

Vuyisile Hlatshwayo – National Director Misa – Swaziland

MISA-Swaziland, as a watchdog of media freedom, views Justice Bheki Maphalala's judgement on the matter between The King and Swaziland Independent Publishers (PTY) LTD and Editor of The Nation magazine as a disappointing judgment under Swaziland's so called constitutional democracy. It is a brutal assault to media freedom and free speech. *The Nation* was the only publication that was speaking truth to power and was the voice of the voiceless in a country that is fast becoming a police state. The fine imposed by the judge is also a total clampdown on media freedom it sends a strong signal to the already censored newspapers and broadcast media.

Mario Masuku - Pudemmo President

It is not surprising that you would get such court pronouncements where the freedom of the media is not only suspect but absolutely not there. As PUDEMO [Swaziland's biggest political party] we absolutely condemn such sentences in particular when the person is victimised for openly criticising a public institution or people acting on public service. We sympathise not only with *The Nation* magazine, but the entire print and electronic media in Swaziland who operate at the whim of all those in power. This also touches upon the broader Swazi society as clearly there is no broad liberal freedom for the people of Swaziland when there is no level

ground in the political, social and economic arena. We will fight this travesty and see to it that not only are the people's freedoms protected and promoted, but also that there is free political participation, media freedom and accountability. We encourage MISA, the Swaziland Editors Forum and all people who embrace democracy and the principles of a better life for all to condemn such a court pronouncement and take necessary steps to see to it that such an unfortunate incident is undone and never happens again.

Jabulani Matsebula – Secretary General Swaziland Editor's Forum

It is a shock that in this day and age anyone can actually receive a custodial sentence for criticising a public institution and expressing himself on the conduct of a public official. This is particularly disturbing because The Nation magazine is considered a credible independent voice in Swazi journalism. We will be taking up the issue with the relevant authorities in government to express our dismay and call for the review of laws that provide for such harsh punishment for the expression of views especially because we believe this is contrary to the provisions of our constitution.

Lucky Lukhele – Swaziland Solidarity Network

We see the entire case against Makhubu as a witch hunt and a political maneuver on the country's only independent magazine and the government's most

fearless critic.

The mere fact that the judge has allowed his political superiors to use the courts to suppress media freedom is the biggest show of contempt for the country's laws and its judiciary. The judgment against Makhubu and the subsequent attention which it has generated has caused far much more harm to the reputation of the country's judiciary than the said article ever could. As the SSN we condemn this outright declaration of war against media freedom and call upon all the country's media institutions to rally behind Makhubu in his quest for justice, which will have an impact on all media outlets in the country.

Musa Nkambule - Chairperson Sive Siyinqaba

Sive Siyinqaba ó Sibahle Sinje [a political organisation with strong cultural leanings] is worried that for the past decade there has been a growing, yet worrying trend of the erosion of the independence of the judiciary and public confidence in the judiciary has been waning and we are concerned about this. We are, as an organisation, very curious that of late government is winning 100% of cases in matters brought against it. This is not a usual occurrence. We are asking ourselves the question, is the government now so clean that they get 100% victory in cases. We are also wondering if the issue could be qualification, experience and skills from some of the officers. We are asking ourselves the question, are the cases properly allocated. In the past the trend was that the government would come out boldly to say they would not adhere to some judgments. You would have citizens winning

judgments cases or matters, but government would not comply. In fact disturbing statements would be issued that there would be no compliance. But now, what we see is a direct shift where government wins all cases. We cannot help but suspect that there could be challenges somewhere. As an organisation we are in the process of looking at all this. As for the case against The Nation magazine and its editor, Bheki Makhubu, we will meet and study the judgment and issue a full statement. We will include a whole examining of the entire judicial process.