



**Comrade Sipho Jele Did Not Commit Suicide:  
He Was Murdered by Swaziland Police.  
Lies and Slander Fail to Persuade. Forward to September 7th.**

**Swaziland Democracy Campaign - South African Chapter - Press Statement**

**Sunday 11th July**

Yesterday, Specialist Forensic Pathologist, Dr Gana Perumal presented his report to the inquest into the death in custody of our comrade Sipho Jele. He was found hanging in a police cell after being detained by Swazi police in May earlier this year. Comrade Jele, was a respected and loved trade union and political activist and was arrested for the ‘crime’ of daring to wear a PUDEMO tee shirt at a May Day Rally.

His death was reported all over the world. In an echo of the apartheid era, the Royal elite regime claimed that Comrade Jele had committed suicide. This was completely rejected by his family, the community where he lived, and all those friends and comrades who knew him to be a courageous, lively and life affirming individual.

At the ILO Conference in Geneva last month, despite the protestations of the two Swazi Ministers in attendance, Swaziland was overwhelmingly condemned for its record of flagrantly and systematically abusing trade union and human rights. In fact, in a report from the ILO to the United Nations, Swaziland will stand alongside the notoriously oppressive Burmese military dictatorship as one of two countries in the world where the mistreatment of its citizens will be subjected to further condemnation. So much for the assertion by the Royal regime of their claim to be ruling by consent.

At the ILO, the Minister of Justice, when challenged on the death in detention of our Comrade Jele, continued to defend his government by saying that it was not possible to comment until the pathologists report had been completed. Well, now it has, and the Swazi regime has been exposed as a murderous clique, prepared to ‘liquidate’ all who stand in the way of their continued plundering. This so-called Minister of Justice should be thoroughly ashamed of himself. He has exposed himself as an apologist for an elite that imprisons and kills innocent and poor people.

The pathologists report is absolutely unequivocal. The cause of Comrade Jele’s death was not suicide. The physical evidence and an investigation of the scene have left the pathologist, who has attended to a very large number of deaths in custody across the continent, ‘perplexed’. The fact is that Comrade Jele was found hanging, in a place where there was nothing to stand on to hang oneself. Furthermore, his body did not show any signs of a suicide attempt. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that Comrade Jele was not hung, but brutally asphyxiated, strangled to death by those who were responsible for his arrest, and then made to look as if he had hung himself.

Incredibly, the police stated that they had interviewed the other prisoners who were in the same holding cell as Comrade Jele, but the pathologist reported that in fact they had not. This is not about the incompetence of the police, but their wilful manipulation of the truth. Ten days after the death, the pathologist himself, had to insist that the interviews were carried out, indicating that the police were in the process of fabricating reports for the inquest.

In an another cynical twist of the truth, and in a desperate attempt to

distance themselves from further international condemnation, the regime are now saying that additional charges were being prepared against Comrade Jele at the time of his death. We know from experience what this means. This is nothing less than a criminal and wholly distasteful attempt to besmirch the good name of our comrade by claiming that he was in fact an extremist, or a so-called ‘terrorist’. But we are confident that the world will now treat such baseless accusations with the contempt they deserve. The only terror that is being committed in Swaziland is state sponsored, against the peace loving people of Swaziland.

We feel for the family and loved ones of our Comrade Sipho Jele. To add insult to injury in such a way is unforgiveable. The family have been subjected to extreme harassment at each stage of this travesty. They were initially denied access to the body, have had to endure countless lies and innuendos published in the sycophantic media of the regime, and denied the right to a dignified burial free of police brutality and intimidation. They have however stood resolutely together with the democratic movement, and deserve our deepest respect for doing so.

The people of Swaziland are fast approaching a point of no return. The barbarous actions of the regime are finally being exposed for what they are. This is a regime in deep crisis, that is slowly but undeniably losing the facade it has so carefully constructed, and which has been woefully defended by the combined inactivity of SADC, the AU, the former colonial power and neighbouring governments. Our own government here in South Africa, has, to our collective embarrassment, done virtually nothing to expose and isolate one of the most undemocratic regimes on the continent. However in the words of a famous folk song, ‘the times they are a-changing’.

The democratic movement in Swaziland, including political, trade union and faith based organisations have found a new common purpose. Despite murderous setbacks, despite continuous harassment and trumped up terrorism charges, they are more determined than ever to bring Swaziland into a truly democratic being. September 7th will mark the first ever Global Day of Action on Swaziland. Thousands will march across the world and in Swaziland itself to say loud and clear, ‘A Democratic Swaziland Now!’ Our task, and all those claiming to support democracy and human rights, must be to support and be part of this unstoppable movement for change.

Issued by the Swaziland Democracy Campaign – South African Chapter.

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