



Press Statement

19th September 2018

For immediate release

To: All Media Houses

The Human Rights and Governance Consortium under the auspices of the Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO) expresses shock at social media and newspapers-circulating images and clips of violence meted by the riot Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS) to protesters in the TUCOSWA-organised protest action in Manzini yesterday.

The Human Rights and Governance Consortium is an advocacy group of organisations focused on a broad-spectrum of human rights and governance issues which have dominated the human rights agenda since 2000.

Whilst we are not privy of what triggered the violent crackdown, we are, however, concerned that such images point to high handedness of the police assaulting protesters to the point of injuring some.

The police must be reminded of the rights to protest within the confines of the law which enable and protect people to freely express themselves, associate and assemble on socio-economic issues as provided for by the Bill of Rights.

The amendments of the Public Order Act and the agreed Code of Conduct during protest action were attempts to provide mechanisms for protest actions guiding both the police and protesters.

In fact, we got worried that the government conflicted itself when it publicly closed schools because of the intended protest action and on the following day proclaimed schools and teachers to continue as normal.

That the government chose to say that the issues raised by TUCOSWA and unions were attended to by the previous Cabinet and any outstanding issues to be dealt with by the next Cabinet was a recipe for such confrontation as workers called for the protests to bring forth workers issues of the deadlock

negotiations in the cost-of-living adjustment, minimum wage and the conversion of the Swaziland Provident Fund into a full-fledged pension fund, among others.

We take note that the government has raised issues of financial challenges. We are concerned though of obscure and prioritized spending of public funds at the height of increases in taxes, service-fees and inflation eroding income and wages, subjecting workers to even more difficult livelihoods.

We implore the government under the leadership of the Acting Prime Minister Dr Vincent Mhlanga to intervene. We also beseech the police to exercise restraint towards peaceful demonstrators.

We must commend the police and workers in other towns who seemed to have had peaceful demonstrations. We call for workers to continue to pursue peaceful protests which are a right of workers entrenched in laws and the Constitution of this great Kingdom.

This country prides its self as a peaceful country. Peace should be treated as an investment which the government should continue to pursue because violence begets violence.

CANGO objectives are: Coordination, capacity-building, advocacy, sustainability and grants-management.

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