

29 July 2024

Honourable David Lammy

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

By email

Dear David,

Following the general election on Thursday 4 July, **we would like to congratulate you** on your appointment as Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. We look forward to working with you over the coming months and years on a progressive and impactful UK foreign policy, especially in relation to Southern Africa and SADC.

As you commence your period in office, we are writing to **request your urgent renewed attention to the political situation in Swaziland.**

Recent years have seen the ever-increasing repression of pro-democracy activists and civil society leaders by the government of King Mswati III. Trade-unionists, lawyers and many others advocating for rights already provided in constitutional protections such as freedom to associate and democratic representation have faced serious reprisals from government agents, including violent attacks and killings. You will be aware of the assassination of Thulani Maseko, 586 days ago. Just this month, two former Members of Parliament who were arrested at a pro-democracy protest in 2021 for 'inciting unrest' have been sentenced to 25 and 18 effective years in prison. Others have been forced into exile, in the UK and other countries, because of the threat to their personal safety.

As we mark 30 years since the end of apartheid in South Africa, it is clear that Swaziland lags woefully behind in the liberation for all the peoples of southern Africa. With its proud history supporting the anti-apartheid struggle, we believe that the new Labour government has a vitally important role to play in supporting civil society's pursuit of democracy in Swaziland, not least because of the country's membership of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Charter's commitments to democratic principles can be reinforced wherever possible as part of a progressive shift in foreign policy under the new government.

In addition, shortly before the UK general election, the 112th session of the UN International Labour (ILO) Conference addressed the labour impacts of the situation in Swaziland. The Committee on the Application of Standards "noted with deep concern the deteriorating state of public order and its negative impact on trade union rights in the country as well as a culture of impunity for the perpetrators of crimes against trade

unionists". The Committee has requested a detailed response from the Swazi government by 1 September on how it is improving its compliance with the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention 1948, which it ratified over 40 years ago.¹

We therefore urge you to ensure that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office prioritises Swaziland in two ways:

- To utilise the UK's diplomatic capacity and credibility to protect Swazi dissidents and encourage the present government towards democratic reform, in concert with regional partners like South Africa and international institutions like the Commonwealth of Nations; and
- To channel UK development funding to strengthen the capacity of the Swazi pro-democracy movement, as part of Labour's broader commitment to multilateralism.

We remain available to discuss these matters with you further, as well as to provide introductions to the leaders of the Swazi pro-democracy movement in the UK and elsewhere.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Lyn Brown for her stellar work as Shadow Minister for Africa, and we look forward to engaging with the new Minister for Africa Lord Collins.

Yours in solidarity



Chitra Karve, on behalf of the ACTSA board advisory council and the ACTSA membership

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<https://www.ilo.org/meetings-and-events/international-labour-conference/112th-session-international-labour-conference/committee-application-standards-ilc112-2024>