

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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Senate
Parliament House
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6 August 2021

Dear Minister,

State repression against protesters in eSwatini

On behalf of the Australian trade union movement, we would like to express our condemnation of the recent surge in violence and repression against peaceful protesters by the security forces in eSwatini.

We have been following the developments in eSwatini and understand from our sister organisation TUCOSWA, the trade union movement in eSwatini, that the protests that started on 26 June 2021 were caused by the eSwatini Government's decision to ban delivery of petitions by protesters. The petitioners are demanding a constitutionally established democracy in which the people elect their government representatives in full freedom. Mass protests calling for democracy have persistently arisen since the promulgation of the 1973 decree that banned political parties. We believe that they will continue as long as the Government of eSwatini does not respond to the will of the people.

We are also reliably informed that the security forces have killed at least 71 people and injured many others. Furthermore, the security forces continue to use brutal force against citizens who are conducting their lawful business. Several people who have been injured by the security forces are not receiving any assistance from the government. In addition to the above, thousands of workers are not able to report for duty because of the violent crackdown against peaceful protesters. We are extremely concerned that, in the absence of any social or employment protection, these workers are likely to lose their incomes without any compensation from the government, resulting in abject poverty faced by thousands of poor households.

We call upon the Australian Government to condemn the brutality being perpetuated against the people of eSwatini and to call on the eSwatini Government to respect the people's rights to establish a democratic state. The Government of eSwatini must ensure that protesters enjoy their rights to peaceful assembly and association. They must not be punished for exercising their rights or expressing political views. We request you to advocate for the setting up of an independent commission under the supervision of the United Nations to investigate the atrocities committed in eSwatini and bring the perpetrators to justice. We call upon you to demand the unbanning of political parties in eSwatini and pave way for an inclusive political settlement.

I enclose a copy of a recent report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which finds that the actions of the eSwatini Government are not consistent with the Commonwealth Charter and the Harare Declaration. As such, we urge the Australian Government to support the call to suspend eSwatini from the Commonwealth, and to support reference of eSwatini to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) for consideration of this call.

We hope that the Australian Government will take the necessary measures to ensure that the people of eSwatini's human rights are respected and I look forward to your response on the matters raised in this correspondence.

Yours sincerely



Michele O'Neil
President
ACTU

CC:

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