

Action for Southern Africa Press Release

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For immediate release

Time for the Commonwealth to increase pressure on Swaziland

Action for Southern Africa calls on the Commonwealth to vigorously respond to the Government of Swaziland's failings on human rights, democracy and the rule of law

With the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting due to be held in Malta on 27-29 November 2015, the Government of Swaziland, which is controlled by the absolute monarch King Mswati III, must be held to account for its serious breaches of the Commonwealth Charter, Action for Southern Africa said in a new report published today.

In its submission to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, Action for Southern Africa argues that Swaziland's lack of respect for Commonwealth principles, along with its violations of international human rights law, results in the subordination of the vast majority of the country's population. The report notes the 'growing internal criticism of the Government of Swaziland, including a call for a transformation of the political system' but asserts that 'internal pressure for reform can be bolstered by external pressure'.

Among the allegations that Swaziland must address are: bans on political parties participating in the democratic process; restrictions on freedom of expression; a weakened judiciary; and abuses of women's rights. The report challenges Swaziland's response to previous recommendations made by the Commonwealth and demands that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group take action.

Action for Southern Africa's Director, Tony Dykes, said: "The Swazi government has led the Commonwealth on a merry dance. If the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group - and thus the Commonwealth as a whole - is to command respect, it absolutely must take action to ensure Swaziland lives up to the commitments it has made. The time has long come for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to formally consider the Government of Swaziland's status with respect to the Commonwealth Charter. The people of Swaziland deserve nothing less."

Action for Southern Africa has been working with a broad range of Swazi civil society over the past decade to campaign for human rights and democracy in the country.

Notes:

1 – Action for Southern Africa is the successor to the Anti-Apartheid Movement and is a democratic, member-led, campaigning organisation. See www.actsa.org for more information.

2 – The report, *Submission on Swaziland to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group*, may be downloaded here: <http://www.actsa.org/page-1223-Swaziland.html>.

3 - King Mswati III has been on the throne since 1986. His extensive powers include the ability to appoint the prime minister, ministers of government and members of the judiciary, as well as the right to veto legislation.

4 – The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1995 to ‘deal with persistent and serious violators of the Commonwealth's shared principles’.

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