

LICINISO WEEKLY

SWAZI TEACHERS SAY: 2023 A YEAR OF ACTION!



The Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) has declared the year 2023 a “year of action” against the tinkhundla regime. The union’s first action in taking forward this declaration took place on Friday 13 January 2023 when SNAT led a march to the government in Mbabane, demanding the employment of at least 5,000 teachers on permanent and pensionable basis. SNAT called upon the regime to stop the casualisation of the sector, among other demands.

The Communist Party of Swaziland (CPS) supported the protest action as a number of its activists gave practical solidarity to the teachers and all workers. CPS National Organising Secretary, Simphiwe Dlamini, addressed the protest.

Also present in the action were members and leaders of other public sector unions as well as members of the mass democratic movement.

On the days leading to the protest, SNAT Secretary General, Lot Vilakati, proclaimed the demand for the end of casualisation of the teaching profession, stating, “We’re yet to see a casual Police Officer... We’re yet to see a temporary warder for the Correctional Services. Let’s see a temporary [soldier]... In these forces, every worker is permanent and pensionable. But when it comes to teachers, we’ve thousands in precarious employment. This must stop!”

During the protest action, SNAT President, Mbongwa Dlamini, expanded on SNAT’s call for a year of action, stating, “If we say this is the Year of Action for the SNAT, we need to know that action is not on Face-

book. Action is here on the streets. What we shall do as the SNAT is to unite and fight the challenges faced by teachers in this country. These include the problems faced by contract teachers and all teachers in the country.”

According to SNAT, the sector “has around 3000 teachers (both primary and high schools) placed on fixed term contracts, an exploitative practice that came into the fore through Legal Notice No.147/2009. In 2021, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) hinted that around 700 high school qualified teachers required relocation to their correct posts, were posted in primary schools.”

CPS National Organising Secretary, Simphiwe Dlamini, made the following address, reproduced below in summarised form.

Comrades, we cannot hope for things to be normal this year. Abnormality in this country started in 1973 when Sobhuza banned political parties. We are here because of the 12 April 1973 decree imposed by Sobhuza on us and assumed absolute monarchy rule. This year the regime will mark half a century of oppressing the people. We must ensure that the regime does not celebrate its half-century long state of emergency.

Let us ensure to mobilise the people to render the tinkhundla system ungovernable and disrupt its sham elections. Let us remember that when the people attacked tinkhundla structures, they were demonstrating that their future no longer lied with the tinkhundla system, but only with a free democratic Swaziland. But now we see that some opportunists who claim to be among the progressive movement want the people to go back to that very system which they rejected, to embrace and rebuild it.



Above: TUCOSWA 2nd Deputy General Secretary, Sikelela Dlamini, addresses workers at the protest.

Right: SNAT President, Mbongwa Dlamini, addressing at the protest.



As the CPS, we will continue to expose the opportunists who keep trying to drag the people back to the regime's hands.

There shall be no tinkhundla elections this year, comrades. We will ensure to **BOYCOTT, DISRUPT** and **STOP** tinkhundla elections, as we have said as the Communist Party. Participating in tinkhundla elections will only help prolong our struggle and legitimise the system. Let us remember that Mswati is desperate to earn some legitimacy. But it is very unfortunate that, in awarding Mswati that legitimacy, some people within the mass democratic movement are helping him and his system to survive.

We call upon all trade unions to organise workers, their members and service them at grassroots level. Trade unions must ensure to capacitate their branches and make them more active.

We have seen and appreciate SNAT's directive that this year will be a **year of action**. This must be done in practical terms through grassroots-level mobilisation. Regions and branches of SNAT must be active. If it is a year of action, there is nowhere we can give any breathing space to the tinkhundla regime.

We must organise to drain the tinkhundla system economically, as one of the pillars of our struggle. The regime's security forces must be made to work every day, stretched until the regime can no longer cope and thus surrender to mass power.

Teachers are overburdened by work at school, as it has been demonstrated. We call upon teachers to be conscious of this reality and rebel against such enslavement.

As the Communist Party, we have said time and again that there must be no spectators in the revolution. The time has come for everyone to stand up and make their contribution. Remember that before you are teach-

ers you are members of the community. This is why we say your issues as teachers are at one and the same time national issues.

Let us go back and mobilise students as well. The crises affecting teachers also affect students and the education system as a whole. Next time, we want to see students also storming the government and demanding quality education. We also need to see parents doing the same.

Students are victims in this dilapidated education system. In the rural areas, the situation is even worse. There are no teachers, laboratories, internet and other basic necessities. Now there is a food crisis. But in all this, the government expects teachers to produce the best students and results at the end of the year!

Remember, comrades, that there are two crucial pillars for a country's proper development: Health and Education. But both have collapsed in Swaziland. This regime does not care about developing both. Instead, the royal family is its priority, and the people come last.

We call upon the trade union movement to instil within their members the understanding that **an injury to one is an injury to all**. The attacks on the General Secretary of the Swaziland Transport, Communication and Allied Workers Union, Comrade Sticks Nkambule, by the regime and its police is an attack on all of us. The same applies to the attacks on SNAT President, Comrade Mbongwa. We must defend our leaders.

Let us also unite and demand the total unbanning of all political parties, release of all political prisoners, and the return of all political exiles.

As we mobilise to render the system ungovernable, we also pay special tribute to Comrade Njefire Dlamini, the late, the young creative and industrious SNAT leader who worked, together with other workers, to organise actions, including night vigils wherein the mobilisation against tinkhundla elections in 2018 took place. Those were the



Above: Activists at the SNAT protest.

Right: CPS National Organising Secretary, Simphiwe Dlamini, leads protestors in revolutionary songs.

Below: Earlier on Friday, CPS joined UNESWA Kwaluseni Campus workers on issues affecting their work environment.



BOYCOTT! DISRUPT! STOP!

Pictures courtesy: SNAT Media and CPS Media



practical actions that were undertaken by workers to disrupt Mswati's elections, and we can learn from those actions. The anti-tinkhundla elections campaign is thus not a new one and it has led to many successes.

We will not forget the murder of our people by the Mswati autocracy from 29 June 2021 – of course, including those that the regime murdered before that. Let us fight and ensure that they and their families receive justice. Under the current system, they can never receive justice. Only people's power can give them that.

The time has come for us to defend ourselves. Let us go back to our communities to form community councils. The security councils are very important. The urgency in establishing them cannot be overemphasised. Each and every Swazi must defend themselves but also unite in collective defence of communities from the regime's criminality. Muzi Mmemba was abducted from within the community and murdered by the regime. This is unacceptable. We must defend our communities. Each and every home must have a whistle to blow it the moment they notice an attack on any member of the community.

Problems Faced by Teachers in Swaziland



By Lucky Mamba

1. Casualisation of the teaching profession

The Mswati autocracy has imposed a policy of casualisation of the teaching profession. They hire teachers on fixed-term contracts, often renewable after one or two years. Through this policy, teachers are deprived of benefits such as pension. Sometimes teachers would work 20 years on contract and receive no benefits.

Additionally, teachers hired on fixed-term contracts are not entitled to benefits like accommodation, housing allowance or travelling allowance. Even when they relocate, they do not get transport yet it is the task of the employer to provide same.

Teachers on contract are also unable to access long-term loans. This deprives them of opportunities such as purchasing property like land, homes, vehicles, etc.

Furthermore, contract teachers are treated like slaves by their supervisors. They are burdened with tons of responsibilities on top of their stipulated workload. They cannot even complain or refuse those extreme burdens because they are literally in a begging position for the renewal of their contracts.

Worse, some of these teachers receive abuses in many forms at the hands of such unscrupulous administrators, such as emotional and sexual abuse. They cannot lodge complaints for the abuses due to fear of victimisation and loss of their contracts which is a result of the inherently corrupt justice system of the tinkhundla government. That is why we call this casualisation of the teaching profession.

2. Unbearable work loads

Teachers are given unworkable workloads. According to the *School Guide and Regulations Procedures*, teachers must have a minimum of 26 periods a week. The maximum is not given. Sometimes, teachers may go up to 40 periods or more per week and legally there are no grounds for complaining. This results in deepened exploitation of teachers who end up fatigued. This leads to depression and stress. They will have no time to rest as they will have to do this work at home or on weekends, thus depriving them quality time with their families.

3. Teacher-pupil ratio

Another cause of stress for teachers is the teacher-pupil ratio. The *School Guide and Regulations Procedures* as well as the *Education Sector Policy* of 2018, clearly stipulate the number of learners a teacher must have per class which is completely ignored by school administrators. For one teacher to have about 60 to hundred learners is not uncommon.

This creates further problems during lessons. Some learners are inaccessible, which inhibits learning and promotes class administration problems. This also compromises safety as in case of an accident there can be a stampede causing many fatalities.

Moreover, when marking class works, tests and examinations for big classes, teachers are often unable to give feedback at the right time and may miss deadlines which disrupts the overall operations of a school.

4. Poor working conditions

Some schools are not fenced. This makes people and animals alike to disrupt learning operations.

Some classrooms have broken windows and birds will be flying inside the classroom, disturbing lessons. One school was awfully close to the forest and monkeys would easily access the classrooms, disturbing lessons in the process.

Moreover, the lack of furniture in schools has reached extreme levels. Learners would be looking for furniture all over the school and a great deal of learning time gets wasted. In some lessons, learners often have to undertake lessons standing or sharing furniture.

5. Deplorable living conditions

Teachers live in dilapidated houses with leaking roofs and falling callings and fittings like cupboards. This negatively affects teachers' preparations for work. Some teachers are being forced to share houses, causing many clashes within staff members, thus creating workplace conflicts.

Due to shortage of housing, many teachers are forced to rent expensive houses in town, which further cripples them economically. In the rural areas, they are forced to stay in neighbouring homesteads where their learners live, further stripping them of their dignity.

Teachers are also exposed to poor sanitation. Most of their houses have no running water and no proper toilets. In such cases, they use pit latrines which are not up to standard, all of which compromises their health.

Sometimes teachers are forced to walk long distances to work caused by underdevelopment of rural areas and lack of proper maintenance of road infrastructure by the government.

6. Wrong placement of teachers

There are so many instances where teachers are wrongly placed, particularly considering their qualifications.

Often, this affects Degreed + PGCE teachers who get deployment in primary schools instead of high schools.

Such improperly placed teachers are forced to teach all subjects yet they have their own subjects they specialise on, in line with their qualifications.

They are also not properly remunerated for the "new" work they are posted to. They are paid at diploma scale yet they are degreed. This raises the question whether teachers are paid by qualification or post. The experience of such teachers is not considered.

On top of that, they do not qualify for promotion at primary or high schools.

Moreover, the attitude of supervisors to these teachers is also problematic. When they exercise their rights, they are constantly reminded that "this is not high school".

7. No clear career pathing

Some positions are not remunerated. These include Senior teacher, nominal head of department, and nominal deputies.

These officers are burdened with extra responsibilities for which they are not paid. This creates disharmony in the workplace.

The promotion criteria of these positions are not clear as you find a long-serving teacher not promoted in favour of a novice.

8. Wellness issues

Teachers suffer from a myriad of health issues involving physical and mental health due to work-related stress, leading to depression. There is a long queue of teachers waiting to be enrolled in the country's mental facility. Even the presence of PSHAAC (Public Sector HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee) does not help matters because of the inefficiency of the government. Owing to a neglected health sector, many teachers die prematurely.

9. Shortage of staff members

Teachers who retire and those who are deceased are often not replaced. Contracts are not renewed. This creates overloading to those who remain when they are forced to take over classes of those who left. When they complain, they are threatened with disciplinary action because of a gap in the labour laws. That causes the health issues faced by teachers.

The challenges discussed above are, however, not exhaustive of the myriad of challenges faced by teachers in the workplace. Even more, the tinkhundla regime is simply incapable of solving them. This is why the struggle for democracy is very important. Without democracy, based on people's power, these problems can only worsen.

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Lucky Mamba is a member of the CPS, serving as the Deputy Chairperson of the Party's Workers Commission. He is also a member of the Swaziland National Association of Teachers, serving as Chairperson of the SNAT National Social Welfare Committee. This is a written version of a presentation he made on 12 January 2023.

