



Thulani Maseko MEMORIAL

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21 JAN 2023

THULANI MASEKO 3RD MEMORIAL LECTURE

"The role of solidarity in advancing justice and accountability for the persecution of human rights defenders in Eswatini"

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria in collaboration with the Thulani Maseko Foundation, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, cordially invites you to the Third Thulani Maseko Memorial Lecture under the theme: 'The role of solidarity in advancing justice and accountability for the persecution of human rights defenders in Eswatini'.

EVENT DETAILS

University of Pretoria, SRC Chambers

Wednesday, 4 March 2026

11:00 AM – 13:00 PM (SAST)

For more info:

Latir Grey-Johnson (u22709623@tuks.co.za)

RSVP before 26 February 2026

RSVP

BACKGROUND

January 21, 2026 marked three years since human rights lawyer and opposition activist Thulani Maseko was brutally killed in his home in front of his wife and two young children in Eswatini. More than three years later, Maseko's killers have yet to be apprehended and there is no indication that the government has undertaken or prepared to undertake a credible investigation, despite a government [statement](#) on December 29, 2023, that the police are prioritizing Maseko's murder and the killings of activists and passersby following the June 2021 civil unrest. This government statement rings hollow when consistent calls from Eswatini's [regional](#) and [international](#) partners, and [civil society organisations](#) for an independent, thorough and impartial investigation into Maseko's killing appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Similarly, there has been no justice and accountability for the security forces' [crackdown](#) on protesters during the June 2021 pro-democracy protests. Preliminary findings by the Eswatini Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration recorded at least 46 deaths and hundreds of injuries, including many gunshot wounds. Other civil society organisations have reported higher injury totals. Over four years have passed since scores of students, activists, and passers-by were killed, and hundreds more injured, yet no member of the Eswatini security forces has been held accountable for deploying tasers, teargas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition against participants and passers-by. Instead, the government has intensified its assault on dissenting views by harassing, targeting and arresting government critics on bogus charges, interfering with peaceful assembly and resisting calls for democratic reforms. A number of Swazi pro-democracy activists, journalists, human right defenders, opposition leaders live in exile in South Africa and elsewhere, feeling persecution by the absolute monarchy. Victims of the June 2021 civil unrest have not received prompt and effective remedies for their violations.

In the famous quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from his [Letter](#) from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963, he writes: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," highlighting the interconnected nature of justice and human rights and clarion call for solidarity. The struggle for democracy and human rights in Eswatini cannot be divorced from, for instance, the land struggles of South Africa's *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, the post-election violations in Tanzania and Uganda or the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. It is not a localized issue but a universal concern because human existence and our humanity is bound up in others.

Although the motive behind his killing remains unclear, the Thulani Maseko Foundation and others believe that he was attacked in relation to his pursuit of justice, freedom, human rights and democracy. As we honour and commemorate his significant contributions, life, and legacy during his birth month, we pause to reflect on the role of solidarity in advancing justice and accountability in the persecution of human rights defenders in

Eswatini. Indeed, history has taught us that positive social change, liberation and justice cannot be achieved by individuals acting alone, but rather through collective action, unity, mutual support and solidarity to challenge oppressive systems.

The fact that the memorial lecture will take place at the University of Pretoria, Maseko's alma mater, presents an opportunity to discuss the critical and diverse role universities play in solidarity with victims of human rights violations, acting as both defenders of academic freedom and agents for broader social change. As spaces of knowledge and higher learning, universities are positioned to challenge injustice, protect at-risk HRDs, and influence public discourse.

MEMORIAL LECTURE'S OBJECTIVES:

- Engage in active remembering, honouring and commemorating the life, values and work of Thulani Maseko with the view to foster dialogue and transform his memory into a living ongoing influence on democracy and human rights in Eswatini;
- Underline the urgent need to protect human rights defenders (HRDs), emphasising their essential role in the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Eswatini;
- Highlight the critical role universities play in providing solidarity with victims of human rights violations and HRDs by providing safe, supportive environments for HRDs at risk;
- Discuss the issue of impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations against HRDs, highlighting the lack of accountability and transparency in such cases, and advocate for justice and accountability;
- Advocate for the implementation and enforcement of existing regional and international frameworks for the protection of HRDs and call for necessary policy reforms to enhance the protection of HRDs;
- Propose strategies to build solidarity across various sectors, regionally, continentally and globally as it relates to the persecution of human rights defenders in Eswatini and promotion of democracy and human rights;
- Bring together various stakeholders, including civil society organisations, human rights defenders, activists, academics, students, media, policy makers and the international community, to discuss and strategize on ways to support and protect HRDs in Eswatini.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Latir Grey-Johnson

*Intern- Democracy and Civic Engagement Unit
Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
u22709623@tuks.co.za
www.chr.up.ac.za*

