



International liaison, dialogue and research

Reg no: 2006/020285/08

The Southern African Liaison Office (NPC)

Regus - Black River Park
1st Floor, Block B, North Park, Black River Park
2 Fir Street, Observatory, Cape Town, 7925

Email: info@salo.org.za
www.salo.org.za
[@salo_info](https://twitter.com/salo_info)

Policy Dialogue Report

24 March 2022

Zoom Online Platform

The Future Of eSwatini: Progress Towards a Dialogue Process

SALO PUBLIC MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE: THE FUTURE OF ESWATINI: PROGRESS TOWARDS A DIALOGUE PROCESS?
THURSDAY 24 MARCH 2022 11:00 TO 13:00

BHEKI MAMBA
TUCOSWA

MAXWELL DLAMINI
SOUTHERN AFRICAN YOUTH
SOLIDARITY NETWORK

ZAKITHI ZIBANDZE:
SWAZILAND RURAL
WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

CLOSING REMARKS:
BISHOP RUBIN PHILLIP

SIMLINDZILE MASINGA:
SWAZILAND NATIONAL
UNION OF STUDENTS

MLUNGISI MAKHANYA
PUDEMO PRESIDENT

THABO MASUKU
MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS
FORUM

[@salo_info](https://twitter.com/salo_info)
salo.org.za
LIVESTREAM:
fb.com/saloinfo

SALO
International liaison, dialogue and research

Executive Summary

In partnership with the Norwegian People's Aid Initiative for Southern Africa, SALO hosted a public multi-stakeholder dialogue titled The Future of Eswatini: Progress Towards a Dialogue Process Public Dialogue on March 24, 2022. There were addresses from Zakithi Zibandze from Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly; Bheki Mamba of the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland; Barnes Dlamini from Multi Stakeholders Forum; Mandla Hlatshwayo from the Letfu Sonkhe Institute of Strategic Thinking and Development; Simlindzile Masinga from Swaziland National Union of Students; and the chairperson of the SALO board. The dialogue focused on Eswatini to offer a deeper understanding of the current monarchy situation, and the discussion looked at the future and the possibility of a meaningful dialogue. The dialogue was

chaired by SALO members Milisa Mbetse, Louis Whaley, and Fowzia Davids, and Bishop Ruben Phillip gave the closing remarks.

Summary of Presentations

Zakithi Zibandze, Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly

Zakithi Zibandze structured her presentation around women's participation in the protests and how they were affected by the unrest. She expressed concern over the lack of experts to help women prepare for transitions since it's a new experience for most women, especially rural women. She highlighted that women do participate in the protests, and they are not being recognised:

"In most cases, it seemed like women were not involved in protests, or maybe the picture that is shown mostly is [of] men that appear to be affected during the unrest".

Issues Affecting Women

Regarding the way women are harassed, there is a need to educate them on security issues. Women are still struggling towards a dialogue. The government is not willing to hold a dialogue in a manner all parties are comfortable with, and there should be measures to correct the injustice that has affected women. In her speech, she drew attention to the fact that women suffer from police harassment: dozens of women have been incarcerated in children's cells, and women have lost their pregnancies as a result. One woman who was arrested and later released because she started bleeding was pregnant. Due to the police searching for her, she cannot stay at home. Currently, there are a high number of rapes committed by police officers in the Matshapha corridor and other homes of activists.

She concluded by emphasising that the assessment of the Troika's approach to the consultative meetings suggests that SADC may not be genuine as it did not consult all stakeholders during its consultation meeting in Eswatini.

Bheki Mamba, Trade Union Congress of Swaziland

As part of his address, Bheki mentioned that Eswatini has been operating as if under a state of emergency despite not having declared it, and evidence of this in the way the police and soldiers are now ruling the country, torturing and brutalising workers and the general public. SADC and the AU need to intervene to help bring peace and stability to Eswatini as the situation could escalate into constant violence. It is forbidden for workers and citizens of the country to demonstrate using their freedom of speech. If they do, the police will disperse the protest, and that is a violation of international principles regarding freedom of speech and assembly. He highlighted that:

"We are seeing that workers are not able now to organise and then engage [in] and even collectively bargain with their employers. That is a serious situation, in our view, because we have tried several times to engage with [the] government, to understand or bring some sense to the fact that this is violating

international principles, international law, and international standards that regulate the relationship between workers and employers and [the] government in the country.”

Calling for a dialogue

He further said that the fact-finding mission of late 2021 was supposed to bring about a dialogue in February 2022 after the pronouncement that there would be a dialogue. They expected that this would lead to some level of peace and an effort to move the country forward. He said:

“We are still calling for dialogue because we understand that dialogue is going to bring peace, and dialogue is going to assist this country [in finding] a political solution to the problems that are facing this country.”

This has led to employers and companies closing businesses because they do not understand what is happening. There is no communication from SADC regarding what is delaying the negotiation process, and even the government has not communicated substantively when dialogue will take place. The dialogue engagement would provide an opportunity to examine the country's situation and how it impacts jobs and workers. As well as addressing how it affects workers, this will provide an overview of how it affects employers, so they can find ways to intervene and mitigate the impact, he concluded.

Mandla Hlatshwayo, Letfu Sonkhe Institute of Strategic Thinking and Development

Mandla started his discussion by highlighting the various issues that affect the people of Eswatini. The situation where a Head of State earns ZAR 2.1 billion while a worker earns ZAR 4000. The burden on poor people is also immense. This situation results in a large number of young people being underprepared for life in terms of education and training. In addition, they cannot earn a living even on their own even if there were jobs available to them. Various industries are also not certain about the future of their investments in Eswatini because the government has not taken any measures to try and find a consensus direction.

Citizens that are fed up

Some groups are fed up with political parties or civil society formations that are talking about peace because they are not seeing peace provided by the state. This has reached a stage where they see low levels of armed activity in society. Violence is erupting as a result of a king declaring, *“I own you; I own the country; you are my subjects”*. He highlighted that citizens are starting to stand up for matters that affect them, *“since June, we have seen a massive wave of people who are saying ‘enough is enough with this King’.”*

King used brutal force

Currently, the royal family commands a variety of powers. The powers in question have nothing to do with customs or tradition; they are power which was acquired through brutal force. The King then used these powers to acquire land.

SADC should be the first regional body where Eswatini asks for help. A Terms of Reference has been developed by political parties and civil society in Eswatini for engagement with Mswati III and other political elites, and SADC will act as mediators. Among these steps is to try to remove the armed forces from the streets of Eswatini. Mandla concluded by mentioning that there will be no actual dialogue if people are physically threatened while sleeping. Such barriers to dialogue need to be eliminated to create a conducive environment. Discussions cannot take place if Swati leaders in political parties and civil society are prohibited from speaking to their constituents.

Barnes Dlamini, Multi-Stakeholders Forum

Barnes started the discussion by mentioning the expectations that should happen to eliminate forces that are affecting the people of Eswatini.

Discussion of talks

In summary, expectations as a mass democratic movement in Eswatini are far-fetched when you look at what they are preparing for inside the country. The Sibaya is a concept of traditional instruction and people are not allowed to freely engage with it. There must be a session of discussion or talks before beginning negotiations. The discussion about talks will help talk about the issues and what happened in Eswatini and what continues to happen because of state security and their attitude towards the people who demand economic and political reforms.

In his conclusion, he explained that Eswatini's main opposition party, the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), has said that it is ready to engage in dialogue with SADC, but it must be a dialogue that prescribes and meets the standards of a dialogue where people can engage freely, not the Sibaya dialogue. That kind of structure won't be acceptable:

"We will not give into such a structure, and that is a position that we have advocated, even presented to the SADC Secretariat, including the current President of South Africa."

Questions and Contributions from Participants

- ⇒ **Dr Clever Chikwanda:** *"Are there any practical steps that have been taken to engage SADC on the need to expedite the dialogue process?"*
- ⇒ **Hynd Shongwe:** *"My question for SALO is that having been based in SA, perhaps through your networks and connections, is there any influence that we have exerted on behalf of the... (poor network coverage)... Swati people should speak to the SADC Troika, COSATU, and others to convince them that [Eswatini] is a neighbour and that the conflict in [Eswatini] has a direct impact on the economic stability of [South Africa]."*
- ⇒ **Athenkosi Thoba:** *"Are there any progressive talks for engagement between civil society and the SADC Troika on the Terms of Reference?"*

- ⇒ **Lwazi Somya:** *“What do the panellists have to say about the King’s interest in terms of even if it’s a full dialogue with relevant actors within [Eswatini]? What are civil society’s demands in terms of what will truly comprise an inclusive dialogue, and [what are] the outcomes of the dialogue? What [are] the ultimate outcomes of society and the people that Mass Democratic Movements seek to have as part and parcel of this dialogue?”*
- ⇒ **Miriam Saohatse:** *“What are the timelines, critical processes and activities leading to the envisaged dialogue? Who are the critical players and actors internally and externally towards the dialogue?”*
- ⇒ **Zico Thamela:** *“My concern is how does an oppressor or a regime of the oppressing classes lead a process of democratisation?”*
- ⇒ **Ambassador Carmen Smidt:** *“SADC has proposed a dialogue. I know it might not be ideal, but to boycott the dialogue before it’s even started – even though it is said that SADC should be part of it. Don’t you think that there should be a beginning stage of dialogue and see where it goes?”*
- ⇒ **Hynd Shongwe from the chat:** *“What is our neighbour, South Africa, most especially the ANC alliance partners doing regarding critical solidarity support to the Swati people?”*
- ⇒ **Question from Facebook:** *“Do the Swati people want a BDS campaign similar to the one that was requested by the Palestinians?”*
- ⇒ **Trevor Ngwane:** *“South Africa bears political responsibility, both as movements and as the state, as people, and as the working class. But basically, what is happening is political opportunism, in which the bosses, the elite, want to continue benefiting from the resources, labour, and markets of Eswatini, Zimbabwe, and so on, without taking any responsibility or giving anything back. Working-class solidarity across borders is critical to finding a solution. It’s just that our movements in South Africa are weak, and there is a rightward shift, so these are issues we must address. But we cannot solve South Africa’s problems without addressing SADC’s broader issues”.*

Responses from the Panel

Bheki Mamba answered several questions

- ⇒ Is there any progress in terms of SADC?

“In our view, there has been no progress because we had hoped that by this time, SADC would have developed the Terms of Reference, pronounced the form this process will take, and SADC could have communicated in terms of what will then be the areas for discussion prior to the negotiations. So far, nothing has been communicated; everything is quiet, and people are losing hope in the process if negotiations are taking place”.

⇒ What are the interests of the King?

“We are suspecting that the King is trying to engage with SADC leaders to see how he can influence the dialogue to an extent that he [can] live with some of the powers that he is currently enjoying. That is our assumption at the moment”.

⇒ What are the timelines?

“We thought that the talks about talks were going to determine the timelines, the agenda, the critical role players and how issues of consultation with the community [will] take place ... However, there has been a significant delay”.

⇒ Can the King lead the dialogue?

“We, the mass democratic movement, do not believe the King can lead the dialogue because we see him as someone whose hands are dirty, having butchered and killed over 80 citizens before him. We consider him to be the one issuing orders for state security because he is the commander in chief of state security. That is why we have recognised SADC as a regional body capable of taking on the role of a neutral mediator in the dialogue”.

⇒ Why should we boycott the process before it even starts?

“We are looking for dialogue to take place. We are the ones who called for dialogue in the first instance. What we are raising is that let us engage in talks about talks so that we are able to talk [about] the preliminary issues. We can see that the country is raising the issue of Sibaya, but we are saying that issues can be discussed when we are dealing with talks about talks. So, we are not boycotting”.

⇒ Have we engaged peace operators within SADC?

“That is why we are engaging with [the] Troika because we understand that [the] Troika is the organ of peace and stability within SADC. So, it is that organ that is entrusted with this responsibility to ensure that in the region there is peace”.

⇒ Are there any practical steps that are being taken to engage SADC on the need to expedite the dialogue process?

“Efforts have been made to engage with SADC. Several times we have written to SADC, but after the uprising in June, SADC responded with a fact-finding mission that [went to] the country. The South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, jetted into the country to talk to the King. That is why everybody in the country had hoped that there was going to be a solution come February. But unfortunately, that is what is causing this state of panic and puzzlement now because no one is talking about what is taking place now”.

⇒ Assisting Eswatini in terms of building capacity

“This is a new process for us to undertake, and we do need to build capacity. We do need to engage with South Africa and Mozambique. I think these two countries are very important and critical chairs in the resolution of the question of [Eswatini]. The ANC, and particularly the liberation movement in Mozambique, must meet and discuss the issue of [Eswatini], and how they can assist in engaging with the mass democratic movement within [Eswatini] and developing strategies for how the situation can be scaled up”.

Barnes Dlamini answered questions about the demands around the Terms of Reference

“The position of the 'key in the hole' depicts our demand for democracy in [Eswatini]. If we are demanding [an] independent and impartial Judiciary, we are saying to [the King], remove yourself from the three arms of government. We are talking to him to say, 'look, it's high time you leave that space, you don't belong'. That is why he is not the right person to chair and lead the process. We need an independent person to chair the process.

It is hard for us to tell you what interests he has in the process because they are quite blurry. The pro-democracy movement and the people [are] exhausted – we are saying enough is enough. We need him out of the sphere of governance, wanting to open space so that people have a say in the old governing structure of the people themselves”.

⇒ What is the role of SADC?

“We have seen the role of SADC in some of our neighbouring countries, and one was hopeful, seeing that the head of the Troika is from South Africa. We must say we are happy that our comrades and fellow organisations in southern Africa have been trying to pipe press around the issue of Eswatini, and we hope that issues of Eswatini will be part of the discussion at the next Summit on April 4th”.

⇒ Do the Swati people want a BDS campaign similar to what was requested by the Palestinians?

“Due to SADC's compromised state, we must pursue every possible avenue to improve the situation and aid SADC. The SADC bloc's secretariat is merely one of its functions. It is a brotherly affair; the real people who will control the SADC Head of State are brothers. While we are assisting and improving the Swati situation within Eswatini, I believe that SADC unity needs to be improved to better address the issues and worries of its member states”.

Conclusion

The dialogue shed light on the current situation in Eswatini and the region. This dialogue brought together speakers from civil society, the student movement, trade unions, and the main opposition party in Eswatini to improve understanding of the current situation. The common theme among all the speakers was the need to be more provocative when dealing with the oppression Eswatini faces and that there is no time to sugar-coat the issues. President Ramaphosa, who was the chairperson of the

Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation in 2021, met with King Mswati and agreed to implement a national dialogue forum, which covered the future of Eswatini and the possibility of meaningful dialogue. It was discussed how the project is progressing as well as possible next steps. SALO will continue to convene and facilitate dialogues to advance democracy in the region.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Report 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 report 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 Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)
for their direct support for this event*



Norwegian People's Aid