



Statement by the SADC Lawyers Association in solidarity with the people of Swaziland

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Lawyers Association (SADCLA) wishes to express its solidarity with the people of Swaziland as they fight for democratic change in their country. This is a welcome development as for decades the people of Swaziland have lived under the yoke of an absolute monarchy that does not adequately guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms despite the existence of a constitution that provides for these rights and freedoms. The government has over the years used a heavy handed approach in dealing with any dissent in the country resulting in the creation of an atmosphere of fear where freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression have been severely curtailed. The people of Swaziland have however defied all the odds and over the past few days have peacefully taken to the streets to demand democratic reforms and the creation of a constitutional democracy in the country.

The government of Swaziland has as was widely expected unleashed the police on the peaceful demonstrators resulting in the violent break up of the demonstrations as the police used tear gas and water canons to disperse the demonstrators. A number of leaders and coordinators of the demonstrations have also been detained. The people of Swaziland have however showed resilience and have vowed to regroup and re-organise themselves despite the heavy handed police actions. This shows that the people of Swaziland are prepared to peacefully and legally do everything in their power to ensure that their demands are met. These developments are not only positive for Swaziland but are also a signal to other dictatorial regimes in the SADC region that the people's wishes can not be suppressed forever.

The SADC Lawyers Association therefore

1. Supports the people of Swaziland in their quest for democracy in the country and urges all the citizens of that country to continue with their peaceful and lawful protests until their demands for democratic reforms in the country have been met
2. Calls on the Government of Swaziland to respect the people's right to freedom of expression, association and assembly as enshrined in Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 10 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and Sections 24, 25 and 26 of the 2005 Swaziland Constitution
3. Urges the Government of Swaziland to seriously consider the demands of the people of Swaziland to create a constitutional democracy and implement democratic reforms in the country to enable the country to shed off its stigma as the last absolute monarchy in Sub Saharan Africa

Issued for and on behalf of the SADC Lawyers Association

By Mrs Thoba Poyo-Dlwati

President

South Africa

15 April 2011.