



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Activists in Swaziland campaign for democracy, 2000-2010

October

2000

to: November

2010

Country: Swaziland

Location City/State/Province: Mbabane, Manzini, other cities in Swaziland, and the South African border

Goals:

The establishment of a democratic system of government in Swaziland and the removal of a decree banning political activity.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 104. Professional strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 097. Protest strike
- 113. Strike by resignation

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- and other activists.
- teachers
- union members

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), Mario Mukaku, Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO), Swaziland National Teachers' Union (SNAT), Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU), Swaziland Federation of Labor (SFL), Council of Swaziland Churches

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

South African Trade Union, South African Communist Party, Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU)

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Mario Mukaku

- People's United Democratic Movement (PUEDEMO)
- Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU)
- Swaziland National Teachers' Union (SNAT)
- Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)
- South African Communist Party
- South African Trade Union
- Swaziland Federation of Labor (SFL)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Council of Swaziland Churches

Segment Length: 22 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

King Mswati III and the Swazi government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Protesters threw stones at police on various occasions, and there were several bombings directed at police and government officials.

Repressive Violence:

Police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters. Protesters were also routinely arrested and beaten.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The government has not met any of the protesters' demands.

Swaziland borders South Africa and has a population of about one million. At the time of the campaign Swaziland had the world's highest HIV infection rate and was both one of the poorest nations in the world and the home of Africa's last absolute monarchy. While King Mswati III was a largely popular figure in Swaziland, he angered Swazis with his lavish lifestyle and

high number of wives. Between 2000 and 2010, activists worked to promote a democratic government.

The whole campaign started when two chiefs, Mliba Fakudze and Mtfuso Dlamini III, were evicted by the government following a dispute with one of the King's brothers. The evictions angered the local population, especially teachers, because evictions disrupted schooling, leaving many children with no place to go. On October 17, 2000, protesters took to the streets to protest against the chiefs' evictions. The protest was largely peaceful, but some demonstrators did throw stones at the police. Three days later, teachers across the country made the decision to close all schools in solidarity with the marchers and planned a protest for the following Monday in the capital Mbabane. Police beat and arrested many marchers, including the leader of the Swaziland National Teachers' Union (SNAT). Police thwarted another, separate protest.

On November 5, activists and union leaders (who played a significant role in these initial protests) crossed the border into South Africa and drafted a petition they planned to present to the government of Swaziland. They crossed the border due to the ban on political meetings in Swaziland. On November 10, Mario Mukaku, the president of People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO), and roughly twenty other activists, attempted to present a petition to Prime Minister Dlamini demanding the repeal of the decree banning political parties. Five hundred average citizens joined the protest, and chanted in support of Mukaku and his followers throughout the five-hour standoff with soldiers, culminating in Mukaku criticizing King Mswati and asking the crowd to disperse to prevent injuries, which they did. Police arrested Mukaku, however. The government responded by banning trade union meetings and instituting the Makhundu, which allowed anyone to be arrested and held for 60 days without trial. In response to Mukaku's arrest, union leaders organized stay at home strikes on November 13 and 14. Police broke up demonstrating sugar workers in Big Bend. On November 29, a mix of Swazi and South African labor unions held a border blockade by physically obstructing a few key border crossings. The sixty present activists were protesting the lack of democracy in Swaziland.

On June 22, 2001, King Mswati issued a decree expanding his powers, including the ability to ban books and newspapers without cause. On July 3, the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) held a protest meeting to organize a demonstration and also stated their intention to the press. Three weeks later, though, the protest failed. Only 200 people showed up in Big Bend, and the police easily dispersed them.

After two years of watching the Swazi government fail to implement their decisions regarding the evictions of the two chiefs, several judges from the Swazi Court of Appeals resigned in protest in November of 2002. On December 20, 2002 the Swaziland Federation of Labor (SFL) and the SFTU organized a general strike, but very few workers participated. Organizers planned the strike to protest the king's recent purchase of a luxury jet despite the country's widespread poverty.

On March 6, 2003, SFL, SFTU, and SNAT held a protest march against irregularities in the legal system and the king's new jet. In mid-August, 2003, Swaziland hosted a meeting of Commonwealth leaders. Activists from the SFTU saw the opportunity to get their message out to larger audience. On the 14th, they organized a march in Mbabane, but police dispersed the protesters with tear gas. Police acted similarly against a march in Manzini. Activists from both Swaziland and South Africa planned a border blockade, but not enough people showed up to have any real effect. Following the protests, the Swazi government responded by instituting a curfew.

After several years of inactivity, activists, largely from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), marched and blockaded the Swazi-South African border on both April 7 and 12, 2006. Police initially let the protest be, but eventually fired rubber bullets at the crowd and arrested twenty protesters on the 12th. The protest was designed as a show of solidarity between Swazi workers and South African workers in the struggle for the former's labor rights and democracy. Exactly a year later, members of PUDEMO staged a similar border blockade. The choice of date was intentional, as it had been the year before; it was the day in 1973 that the Swazi king banned all political activity.

On September 8, 2008, around 5,000 people marched in Mbabane to protest King Mswati's extravagant lifestyle while much of the population lived in poverty. Police turned back demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons. Some stayed nonviolent, but others looted shops and ignited a blast that damaged a bus. On the 18th, COSATU and SFTU organized a border blockade at

Oshoek. The protest largely went ahead on the South African side, but police blocked protesters from demonstrating in Swaziland. Four days later, women staged a march in Mbabane in protest of a lavish shopping trip by some of the king's wives. The march produced controversy due to the presence of women in a political demonstration, as they are supposed to express their views through their husbands. A government minister labeled the march "un-Swazi".

On April 17, 2009, 2,000 protesters all around Swaziland participated in demonstrations against King Mswati. The Swaziland Council of Churches and PUDEMO, led by the recently freed Mario Masuku, planned the actions. Individuals made speeches, and demonstrators wore t-shirts with slogans, distributed pamphlets, and sang protest songs. Police brutally beat demonstrators, and arrested many.

On September 7, 2010, activists planned a march in Mbabane, but before it could take place, police arrested about sixty campaign leaders. Police prevented Mario Masuku from participating in the protests by setting up a police barricade near his house. Despite the police's efforts, the march went ahead, though its numbers were reduced. On November 17, SFL, SNAT, and SFTU held a march in Mbabane that organizers deemed a success.

Though organizers meticulously planned actions year after year, they were unable to take power away from King Mswati or institute democratic reforms, and the Swazi government did not cave to any of the protesters' demands.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

The leading groups in this campaign worked very closely with one another and also received significant support from labor groups in South Africa. At the beginning of the campaign, there were several actions aimed at protesting the evictions of two chiefs by the King's brothers. Many of the same groups that participated in this campaign also demonstrated against the

evictions.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Danny Hirschel-Burns, 27/02/2011

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