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HTUR/FW

13 July 2012

**Use of excessive violence including tear gas and rubber bullets against peaceful demonstrators, arrest of trade union leader**

Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents over 175 million workers through its 308 affiliates in 153 countries and territories, including Swaziland, hereby denounces in the strongest possible terms the way your police handled the peaceful protest actions by the National Public Service and Allied Workers' Union (NAPSAWU), the Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers' Union (STAWU) and the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT), on Wednesday 11 July. These actions were met with disproportionate violence, including the use of tear gas canisters, batons and rubber bullets. Furthermore, NAPSAWU President **Quinton Dlamini** was arrested while he was on his way to support the industrial action taken by the SNAT.

All the aforementioned unions, which are affiliated to the ITUC-affiliated Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA), were undertaking strike action in order to demand a 4.5 % salary adjustment and the withdrawal of the 14 % VAT on a number of commodities.

NAPSAWU had, together with the Swaziland Democratic Nurses Union, organised a gathering at Coronation Park in Mbabane on Wednesday 11 July. The police broke up this peaceful meeting with excessive violence, using batons, tear gas and even rubber bullets to disperse its 500 participants. Eight people were shot, and five were seriously beaten up.

In spite of this excessive repression, NAPSAWU managed to mobilise workers to subsequently deliver a petition to the Public Service Principal Secretary, Ms. Sibongile Mazibuko, who upon receiving it expressed her sympathy with those who had been injured.

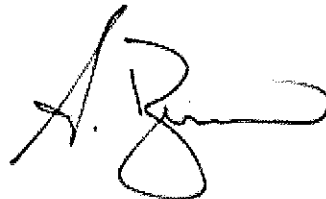
Furthermore, the Swazi police arrested NAPSAWU President Quinton Dlamini while he was on his way to support the industrial action taken by the teachers' union, in their outspoken support of their trade union colleagues' actions.

Prime Minister, that your authorities would resort to blocks to prevent demonstrators to reach assembly points, arrests, house arrests, beatings and even rubber bullets in order to break up peaceful protest actions comes, sadly enough, not as a surprise anymore. This kind of unwarranted violence has become as good as standard practice every time Swaziland's unions undertake action against your government's authoritarian policies. The inability of your law enforcement troops to deal with legitimate protest actions has unfortunately obtained international renown. The fact that your police is now even resorting to shooting rubber bullets at unarmed peaceful protestors, and arresting union leaders because they simply express their support, seems to suggest that your government even stopped worrying about this.

The ITUC wishes to emphasise that these events are of course taking place while Swaziland's national trade union centre, the ITUC-affiliated TUCOSWA, has been banned after its de-registration on the basis of fickle legal arguments against which the ITUC has protested on numerous occasions, and after which a Complaint was filed with the International Labour Organisation's Committee on Freedom of Association (ILO CFA). It is pointless to say that this makes the over-all picture even more dreadful.

We emphatically urge your government to refrain from excessive violence against peaceful protesters. We also demand that NAPSAWU President Quinton Dlamini be immediately and unconditionally released. The issue of TUCOSWA's arbitrary de-registration is meanwhile being closely monitored and followed up on, and will continue to tarnish your government's image on the international scene until it is resolved in a way which abides by international standard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B.' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

General Secretary