



PRESS RELEASE

Africa Judges and Jurists Forum calls for an independent inquiry into the murder of Human Rights lawyer and Eswatini pro-democracy campaigner, Thulani Maseko

Africa Judges and Jurists Forum (AJJF) has received with deep sadness and shock the [news](#) on the brutal murder of human rights lawyer and pro-democracy campaigner Thulani Maseko, who was gunned down at his home in Bhunya in the Manzini region of Eswatini on 21 January 2023. It is reported that Thulani Maseko was shot dead in front of his family while he was watching television. AJJF offers its deepest condolences to Thulani Maseko's wife Tanele Maseko, his family and the people of Eswatini.

AJJF condemns the killing of Thulani Maseko as a heinous crime and a shocking violation of the right to life and security. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights is unequivocal in its protection of these rights. Under Article 4, it states that "*Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.*" Article 6 of the African Charter guarantees the right to personal security. States have an obligation to protect these rights and to ensure that those who perpetrate such heinous crimes, as the killing of Thulani Maseko are held to account.

AJJF notes the statement by the government of Eswatini in which it commits to investigate this heinous crime with the view of bringing the perpetrators to account. AJJF also notes reports that during his life, Thulani Maseko and his fellow pro-democracy campaigners were constantly harassed by agencies of the State. For example, previously, Thulani Maseko suffered arbitrary arrest, detention and imprisonment for two years after he expressed an opinion about the administration of justice in Eswatini. Further, AJJF notes recent reports indicating escalation of violence against pro-democracy activists and those who are critical of the government in Eswatini. Of particular concern to AJJF is that the brutal killing of Thulani Maseko comes in the wake of [reports](#) that the government of Eswatini has hired mercenaries to assist the police and the military to suppress and eliminate pro-democracy activists in the country. At the time he was gunned down, Thulani Maseko headed the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) of political parties and civil society groups leading the campaign for democracy in Eswatini. These reports and the killing of Thulani Maseko need to be investigated. In this regard, AJJF notes the African Commission Resolution ACHPR/69(XXXV) 04 on the protection of Human Rights Defenders in Africa, and Resolution ACHPR/Res. 376(LX) 2017 on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa which call upon States Parties to the African Charter to take all necessary measures to initiate independent investigations on cases of violations of the rights of human rights defenders, so as to bring the perpetrators to account.

AJJF calls on the government of Eswatini to permit and support an independent inquiry to be conducted into the killing of Thulani Maseko and the general human rights situation in the country. AJJF stands ready to assist in this regard. It is in the best interests of Thulani Maseko's family, the people of Eswatini and their government that the investigation of the brutal killing of Thulani Maseko be carried out by a body and through a process that is considered to be independent of political and other influences.

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