

Press briefing notes on Eswatini

Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Liz Throssell

Location: Geneva

Date: 6 July 2021

The eruption of violence in the Kingdom of Eswatini in recent days is deeply concerning, amid reports that dozens of people have been killed or injured during protests calling for democratic reforms.

The unrest first began in May when students took to the streets to call for accountability for the death of a 25-year-old law student, allegedly at the hands of the police. In late June, these protests grew into daily pro-democracy marches in several locations in Eswatini, with protesters voicing deep-seated political and economic grievances.

We have received allegations of disproportionate and unnecessary use of force, harassment and intimidation by security forces in suppressing last week's protests, including the use of live ammunition by police. Some protesters were reported to have looted premises, and set buildings and vehicles on fire, and in some areas they barricaded roads.

Although the situation is now reported to be calmer, we remain concerned at the potential for further unrest.

We urge the authorities to fully adhere to human rights principles in restoring calm and the rule of law, in particular the obligation to minimise any use of force in the policing of protests only to that absolutely necessary as measure of last resort. We also call on the Government to ensure that there are prompt, transparent, effective, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of human rights violations, including those by law enforcement personnel in the context of the demonstrations, and that those responsible are held to account.

We remind the authorities that peaceful protests are protected under international human rights law, including under Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Kingdom of Eswatini is a State Party. We are also concerned at reports that Internet services were disrupted last week and urge the authorities to take all steps to ensure that Internet access is not blocked.

We urge the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini to open up a longer-term dialogue to air and address the underlying public concerns that have given rise to these recent protests.

We remain committed to working with the Government of Eswatini to strengthen human rights promotion and protection, including support and guidance in implementing recommendations by UN human rights mechanisms, including guaranteeing the rights to freedom of expression, of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association, as well as the right of people to participate in the conduct of public affairs.

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