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## **One Year into Swaziland's uprising**

I would begin my input by first paying respect to those who died last year. I remember those who were injured and carry both psychological and physical scars. Importantly to the families whose loved ones were murdered last year. I believe that the victims of the Massacre did not lose their lives for nothing; their spirits guide us as we move ahead with our struggle for freedom, justice, equality and dignity.

One of the fundamental issues about last year's massacre is that the Swazi regime has not instituted an investigation into the killings and use of excessive force by the security forces. No one in the security forces has been held accountable for those killings. No reparations have been paid to those affected and their families. The families of the deceased clearly deserve justice and closure.

It is important to note that the foundation of the massacre was laid down in 1973 when political parties were banned by the late King Sobhuza, the father of the current King, Mswati. The banning of political parties gave extreme political power to the royal family and left the public powerless. The taking of political power led to the royal family governing public resources with no scrutiny or input from the public.

A mismanaged economy and skewed distribution of public funds put extreme pressure on the people as inequality grew more and more. According to Freedom House the monarchy controls an estimated 60% of the economy. Almost every big business has a royal hand. On the other hand Swaziland ranks amongst the top as an equal society. And these dramatic changes have happened in the last decades.

### **Last year's uprising**

It started as a response to police brutality, harsh socio-economic conditions of the people, especially the youth and there was the demand for people to elect their Prime minister. For the last 5 decades, the Prime minister in Swaziland has been appointed by the King. I want to emphasize the importance of the socio-economic conditions in understanding the events of last year leading to the massacre. The country had been shut down because of the Covid pandemic, meaning that many people were struggling economically. We should remember that many in Swaziland live on the informal economy whereby putting food on the table is a daily struggle. With no social support from the government, a total lockdown in an already struggling economy people found under extreme pressure.

We find ourselves in this situation today because political power has been taken away from the people 49 years ago when political parties were banned.

Today as we commemorate the day, political parties are still banned, political prisoners are in prison, and many are in exile. The regime has strengthened its tactics of mass brutality and surveillance. The massacre saw the King lose his legitimacy. There were activities to commemorate the Massacre

organized by different organizations in Swaziland. Once again the brutal hand of the regime has been witnessed.

The situation has not improved except that Swaziland has been on the spotlight internationally as international media cover it more.

However, there is still more to be done from outside to support the movement. The regime still draws support of the international community, be it UN, EU, African Union, Commonwealth and national governments.

Democracy loving people of the world have to step up and show solidarity to the people of Swaziland.