

ACTSA Press Release
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ACTSA welcomes the release of Swaziland political leader

Mario Masuku, leader of banned opposition political party PUDEMO, was released by the Swazi courts on Monday 21st September after spending 10 months in prison on charges of terrorism and sedition. Masuku had been detained in a maximum security prison under the country's Prevention of Terrorism Act, whilst he awaited his trial.

The controversial act, which was implemented in May 2008, has provoked much criticism in Swaziland and internationally and has resulted in PUDEMO, the country's main opposition party and three other organisations being declared terrorist entities.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act is the latest in a long line of restrictions placed on political activists in Swaziland since political parties were first banned in 1973 when the government first imposed a state of emergency.

The Swaziland United Democratic Front, a coalition of civil society organisations including trade unions, churches and political parties, have campaigned tirelessly for Masuku's release and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act since November last year.

PUDEMO expressed its thanks to all those who campaigned for Masuku's release both in Swaziland and throughout the world.

Tony Dykes, Director of ACTSA said:
"ACTSA welcomes the release of Mario Masuku and the court's decision to throw out the charges made against him. Mario has been unwavering in the struggle to bring democracy and rights to the people of Swaziland. His release is due in part at least to national, regional and international solidarity. ACTSA will continue to campaign in solidarity with civil society and the trade union movement of Swaziland and across southern Africa for democracy and rights for Swaziland."

Ends

Notes for Editor

- Action for Southern Africa is the successor to the Anti Apartheid Movement. It campaigns for justice, rights and development in solidarity with the people of southern Africa.
- ACTSA have been campaigning in solidarity with the people of Swaziland to bring democracy and rights to the country. ACTSA supports the calls of civil society and the trade union movement in Swaziland to bring about a democratic, people led constitution; the un-banning of political parties; the removal of laws that inhibit political activity; to bring about an end to corruption; and to introduce pro-poor policies which result in a fairer distribution of the country's wealth.
- Swaziland has managed to evade the international spotlight for many years despite regular human rights abuses including the arrest detention and torture of activist and strict limitations on freedoms of expression and assembly. Swaziland is Africa's only absolute monarchy; the King and Government rule over the population by authoritarian means, denying them their democratic rights. Despite being a middle income country 69 percent of the population live on less than one US dollar a day.