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Media Statement

From the desk of the General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana

THULANI MASEKO: THE SHOCKING DEATH OF A CHAMPION FOR JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) joins the people of ESwatini, who are mourning the death of human rights lawyer - Thulani Maseko, who was assassinated last Saturday. The murder of Maseko is deeply saddening - it is the silencing of a fearless voice, known globally as a champion for justice and democracy in ESwatini.

In its July 8 2021 statement, the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) called for (among other things) 'the immediate cessation of all forms of state sponsored violence against the citizens' and this call is again echoed by the SACC, as Maseko was gunned down shortly after the monarchy reportedly issued a warning to those calling for democracy in the small kingdom. ESwatini has an unfortunate reputation as a police state, where its citizens are subjected to cold-blooded acts of persecution for anyone opposing the current rule of King Mswati III. The timing of Maseko's death can, therefore, not be a coincidence given his repeated incarceration for his public opposition of the monarchy. This is a brazen act of intimidation against the citizens of ESwatini.

"Such an environment of social control has robbed ESwatini of a courageous fighter for human rights and democracy. He embodied the hopes of many in the kingdom, that one day - ESwatini might enjoy a democratic existence," said Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary of the SACC. The journey that this human rights lawyer and activist travelled mirrors the fearlessness of a breed of activist that paved the way for the liberation of many African countries from oppression. Maseko, in his address at the OSLO Freedom Forum in 2016, spoke of the impact that seeing Nelson Mandela assume the Presidency of South Africa in 1994 had on him, and how this gave him hope that one day - ESwatini's fortunes would turn towards democracy. Unfortunately, he has not lived to see that day. "This is such a devastating loss and we condole with his wife Tanele Maseko and the family for their loss. The type of fearlessness demonstrated by Thulani Maseko requires great personal sacrifice, and Thulani has paid the ultimate price for the love of his people and his country," said Bishop Mpumlwana.

Our condolences go also to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, whose active worshipper Maseko was. The current political climate in ESwatini will require increased global intervention and pressure, and the SACC calls for SADC leaders, the African Union and other global actors to exert their political muscle to intervene in this situation. “We fear that there may well be a hit list of other people to be assassinated. This makes it urgent that every effort must be made to stop this menace, saving lives and preventing the country from descending into chaos that also affects the neighbouring countries. The death of Thulani and other citizens can not be allowed to continue - the people of ESwatini need our intervention,” said Mpumlwana.

May the soul of Thulani Maseko rest in eternal peace, to rise in glory!

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About SACC

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is an ecumenical association of affiliated Christian Churches, and blocks of churches such as The Evangelical Alliance and the Council of African Independent Churches, and the International Federation of Christian Churches, with a mandate to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa. SACC does not exist for the propagation and the advancement of its doctrinal position, but is the place where our diverse interpretations of our faith come together in action for **social justice**. It therefore seeks to achieve a visible, just socio-economic and ecological impact, enabled through engaged churches-in-community for a reconciled South Africa and our sub-continent.