



International liaison, dialogue and research
Reg no: 2006/020285/08

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Policy Dialogue Report

17 May 2022

Zoom Platform

SALO Public Dialogue on Eswatini: Building a Diplomatic Response from South Africa and SADC on Eswatini

**SALO PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON ESWATINI:
BUILDING A DIPLOMATIC RESPONSE FROM
SOUTH AFRICA AND SADC ON ESWATINI**
TUESDAY 17 MAY 11:00 - 13:00

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LIVESTREAM:
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**WANDILE
DLUDLU**
PUDEMO
SECRETARY
GENERAL



BONSILE MAMBA
CHAIRPERSON,
RURAL WOMEN'S
ASSEMBLY
SWAZILAND



MARY DA SILVA
MULTI
STAKEHOLDERS
FORUM



**MUNJODZI
MUTANDIRI**
SALO



**NOLUVUYO
MJOLI**
SALO



Executive Summary

On 17 May 2022, SALO hosted a public multi-stakeholder dialogue to discuss the ongoing crisis in eSwatini and the appropriate diplomatic response from SADC and South Africa. This dialogue brought together experts, media, civil society actors, activists, and diplomats from eSwatini and the region. The discussion looked at enhancing the understanding of leadership in South Africa and the region of the current situation in eSwatini. The panel consisted of speakers from the ground in eSwatini, leaders in the trade union movement, civil society from the region, experts and political actors and decision-makers in South Africa. Speakers included Wandile Dlodlu, People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) Secretary General; Bonsile Mamba, Rural Women's Assembly Swaziland Chairperson; and Mary da Silva, Multi Stakeholders Forum. Mary commended these platforms: “SALO continuously has

these kinds of dialogues to keep Swaziland on the spotlight because the danger is [that] there is a focus on one sporadic event or during the protest and then the interest is down, but SALO continuously keeps Swaziland in focus.”

Summary of the Presentations

The situation for students and young people

Wandile Dlodlu started his presentation by updating participants on a situation that was taking place at the university. At the time of the dialogue, the president of the Swaziland National Union of Students (SNUS) was being harassed and taken away by soldiers. He continued to describe the situation for students in the country who have not been receiving their allowances and were struggling with survival, while the university was moving towards having examinations. Furthermore, pro-democracy activists were continuously being targeted and attacked by state forces, with no repercussions for perpetrators.

The Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) role

Wandile Dlodlu shared his belief that SADC is not in a position to intervene in eSwatini:

“It is continuously tiptoeing and walking around the question of Swaziland. There is too much diplomacy at the expense of human life and at the expense of an opportunity to decisively intervene and resolve the imminent boiling point political crisis in Swaziland.”

He further criticised SADC member states for not being willing to take up the eSwatini issue in a meaningful way. He said that a powerful and international solidarity movement is necessary for the King to take the calls for democracy from eSwatini seriously. The King should also be pressured economically from the outside and there should be more support on the ground – *“we need technical support, we need support to assist the movement.”*

Mary Pais da Silva explained that the Multi-Stakeholders Forum (MSF) has been engaging through several diplomatic channels with SADC’s different organs, including the Secretariat, the Organ Troika, the Office of the Chairperson as well as the Office of the President of South Africa. She continued to say that they have been disappointed with how the issue of eSwatini has not been prioritised by SADC.

“When [Lazarus] Chakwera took over the chairpersonship of SADC, Swaziland was not put on the agenda. And again, in the last session that they had, Swaziland was not on the agenda. So we are now looking forward [to] the Summit in DRC to begin planning for that because I think we are at the realisation that at this point, Malawi and South Africa, perhaps will not be able to play the role [we need them to play].”

The MSF is aware of how limited SADC as an institution is to bring about transformation, as is evident in the case of Lesotho. Even so, they are expecting SADC to engage in a process that brings about peaceful and meaningful negotiation and believe that they cannot move forward without engaging with SADC and other regional and international organisations. They believe that the idea of ‘talks before talks’ is critical. It would be the first step to convene around the process of negotiation, what it would entail, what the timelines would be, who would attend, which issues should be negotiated etc.

Violence in eSwatini

Mary Pais da Silva explained that the country is still experiencing violence and that although it may seem sporadic, it is in fact systematic and ongoing every day. This situation will continue until negotiations start. The government seems to be intentionally provoking people to protest so they can react with violence and silence dissenting voices in this way. The MSF wants the removal of security forces from communities and the streets, and the opening up of democratic space.

Positively, pro-democracy organisations are becoming more organised. Although they still have their challenges and make mistakes, they are becoming more efficient. They remain constrained by a lack of resources, especially when compared to that of the regime.

Moving towards the SADC Summit

The MSF recognised the efforts that other CSOs have been making in allowing them to speak for themselves on their platforms as emaSwati, and not speaking for them. The then-upcoming SADC Summit of 17-18 August in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, was an opportunity for pro-democracy movements to coalesce around common statements. These statements should come from a region with one voice, not just from inside eSwatini. SADC member states needed to be engaged by different CSOs in the respective countries. Mary continued:

“SADC needs to give the impression that they are working on the issues of Swaziland. They need to come up with a very strong decision... We know that the change will not come overnight... this is a process... until the process of engagement begins, we will continue seeing the violence, we will continue seeing the unrest, we will continue seeing a royalty that is living large[r than] life while the people are suffering.”

The Swaziland Concerned Church Leaders

Sydney Nyembe of the Swaziland Concerned Church Leaders, an organisation that was founded in 2008 to bring churches together, spoke about their work. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to meet with the King and they decided to write a document on their position and how they view the crisis. This was received negatively

in many spheres, including other churches, Parliament and the government. However, Nyembe did not give up.

Currently, they are giving counselling to victims who have experienced trauma and assisting them in many other ways. Although this work is necessary, what Nyembe wants is a bigger movement in the region that will take the issue of eSwatini seriously. They are working on the logistics to link up with Christian boards in the region to have a regional prayer.

“So as a church, we want to strengthen prayers in the region in particular towards the end of the year, because we know that towards the end of the year there is an annual event that is done in a way that they say is a Swazi prayer, the Incwala.”

Together with this, they are working on a statement to condemn the violence that is continuing unabated. They are also visiting churches in the country to work towards a solution:

“Somebody once said [eSwatini] is the pulpit of Africa...if Swaziland, is indeed a pulpit of Africa, why do we have violence in the country? Why are people killed? All concerned people around the region [must] also understand that as a church, we are not part of the problem. But we want to be part of the solution of taking this country forward.”

Questions and Recommendations

- **Alistar Pfunye (Southern African Students Union):** *“I think what needs to be done now is to maybe converge with progressive forces around the region in civil society, be it a church organisation, the labour movement, the students... [to form] a clear position on Swaziland because we cannot relax and say the Swazis can do it alone while we see that Mswati does [not] care about citizens... And I think it's high time we bring back the SADC tribunal court because people like Mswati deserve to be questioned and punished for their doings.”*
- **Mcolisi Ncamphalala (South African Union of Students):** *“What is fundamental to us [is] to find [out] exactly from the Swaziland Mass Democratic Movement where [to] target the regime and its beneficiaries in South Africa? For instance, we have had a meeting with the Palestinian mass democratic movement, where they have given us even specific companies to say, this is how we intend you to go about boycotting and exposing [them]. So we believe that the same thing can still be done in Swaziland.”*
- **Bram Hanekom (South African Activist):** *“I just want to say blatantly that the situation [in eSwatini] is a South African responsibility. When we talk about the economic benefits and the fact that Mswati has a private jet and millions of*

wealth, while the people are starving, and where there is no democracy, and there is a dictatorship [under an] absolute monarch, that as South Africa we have created and supported and enabled that. Sugar is one of the major, if not the biggest export of eSwatini. Right now, South Africa has tariff protection to protect sugar from being imported around the world to defend it and protect its local industry. So, essentially, sugar in South Africa is 70% more expensive than sugar at the global price. The reason for this is really big tariff protection to protect local sugar producers, local sugarcane growers and ministers and so on. But eSwatini does not pay any tariffs. So currently, 95% of our imports of sugar come from eSwatini because of SACU and in the absence of tariffs on eSwatini sugar. The tariffs on the world only enable and support the eSwatini economy, and we haven't seen a significant decrease in inputs. All we have seen is that South Africa's inputs are now all coming from eSwatini. Now there is a process underway to review the SACU agreements. I think that it is in the interest of people in eSwatini and of South Africans to say we should not be giving a free ride to the Royal Sugar Company, we should not be giving a free ride to eSwatini because essentially, we are handing the money through these sugar deals that we have. No one is benefiting because the local sugar cane growers are not selling their stock sometimes, because there [are] huge inputs from eSwatini without tariffs. At the same time, local manufacturers are facing serious challenges because their key input for confectionery products is much higher than the global price.”

- **Ambassador Carmen Schmidt:** “I am sure not everybody in [the eSwatini] government is hard-core. We need to find avenues of communication within the government systems [with] people that might be able to influence the conversation, similarly, within the SADC region, we need to identify people within the peace apparatus of SADC that we can have that conversation with.”
- **Miriam Saohatse (ANCIR):** “It is important that the voices of everyone [are] consolidated, so that, as Congress has said, those that spoke on this platform... you project that united voice around the critical issues that you are talking about. I mean, you would want to hear the voice of the women, the voice of the youth, the voice of the working class, whether through the trade union movement, political parties... it's important at this stage now to bring together all those voices so that when these issues are presented, whether it is an agenda at the SADC platform, or wherever, you have a sense that the voices are united, and there's this critical mass, that support changes in eSwatini.”
- **Mary Pais da Silva's response to the question:** “Let me start by talking about the fact that the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) is as inclusive as it can get at this point, and we are still accepting new members into the MSF as long as these organisations have the same objective in terms of pushing for

transformation and pushing for multiparty democracy in the country. But I want to run away from the narrative that says that there is disunity within the mass democratic movement. [As] I said, we are learning from our own engagements, we are bound to make mistakes, but we have to learn from those mistakes. The reality is that we come from a society that has been starved of political participation for a very long time.”

- **Lwazi Somya:** *“We need a consolidated approach towards eSwatini because there are many actions taken up by various groups across political formations across our borders and transnationally. However, there's no centralised ‘Coordination Council’ that has a structure that [can] channel the energies of various organisations towards the solidarity movement throughout the region. This poses a question to our speakers going forward – should the international community be waging a full-on ‘Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions’ campaign against the regime because currently, there have been discussions around a full-blown BDS campaign like the one [for Palestine]?”*
- **Mary Pais da Silva’s response:** *“For the BDS campaign – definitely it is one of the campaigns that we are looking forward to getting assistance from our brothers and sisters across the region because we cannot launch this campaign on our own.”*
- **Athenkosi Thoba:** *“What is it that SADC can do beyond just putting eSwatini on the agenda but having more reliable and also more impactful inputs on the ongoing issues that are facing the movement in eSwatini?”*

Conclusion

This SALO dialogue created a platform for Swati civil society to clarify what they need from their regional partners to support democratic change. As was put by Wandile Dlodlu: *“[We] appreciate of course the opportunity that we keep getting from SALO and everyone [who] listens to the Swazi story, which is the African story”*. The dialogue brought about consensus on what needs to be done going forward. Firstly, the mass democratic movement within eSwatini needs to be capacitated and supported by its regional counterparts, including with technical skills and security. Secondly, the need for solidarity from across the region remains important and needs to be more effectively coordinated to build on some of the individual efforts that are already happening. Thirdly, those within eSwatini and those pushing for change from outside the country need to push for diplomatic responses that reflect the type of change that is needed. The tactics used to strengthen these three pillars need to be diversified and consolidated.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

SALO would like to thank The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) for their direct support of this event

