



ACTSA Briefing Paper: Swaziland Executive Summary

Swaziland is the world's longest running state of emergency of 35 years. It is Africa's last remaining absolute monarchy. King Mswati III rules a population of just over one million people by authoritarian means; political parties are banned, political and civic activists are threatened and imprisoned. There is less political freedom than in Zimbabwe. The King has a personal fortune of over US \$200 million while 69% of the people live below the poverty line of US \$1 per day. Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world, currently 26.1%.

The landlocked southern African state has evaded the international radar for years. Leading civil society organisations and outlawed political parties are speaking out against the lack of democracy, human rights violations and growing poverty and are demanding immediate change. Action is needed urgently, domestically, regionally and internationally.

Governance and accountability

- The government of Swaziland works on a Tinkhundla-based system. Chiefs, who owe their loyalty to the King 's elect 55 members to the Assembly with the King appointing a further 10 making a total of 65. The king appoints 20 of 30 members to the more powerful Senate with the remaining 10 nominated by the Assembly. The system and process has been rejected by many groups as undemocratic.
- New constitution came into effect in 2006 which confirmed the King's legislative, executive and judicial power and his right to overrule parliament. A new "Bill of Rights" was introduced but political parties remain banned and democracy activists harassed and detained. The Suppression of Terrorism Act is used against those calling for democracy and freedom and a Public Service Bill is proposed to prevent public employees from being politically active, with the state defining what is political.
- In 1983 the People's United Democratic Movement formed as a political party opposed to the status quo in Swaziland. Since its conception, PUDEMO has been banned and had to operate as an illegal movement.
- Swaziland held a parliamentary election on 19 September 2008 under the Tinkhundla system. The Pan-African Parliament observation mission asserted that the elections infringed on the people's basic democratic rights and did not meet regional or international standards. A Commonwealth expert team made recommendations for constitutional reform to ensure political pluralism is unequivocal.

Poverty and inequality

- Swaziland is a low middle-income country with a per capita income of over twice the sub-Saharan African average. However, the proportion of the population living at or below the poverty line of US \$1.25 is 69%. Swaziland has one of the world's highest levels of inequality.
- The unemployment rate increased from 22% in 1997 to 40% in 2009 and among young people has often been twice as high.
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has averaged just over two per cent in the past six years. Per capita GDP growth is lagging behind other members of the Southern African Customs Union, with neighbouring countries recording over five percent growth figures over the last five years.
- Major donors in Swaziland are the Republic of China and the European Union. On the whole external assistance to Swaziland has declined with donors changing their financing strategies and focusing on least developing countries and countries in "transition".



King Mswati III

Human and labour rights

- Human rights abuses have been increasing in recent years, they include limitations on freedoms of expression and assembly as well as the arrest and detention, and in severe cases suspicious death of activists in detention.
- Swazi law provides for the right to organise and join labour unions; however, there is anti-union discrimination; political parties are banned and activists and their organisations persecuted under the controversial Suppression of Terrorism Act. There are widespread reports of employers discriminating against, and in many cases taking illegal action against trade unionists.
- Swaziland has active labour unions and two national federations. They have led, with the outlawed political movements, the calls for multi-party democracy and a people driven constitution.
- In February 2008, a coalition of pro-democracy interested groups including the unions, political parties, and the churches, formed the Swaziland United Democratic Front. The Front vows to fight against the Tinkhundla system, yet its members have already been described as a “terrorist” by the King.
- in February 2010 Swazi organisations and the Congress of South Africa Unions (COSATU) formed the
- Swaziland Democracy Campaign



Public demonstrations have been on the increase in recent years

HIV/AIDS

- Swaziland has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world. Vulnerability to HIV infection is so high due to the combined effects of poverty, gender inequality, migration and return and some harmful cultural practices.
- The Abuja Declaration states that the allocation for health should be 15% of the national budget. In Swaziland the 2008/9 budget has only been given a slight increase from the 8% allocated in 2007/8.

Recommendations

ACTSA supports the calls by trade unions and other civil society organisations in the region for:

The Government of Swaziland to:

- Un-ban all political parties; remove laws that inhibit political activity; ensure democratic elections can be held.

Make the distribution of national wealth fairer through pro-poor policies; put an end to corruption

- Respect the International Labour Organisation’s mandate and the Swazi Industrial Relations Act.
- Improve service delivery and capacity to people affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Southern African Development Community and African Union to:

- Support democratic reform in Swaziland in keeping with standards and norms SADC and AU have agreed for democratic government.
- Work bi- and multi-laterally to and press for the establishment of full democracy.

ACTSA, based on the views expressed to us from partners in the region, specifically calls on the UK government and European Union including the Commonwealth and other international institutions to:

- Be more outspoken on Swaziland and publicly condemn the lack of democracy. The silence of the UK and EU on Swaziland is in sharp contrast to Zimbabwe.
- Support Swazi and regional civil society in their efforts to bring about democracy in Swaziland.
- Not host or participate in royal visits with the monarchy of Swaziland until democracy is implemented.
- Ensure financial institutions based in donor countries do not support the undemocratic Swazi regime.

[To find out more on Swaziland including the full ACTSA briefing paper on Swaziland go to www.actsa.org](http://www.actsa.org)
[Contact ACTSA at campaigns@actsa.org tel +44 \(020\) 3263 2001](mailto:campaigns@actsa.org)