



Int Dept/KT/gp

DATE
2010-05-19
YOUR DATE

OUR REFERENCE
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Mr. Barnabas Sibusio Dlamini, Prime
Minister
Prime Minister's Office
Mbabane
Swaziland

Death of labour activist in custody

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) hereby joins the ITUC, ITUC-Africa and the trade unions of Swaziland in its denunciation in the strongest possible terms of the suspicious death in custody of **Sipho Stephen Jele**, member of the Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union (SAPWU) and the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), your country's largest opposition party, which was banned and is being relentlessly persecuted under the contested "Suppression of Terrorism" Act.

On 1 May, the workers' celebrations held at the Salesian Sports grounds in Manzini, Swaziland's main industrial town, were violently interrupted by the police, who for reasons which the LO fails to understand, were insisting on the removal of all guests who they considered not to be workers. They disrupted the peaceful May Day celebration and manhandled and detained several officers of the unions, including Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) National Executive Committee member Simangele Mmema. They confiscated photographic equipment and deleted photographs which they claimed were pictures of officers on duty, alleging this was an offence. They targeted participants wearing PUDEMO T-shirts and even arrested a youth activist who was wearing a Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) T-shirt and an African National Congress (ANC) cap, which they confiscated.

The event was scheduled to start at 9:00 am, but was delayed for three hours as the police rushed in to search for participants wearing PUDEMO T-shirts. Swaziland Democracy Campaign (SDC) guest speaker Marie Da Silva was pushed in a police vehicle and taken away. Swaziland Consumers' Forum (SCF) representative Peter Mpandlana was arrested 200 meters from the sports grounds on claims that he was not a worker. Swaziland United Democratic Front's (SUDF) Alex Langwenya was held by the police until the event was nearly over, and was thus prevented from

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The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

holding his speech. The unions publicly protested against this overt anti-union harassment and the interruption of their peaceful May Day celebrations.

It was under these circumstances that Siphso Stephen Jele was arrested by the police for wearing a T-shirt with the name of PUDEMO on it. The police took him to his home, which they searched, finding his PUDEMO membership card. He was forced to have his picture taken showing this card before being taken away. Two days later, the police's correctional services department announced that he had committed suicide in the toilet of a prison cell.

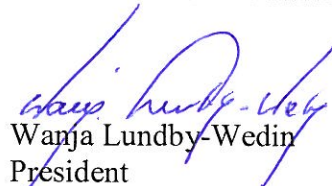
According to information received by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the police has exerted pressure on Jele's family for him to be buried quickly. Furthermore, the investigation into this death, appointed by your Office, is being done by the police's own correctional service staff. Given the circumstances under which he was arrested and the way he was treated in custody, the LO fears that Siphso Jele was killed because of his support for workers' rights and democracy. His death is the 12th stabbing or shooting incident of PUDEMO members, leaders, family or sympathizers since August 2003. Nine of these incidents were fatal.

Prime Minister, interfering in legitimate union work is a violation of ILO Convention 87 on the Right to Freedom of Association, which Swaziland has ratified. Interrupting peaceful May Day celebrations, under the pretext of letting only workers participate in them, is symptomatic of an attitude hostile to trade union rights. Random killings of alleged members of political organisations, even if they are proscribed under the Swazi "Suppression of Terrorism" Act, are never acceptable.

The LO strongly urges you to order a thorough, impartial investigation into Siphso Stephen Jele's death, including an independent post-mortem. We trust that you will pay prompt attention to this very serious matter.

Yours sincerely,

THE SWEDISH TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (LO)


Wanja Lundby-Wedin
President