

Authorities threaten Swazi journalists with death

MBABANE: Swazi traditional authorities have threatened journalists of the country with death if they continue to write stories, considered by the authorities, as undermining the country's leadership and system of government.

The death warning came from Prince Mahlaba, brother to King Mswati III and also a member of the King's advisory council, the Swazi National Council Standing Committee (SNC), which is a highly influential body in Swazi politics.

Prince issues warning

The senior prince issued his warning during the final day of a two-day national dialogue dubbed as Smart Partnership held in Manzini, the second city. It was during a question-and-answer session in which the authorities engaged the media in dialogue.

According to a report in the *Times of Swaziland* newspaper, Prince Mahlaba said he had been monitoring what he believed were clandestine manoeuvres in the media that sought to undermine the country's leadership and system of governance and said that for prolonged periods of time he has been silent hoping that the journalists would come to their senses and stop their 'bad writing'.

Death for persistence

The prince said it was now clear that some journalists were hell-bent on destabilising the country and warned that they would die if they persisted.

"It is a fact that journalists earn their living by writing lies and if they do not write the lies then their source of livelihood is threatened and this is a fact and beyond debate. I want to warn the media to bury things that have the potential of undermining the country rather than publish all and everything even when such reports are harmful to the country's international image. Journalists who continue to write bad things about the country will die," threatened Prince Mahlaba.

In response, the *Times'* managing editor, Mbongeni Mbingo, who formed part of the media panel answering questions from the authorities, called the prince to order and wondered why journalists are now threatened with death and made scapegoats by authorities.

MISA-Swaziland position

MISA-Swaziland has strongly condemned the threat from the prince and has called on him to publicly withdraw it forthwith as it is not only dangerous and uncalled for, but also completely out of place and seriously undermines press freedom.

Coming from a prince and a senior advisor to the king, the threat has the potential to intimidate the media and instil further fear in the newsrooms. Already the Swazi media is operating under a hostile environment characterised by imposed self-censorship. Such statements by the prince only worsen the situation.

MISA-Swaziland has also called on the prime minister, who is head of government, to publicly call the prince to order as his statement not only instigates violence against journalists but is also against the spirit of the constitution which encourages freedom of expression and the media.

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