

## **COSATU statement on the SADC Summit on Madagascar**

The Congress of South African Trade Unions has noted the decision of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to suspend Madagascar for what they describe as an unconstitutional change of government. Yesterday's extraordinary summit in Swaziland suspended the island country from all community institutions and organs "until the return of the country to constitutional order".

The African Union's Peace and Security Council, meeting in Ethiopia, had already suspended Madagascar from the AU for an unconstitutional takeover of power.

Madagascar, off the south eastern coast of Africa, with an estimated population of about 20 million people, won its independence from France on 26th June 1960. In recent days it has undergone serious political turbulence that resulted in around 135 people's lives being lost.

Several protest marches led by opposition leader and Mayor of Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina, snowballed into a national challenge to the rule of the then President Marc Ravalomanana, who is also one of the richest people on the island. Mutineering soldiers were accused of trying to stage a coup.

All of this led to the resignation of Ravalomanana, who handed over of power to a Naval Admiral, who then proceeded to hand it over to the opposition leader, Andry Rajoelina, who now claims to be managing a transition to a democratically constituted government.

The SADC Organ Troika on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation chaired by Swaziland's dictator, King Mswati III, held an Extraordinary Summit in Mbabane and prepared a process to effect sanctions against the new regime. This was followed by yesterday's SADC Summit of heads of states.

The Summit reaffirmed the AU position to suspend Madagascar and put in place a process to strengthen sanctions, should the "de facto" regime refuse to cooperate with their demands. They also mandated the Executive Secretary of SADC, Tomaz Salamao, to engage the UN and other role-players to define a comprehensive and coherent strategy to resolve the situation.

COSATU notes that SADC's intervention was taken in the context of a clearly unconstitutional transfer of power that threatens to undermine the basis of constitutional democracy. However, a few factors need to be taken into account:

Insufficient, sometimes non-existent, political or democratic space for continuous political engagement in most countries of our region, constitutes the greatest threat to democracy, stability and progress

The weakness of civil society, sometimes as a result of deliberate state policy to keep ruling elites in power, subjects the people of our region to a perennial process of elite-recycling, without clear and fundamentally progressive alternatives to failed state policies

Weak institutions of state jurisdiction and power management lead to individuals and even armies exceeding their own limits; hence the rife abuse of power

Inconsistencies, hypocrisy and double standards will continue to plague SADC. Having failed to act with the required decisiveness on Zimbabwe and Swaziland, it now seeks to prove a point in the Madagascan situation, which it could not in the two other instances. While decisive action is welcome, it must be a consistent and not selective feature of institutional intervention.

The fact that SADC could appoint a renowned despot in the person of Mswati, to preside over such an honourable institution as the SADC Organ Troika, responsible for the defence and promotion of democracy in the region, makes a mockery of those intentions, however noble they may be. Swaziland is not the place to discuss the democratic resolution of regional problems, because it is a bad example to the region and world.

As Mswati was presiding over the Organ troika meeting and addressing the summit about the crisis in Madagascar, PUDEMO President, Mario Masuku remained behind bars, rotting in jail for merely challenging oppression and calling for democracy. What an irony!

COSATU's Mpumalanga Province has taken a firm resolution to take urgent action to demand the release of Mario Masuku, in the form of a week-long border blockade against Swaziland, until "Mswati's regime falls on its knees", in the words of Mpumalanga Provincial Secretary, Cde Norman Mokoena.

SADC must be transformed to reflect the legitimate aspirations of the region and its people. It must uphold the most democratic practices and consistently enforce high standards of governance, transparency and accountability to its people. Mswati must be removed as Chairperson of the Organ Troika; he is a disgrace to the region and its concerted efforts to promote democracy.

Further, we call for cautious engagement with the ruling unity government in Zimbabwe, given that the Mugabe regime has not yet shown serious commitment to the ideals of democracy and fully embraced the new dispensation. Accountability for all the support and resources being raised to support the new government must not be compromised. It must be part of the new culture being inculcated throughout the region, for more accountability and zero tolerance of corruption.

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Braamfontein, 2017