



# DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 52<sup>nd</sup> regular session

Item 4: General Debate

Oral statement

*Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini*

Mr. President,

On 21 January 2023, human rights lawyer [Thulani Maseko](#) was gunned down at point-blank range, in front of his wife and children at his home in Mbabane, Eswatini. This atrocious, cowardly, and cold-blooded act came a few hours after King Mswati III had issued “stern warnings” to those calling for democratic reforms in the country, and that his hired mercenaries would deal with them.

At the time of his death, Maseko was a senior member of Lawyers for Human Rights Swaziland and chairperson of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, a convergence of stakeholders calling for constitutional reforms in Eswatini. A true Pan-Africanist and a staunch believer in the rule of law and constitutionalism, Maseko used his professional legal skills to advocate for democratic reforms.

While the government of Eswatini issued a statement condemning the murder and pledging to investigate, DefendDefenders and AfricanDefenders [join](#) SouthernDefenders and others in asserting that only an independent investigation can ensure that those responsible for the assassination of Maseko and many others brutally injured and killed are brought to justice and their families compensated.

Two months after Maseko’s assassination, no investigation has taken place. As a civil society [petition](#) highlighted, “the government of Eswatini has taken no action to show any commitment to bringing Thulani’s murder to light. Instead, it has become entangled in contradictions in its tactics of intimidation and threats against defenders of democracy and human rights.”

We therefore join partners in calling on SADC, the African Union, and the international community to hold the leadership of King Mswati III accountable for the violence meted out against the people of Eswatini merely for advocating for their fundamental human rights, including to political participation.

We call on the Eswatini government to, among others, immediately allow for an internationally supported, thorough, independent, and expeditious investigation into the killing of Thulani Maseko.

Thank you for your attention.