations with PUDEMO. The South African government should upscale its strategic influence within the SACU. The ANC must encourage the progress of Swazi political and civil organisations to lead the struggle.
- The Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC) demands an investigation into the atrocities that took place in Eswatini. They require that Amnesty International come to the country.
- There is a need to strengthen ideological militancy among Eswatini's leadership so that more robust action can be taken to confront the Swazi regime.

Conclusion

The dialogue concludes a two-part series, the first involving civil society and the second involving political parties to ensure that the dialogue is multifaceted and to platform varied views within Eswatini. South Africa has significant leverage and can act as a catalyst to improve the plight of Eswatini. A strong solidarity campaign is needed to foster those synergies to improve Eswatini's situation. The task of reorganising international solidarity must be understood in the context of strategically and tactically coordinating to bring about change in Eswatini.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Brief do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the brief are the sole responsibility of SALO and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

SALO would like to thank

The Olof Palme International Centre

for their direct support

