

The ILO attacks the lack of rights in Swaziland

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has launched a fierce attack on the Swazi Government in a recent report of the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards. The document stressed the unacceptable lack of human rights in Swaziland and demanded the Swazi Government to abolish the 1973 Royal Decree, which restricted political and civil liberties, and to amend both the Industrial Relations Act and the 1963 Public Order Act.

The Swazi Government has already ignored ILO interventions in the past and is unlikely to behave differently this time. The human rights situation in the country seems to have steadily deteriorated in the last months and many activists have become more fearful of criticising the regime because they could face criminal charges for inciting terror. The most recent victim of persecution was the human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko, who has been arrested and charged with sedition. The ILO has urged the Swazi Government to release all people jailed for exercising their civil liberties.

In addition, the ILO expressed very strong concerns about workers' rights in Swaziland, pointing out that workers' organizations lack the right to elect their officers freely and organize their activities and programmes of action. In particular, the ILO said that trade unions should be respected and blamed the Swazi government for 'acts of violence carried out by the security forces and the detention of workers for exercising their right to strike.'

The harsh criticism contained in the ILO report focuses on critical issues highlighted also by Sisonke Msimang, the executive director of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, in an article published on June 27. Msimang clearly pointed out that in Swaziland "political parties are not allowed to contest, and a series of repressive laws to silence opposition and dissent have been enacted". According to Msimang, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) should intervene by issuing a "strong statement prescribing a time line for the restoration of political normalcy" to Swaziland.