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CONVICTION OF SWAZILAND EDITOR AND LAWYER A VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO FREE EXPRESSION

The Freedom of Expression Institute is outraged by the decision of the High Court in Mbabane, Swaziland wherein both Bheki Makhubu, editor of the independent news magazine *The Nation*, and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko were convicted of contempt of court yesterday. The decision by the court is in violation of the right to free expression as enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such a precedent will curtail the right and along with it, the ability to speak truth to power in the Kingdom.

The charge originated out of the publication of articles questioning the judiciary's conduct against a government official. Bheki Makhubu and Thulani Maseko have been in custody since April 2014 and denied bail throughout the period. They were released for a brief period of three days in April and were unfortunately rearrested under a newly issued warrant of arrest. Furthermore, there are reports that sentencing has been postponed indefinitely, an undue delay which halts any possible recourse such as an appeal.

Despite numerous calls from local and regional civil society organisations and international organisations against this extreme disregard for the basic right to freedom of expression the Swaziland judiciary appears apathetic in its role of ensuring justice. The culture of impunity continues to grow and hold back respect and advancement of basic rights. In all this, the most vulnerable are the ones who suffer the most.

The Freedom of Expression Institute calls for the immediate release of the two human rights activists and for reforms in Africa's last absolute monarch. Swaziland as a member of the international community cannot continue to disregard international standards that require all nations to protect the foundational right to Freedom of Expression and ensure all citizens enjoy this facilitative right through which they can enjoy other rights. The FXI will continue to direct the eyes of the world to these gross violations of human rights until the monarchy in Swaziland makes the necessary changes to safeguard the fundamental human right.

Executive Committee: Anton (chairperson), Raymond Louw, Nobuntu Mbelle, Indra de Lanerolle, William Gumede, Oupa Lebogo, Sam Radebe, Franz Kruger. **Executive Director:** Tusi Fokane