

Swaziland Civil Society launches the Manzini Declaration

Members of the Swaziland Coalition of Concerned Civic Organisations (SCCCO) have launched the Manzini Declaration to “set out Swazi Civil Society’s vision for a better future for the people of Swaziland.” The broad coalition, including the labour movement, political formations, the faith communities and women and youth groups brought together over 1000 members of civil society to develop the declaration.

The main aim of the Declaration, which was launched during the Sidla Inhloko Forum in Mazini, is to advocate for people’s needs in Swaziland by demanding the government to take a step towards civil society’s requests. The SCCO said: “We call on the government to take its first step, take the ‘Manzini Declaration’ seriously and meet with us as a matter of urgency.” Despite the authoritarian attitude of the Swazi government, which has banned opposition political parties and routinely arrests political activists, Swaziland civil society have been consistent in their calls for non confrontational dialogue.

The Manzini Declaration is seen as a “first step” taken by the civil society to promote proper and credible social dialogue. According to SCCCO “It makes demands on government but also commits us to working with government to turn these demands into reality.” The Declaration focuses on democracy, peaceful conflict transformation, gender equality, sustainable development and national unity in Swaziland. Its main resolutions and demands are:

- At least 15% of the nation’s budget to be spent on health
- An education system that meets the demands of the 21st century
- Land reform as a means to ensure food security
- Decent work for all
- Proper equality and respect for women
- Recognition of the importance of the informal trading sector to the economy
- A credible democracy where the people alone choose their government.
- Respect for human rights
- Adequate and professional policing that makes crime prevention and protection of human rights its priorities
- An end to reckless privatisation
- Proper engagement with the youth of the country
- Respect for Swazi culture as a vibrant expression of our uniqueness
- Adherence to ratified international obligations

July 18th, Nelson Mandela’s 91st birthday, was chosen as the symbolic date on which to launch the Declaration which calls for liberation and dignity for the Swazi people.