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Eswatini: Murder of human rights defender and lawyer Thulani Rudolf Maseko

It is with grave concern and deep sadness that Front Line Defenders has learned of the murder of human rights defender and lawyer **Thulani Rudolf Maseko** on Saturday 21 January 2023.

[Thulani Rudolf Maseko](#) was a human rights lawyer, member of Lawyers for Human Rights Swaziland. He was the chairperson of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, a convergence of various stakeholders calling for constitutional reforms in Eswatini. Maseko was also one of the founding members of the Southern Africa Defenders Human Rights Network (SouthernDefenders). Thulani Maseko worked tirelessly to promote justice and human rights in Eswatini, the Southern-African region and beyond.

On the evening of 21 January 2023, Thulani Rudolf Maseko was gunned down at close range, shot through the windows of his home, in front of his wife and children in Luhleko, Mbabane by unknown assailants. Front Line Defenders believes, and is deeply concerned that, the killing of Thulani Rudolf Maseko appears to be a deliberate targeting and silencing of the lawyer and human rights defender, in direct retaliation to his legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Thulani Rudolf Maseko had already been targeted in the past. In 2014, the human rights defender was arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to two years in prison, following the publication of his opinion articles denouncing the lack of judicial independence in the country. During his detention, the human rights defender was subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment, including being placed in solitary confinement in reprisal for his publications, which he had continued to write from prison. The targeting of Thulani Rudolf Maseko continued after his release. Despite this, he continued his work, including acting as the lawyer of many human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists in Eswatini. In 2021, he was one of the early legal representatives of the currently detained Members of Parliament.

Thulani Rudolf Maseko's cold blooded murder is the latest in the escalating assaults on human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists in Eswatini, which have increased since May 2021 when the country began facing nation-wide protests demanding democratic reforms. The government of Eswatini, led by King Mswati III, has responded with excessive use of force against protesters and human rights defenders, arbitrary arrests and detention, internet shutdowns and blanket bans on protests.

Front Line Defenders reiterates its condemnation of the killing of Thulani Rudolf Maseko. Thulani Rudolf Maseko was a model of the bravery and passion of Eswatini human rights defenders, who continue to carry out their legitimate work for human rights in spite of the risks they face, and with no safety guarantees from the local and regional authorities. Front Line Defenders salutes these human rights defenders, and sends its heartfelt condolences to Thulani Rudolf Maseko's wife, family, friends and colleagues.

Front Line Defenders also urges the Eswatini government to:

1. Condemn the murder of human rights defender and lawyer Thulani Rudolf Maseko;

2. Immediately allow for an internationally supported, thorough, independent and expeditious investigation into the circumstances of the murder of Thulani Rudolf Maseko, to ensure full accountability;
3. Immediately end the violence and hostile narrative against pro-democracy activists and human rights defenders;
4. Respect, protect, and fulfil human rights according to International and Regional Human Rights Law and standards as set out in the African Charter for Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.