

SERI condemns the use of lethal force against peaceful protestors in eSwatini



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Over the past month, the people of eSwatini have intensified pro-democracy protests demanding systemic political reforms. The protests call for reform following years of widespread [suppression of political actors, human rights defenders and journalists](#) through the misuse of the law, arbitrary detention, torture and death. The protests also take place against a backdrop of persistent economic hardship and increasing unemployment.

The eSwatini military and police have responded to the protests with excessive use of force resulting in numerous reported deaths, injuries and arrests. On 29 June, the Acting Prime Minister Themba Masuku instituted a curfew from 18:00 to 05:00 and the temporary closure of schools citing concerns about the spread of coronavirus as well as “to maintain the rule of law and de-escalate tension that had turned this exercise into violence and disorder”. There have also been reports of disruptions to internet connectivity in some parts of the country.

As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the government of eSwatini has an obligation to uphold and protect the rights to life, dignity, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly.

The government of eSwatini also has a duty to ensure that any police use of force occurs only in compliance with the principles of legality, proportionality and necessity, in terms of the international and regional principles on the use of force. Disturbing mainstream and social media reports depicting security forces using live ammunition and rubber bullets would be clear violations of these principles.

SERI is deeply disturbed by these reports of repression and excessive use of force and is particularly concerned about the deployment of the military against protestors. While the government of eSwatini is yet to confirm any deaths or injuries, we extend our deepest condolences to the families, friends and comrades of those who have been killed or injured in the violence that has unfolded. SERI stands with all victims of police brutality and state-sanctioned violence in eSwatini and around the world and echoes the demands for justice, accountability, and political freedom.

We urge the government of eSwatini to heed calls to respect the rights of its people and refrain from blocking internet access. We also urge the eSwatini government to ensure that security forces refrain from excessive and unlawful uses of force against protestors and to be accountable for abuses that have occurred. We urge the South African government to call on the government of eSwatini to uphold and protect the rights to life, dignity, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly.

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