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**Police intimidation**

Prime Minister,

I am writing to you as a member of the International Trade Union Confederation, which represents over 176 million workers in 161 countries and territories - including Swaziland -to strongly condemn the systematic interference by police in lawful and legitimate trade union activities.

The Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA) organised a mass meeting scheduled to take place on 26 February 2015 at the Bosco Skills Centre Hall in Manzini in order to address questions related to the registration of trade unions, the loss of trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the recognition of trade unions for collective bargaining purposes and other democratic rights. However, police intimidated the landlord of the Bosco Skills Centre Hall on 24 February 2015 indicating that he could not rent out the hall to TUCOSWA without the permission of the police. Police also reminded him that he had to follow the law of the land without stating which laws he would have violated by renting the space to TUCOSWA.

The trade union meeting was therefore postponed to 28 February 2015. In the morning of 28 February, police mounted roadblocks around the country and placed uniformed and plain-clothed police in front of the Swaziland National Teachers Association (SNAT) Centre in Manzini where the meeting was supposed to be held. Despite the intimidating police presence and roadblocks, more than 100 workers made it to the SNAT centre but police, led by Regional Commissioner Richard Mngometulu and Senior Operations Officer Josefa Bhembe, insisted that the meeting could not take place.

The right to organise trade union activities, including meetings, is recognised under Swazi and international law. Section 14 (b) of the Constitution (2005) guarantees the right to freedom of assembly and section 99 bis of the Industrial Relations Act stipulates that trade unions have the right to plan and organise lawful activities. As you know, article 3 of ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association states that trade unions shall have the right “to organise their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes” and that “public authorities shall refrain from any interference which would restrict this right.” Police tactics to intimidate workers from holding a legitimate trade union meeting therefore constitute a serious violation of both Swazi and international law.

The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association expressed its deep concerns over “the systematic interference by security forces against the TUCOSWA activities” and urged your Government to “take all necessary measures to ensure that the TUCOSWA is able to fully exercise its trade union rights” in its report adopted in October 2014.

Despite repeated calls from the ILO, the ITUC and ITUC-Africa, your government continues to systematically deny the right of Swazi workers to join trade unions and carry out lawful and legitimate activities. We are deeply disappointed about the lack of progress and have serious concerns over the systemic nature of violations of fundamental rights in Swaziland. We urge you to conduct an investigation and hold the responsible police officers accountable without delay.

We request that your government inform us as soon as possible of the steps which it is taking in this regard. Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,