



YCLSA

**THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE
OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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YCLSA DEMANDS THE IMMEDIATE AND SAFE RELEASE OF CDE NTOKOZO “PUTIN” VILAKATI AND AN END TO MSWATI'S REPRESSIVE TINKHUNDLA REGIME

The Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA) condemns the reported re-arrest and continued detention of Comrade Ntokozo “Putin” Vilakati, a National Executive Committee member of the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO), and demands his immediate and safe release. According to SWAYOCO, Comrade Vilakati was arrested in South Africa, detained for 40 days over matters relating to his asylum documentation, granted bail on 7 October 2026 and immediately re-arrested outside the court premises. That a political activist who sought refuge in democratic South Africa should find himself repeatedly deprived of his liberty under such circumstances is deeply disturbing. The allegations of political interference surrounding his detention demand an urgent, independent investigation. We refuse to accept a situation in which the institutions of our democratic state could be turned into instruments for intimidating those who have fled political persecution. Comrade Vilakati must be afforded the full protection of the law, and the circumstances of his detention must not become a gateway for his forced return to the very political conditions from which he sought protection.

The persecution of political activists in Swaziland is neither an isolated development nor an unfortunate excess of an otherwise democratic political order. It is inseparable from the character of the Tinkhundla system itself, a system in which political power remains concentrated in the hands of an absolute monarch while much of the population are denied the democratic right to determine who governs them. For decades, the Swazi working class, students, organised youth, women and rural communities have been subjected to a political arrangement that demands their obedience while denying them meaningful political power. Political parties remain excluded from freely contesting national political authority, democratic activists face intimidation and prosecution, and institutions which should serve the people remain subordinate to a political order built around royal power and privilege. The monarchy presides over a society in which the wealth and privileges associated with the royal establishment stand in sharp contrast to the poverty, unemployment and

economic insecurity endured by ordinary Swazi families. It is this contradiction between the concentration of wealth and power at the top and the deprivation of democratic rights below that exposes the deeply exploitative character of the Tinkhundla system.

The people of Swaziland have paid for their demand for democracy with their blood, their freedom and, in too many cases, their lives. In 2021, when thousands of Swazis, particularly young people, took to the streets demanding democratic reforms, the response of the security apparatus was not meaningful political engagement but repression. Security forces fired live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas, killing scores of people and injuring hundreds, including children. Families lost their loved ones, young people were left with permanent injuries, and communities were forced to live with the consequences of state violence. The assassination of human rights lawyer and democracy activist Thulani Maseko in January 2023 remains a painful reminder of the dangers confronting those who challenge the established political order. Years later, accountability for these grave violations remains absent. These are not abstract questions of constitutional design or differences in political opinion. They concern mothers who buried their children, workers who cannot exercise their political rights, young people whose aspirations are met with police violence, and families who live with the fear that demanding freedom may cost them everything.

It is precisely because of these conditions that the struggle for democracy in Swaziland cannot be reduced to appeals for the monarchy to exercise greater restraint. The fundamental problem is a political system that denies the people sovereignty over their own country. The Tinkhundla system must be dismantled and replaced by a democratic constitutional order founded upon universal political rights, freedom of association, the right of political parties to organise and contest elections, and the right of the people to elect and remove their government. Democracy must also have material meaning for the working class and the poor. A democratic Swaziland must open the path towards addressing the unequal ownership and control of wealth, the exploitation of labour, the exclusion of women and young people, and the social conditions which have condemned generations to poverty while political and economic privilege remain concentrated in a few hands. The liberation of the Swazi people cannot be complete while they remain politically powerless and economically dispossessed.

The YCLSA finds it particularly unacceptable that Comrade Vilakati's reported ordeal is unfolding on South African soil. South Africa knows too well what it means for political activists to be hunted, detained, tortured, exiled and threatened with death for confronting an oppressive government. During the darkest years of apartheid, our liberation movements survived in no small measure because other nations opened their borders, offered refuge and refused to surrender political activists to the machinery of apartheid repression. The peoples of Southern Africa bore enormous sacrifices in support of our freedom. It would therefore represent a profound betrayal of that history if democratic South Africa were to allow its territory, courts, immigration processes or policing institutions to be exploited for the persecution of those struggling for democracy in neighbouring Swaziland. We cannot celebrate the international solidarity that helped defeat

apartheid while remaining indifferent when the same protection is required by Swazi freedom fighters today. The freedom we enjoy cannot become a privilege we deny to others.

The YCLSA consequently calls upon the South African government to act with the seriousness demanded by its constitutional responsibilities and international legal obligations. The principle of non-refoulement, reflected in South African refugee law and international law, prohibits returning persons to circumstances of persecution and other specified serious harm. This obligation cannot be set aside for diplomatic convenience, bilateral political relations or pressure from neighbouring governments. The Department of Home Affairs must ensure that asylum procedures are administered lawfully and fairly, while the Department of Justice and relevant law-enforcement institutions must ensure that no person is subjected to arbitrary detention, improper political influence or manipulation of legal proceedings. We demand clarity on the legal grounds for Comrade Vilakati's re-arrest, proper scrutiny of the allegations raised by SWAYOCO, access to legal representation, respect for judicial independence and effective protection against any unlawful removal. The South African government must make it unequivocally clear that political persecution will find no assistance from the institutions of our democratic republic.

We further reject the comfortable diplomatic silence that has too often accompanied the suffering of the Swazi people. There can be no convincing commitment to democracy on the African continent while an absolute monarchy continues to suppress democratic political participation within our own region. Southern African governments cannot speak passionately about constitutionalism, human rights and the rule of law in international forums while treating the systematic denial of those same rights in Swaziland as an internal matter beyond meaningful regional concern. Respect for sovereignty cannot become an excuse for indifference to repression, nor can cultural tradition be invoked to justify the permanent exclusion of citizens from political power. The Southern African Development Community and the African Union must move beyond routine expressions of concern and pursue sustained, credible engagement directed towards the protection of civil liberties, the release of persons imprisoned for peaceful political activity, accountability for abuses and a genuine democratic transition determined by the Swazi people themselves.

Our solidarity with SWAYOCO, the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), the Communist Party of Swaziland, trade unions, student organisations, women's movements and the broader democratic forces is therefore not a ceremonial expression of political friendship. It is a recognition that the struggle of the Swazi people is part of the same historical struggle against oppression and exploitation that gave birth to the liberation movements of Southern Africa. The young people confronting repression in Swaziland are demanding rights which South African youth fought and died to secure. Their determination should find practical solidarity among South African workers, students, youth organisations, trade unions and progressive formations. Such solidarity must include the defence of political refugees, sustained public attention to human rights violations, engagement with democratic forces on the ground and pressure upon

regional institutions to fulfil their responsibilities. Internationalism loses its meaning when it is reduced to slogans while those requiring solidarity are abandoned to imprisonment, exile and fear.

The YCLSA demands the immediate and safe release of Comrade Ntokozo “Putin” Vilakati, full protection of his constitutional rights and an independent examination of the circumstances of his arrest and re-arrest. We demand that the South African government uphold its obligations to political asylum seekers and ensure that no person is unlawfully returned to persecution. We reiterate our call for the release of political prisoners in Swaziland, the unbanning of political parties, accountability for the killing and brutalisation of pro-democracy activists, and the complete dismantling of the Tinkhundla system. Above all, we insist that the future of Swaziland belongs neither to the royal household nor to those who derive their privilege from the existing political order. It belongs to the Swazi people, whose democratic aspirations cannot indefinitely be silenced by police repression, imprisonment or the threat of violence.

The YCLSA will not treat the plight of Comrade Vilakati as an isolated immigration or criminal justice matter divorced from the political circumstances surrounding the struggle for democracy in Swaziland. Neither will we accept a regional political culture in which the lives and liberties of ordinary people are considered expendable in the preservation of relations between governments. Our internationalist duty is to stand with those struggling against oppression, to insist upon the application of the law without fear or favour, and to defend the right of the Swazi people to determine their own political and economic future. The democratic transformation of Southern Africa remains unfinished for as long as millions of our fellow Africans live under absolute monarchical rule without the full political rights that others in the region have secured.

THE IMMEDIATE AND SAFE RELEASE OF COMRADE NTOKOZO “PUTIN” VILAKATI IS NON-NEGOTIABLE!

DOWN WITH THE TINKHUNDLA SYSTEM!

FORWARD TO A FREE, DEMOCRATIC AND PEOPLE-CENTRED SWAZILAND!

ISSUED BY

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