

# Uniting for democracy in Swaziland

Ngugi Wa Thiongo once wrote: 'There is no night so long that it does not end with dawn.' The same wisdom applies to the struggle for democracy in Swaziland, writes **Mario Masuku**.

The finest sons and daughters of the heroic and fighting masses of Swaziland this conference takes place against the backdrop of a directive from the 7th General Congress of the People's United Democratic Movement (Pudemo), where it was agreed the leading structures were instructed to convene a national policy conference to discuss alternative policies for our country. They were also tasked to develop a clear programme for the effective renewal of this great movement of our people, in view of the years of operating under extremely hostile conditions resulting from the brutal rule of *tinkbundla* and the ever changing political landscape and conditions in the country.

As delegates representing Pudemo structures throughout Swaziland and those based outside the country, joined by our allies and fraternal organisations, as well as researchers and academics drawn from various institutions, we are gathered to make a critical reflection of the situation facing our country and people. The Pudemo structures represented here reflect the width and diversity of the mass of the Swazi people in churches, workplaces, rural areas, social and cultural centres, educational institutions,

and every other space where our people are found.

We the delegates fully accept the responsibility placed on our shoulders by the historic expectations and tasks arising from the political situation in our country and the need to provide concrete answers and alternative policies to the mess that *tinkbundla* has done to our people.

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We are gathered as freedom fighters and revolutionary democrats and disciplined militants of the Swazi movement in order to respond to the emergencies imposed by the deepening conditions of desperation, hopelessness, political suppression, hunger, extreme poverty and unemployment in our country. Our people want change, and not just change for its own sake, but a clear projection of the kind of society and the alternatives we

seek to put in place for the future of our country.

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As we do so, we take this opportunity to salute the coming into being of the giant workers federation, Tucoswa, which has emerged as the spearhead of the Swazi democratic struggle, by building unity in action of workers and other civil society forces. All workers and activists must strengthen the unity and organised capacity of the Swazi trade union movement, whilst also promoting the place and role of the only federation in the country.

We salute the heroic sacrifices of our people, cadres and internationalists who suffer with us. We take this special opportunity to extend our special thanks to our allies, the Tripartite Alliance of South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Community Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) for their clear support, commitment and love for our people and the future of our country.

They have always opened their warm hands to our people and their liberation movement, Pudemo, and its allied forces. They have not dictated to us how to execute the struggle, but have always been willing to share their experiences and wisdom in order to broaden and enrich our own struggle, informed by the prevailing conditions in Swaziland.

#### UNDERSTANDING STRUGGLE TERRAIN

##### ***Those who do not fight are voluntarily choosing to perish!***

The conference reaffirms the centrality of Pudemo as a critical force for liberation in Swaziland, with the full responsibility to build, coordinate and support our people's efforts towards their own liberation. It is with the fullest appreciation that we take seriously the tasks assigned to us and our declared commitment to change the situation in the interest of the poor and oppressed masses.

The conference further recognised the historical significance of 2013 in the following ways:

- Pudemo, the tried and tested weapon of the people's struggle shall be turning 30 years on 6 July 2013.
- The reign of *tinkbundla* terror, marked by the 12 April 1973 perpetual state of emergency, shall be turning 40 years.
- *Tinkbundla* royal selections, disguised as elections are due and we have made our stand clear that without the

fundamental conditions for a free and fair multiparty democratic process in place, no elections can be deemed democratic. No renewal of *tinkbundla* lease of life.

It is for this reason that conference calls upon all cadres of Pudemo, other Swazi patriots and democracy-loving people all over the world to heed the call: 'a day more of *tinkbundla* rule means more suffering, more deaths from curable diseases, more hunger, more unemployment, more arrests and more royal extravagance and corruption.'

We also extend our warmest and most profound salutation to the president of our youth wing, Swayoco, Bheki Dlamini and Zonke Dlamini the two sons of the Swazi people, who are currently in a *tinkbundla* jail for their courage, inspiration and untiring commitment to the cause of our people and their organisation, Pudemo. We also take this opportunity to condemn the vengeful sentencing of our internationalist, Amos Mbedzi, and call for his immediate unconditional release.

We also note that the heightened levels of harassment, arrest, intimidation and victimisation of Pudemo members and activists, which have clearly demonstrated the extent of desperation with the ruling *tinkbundla* circles. In the recent past the regime has engaged in a full-blown policy to crush dissenting political views in line with the mandate given by the head of state to his current cabinet. Pudemo is the prime target, as indicated by the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act, which specifically names the movement and its youth wing, as well as its auxiliary structures, for brutal crackdown.

#### WEAPON FOR DEMOCRACY

Pudemo is synonymous with liberation. It has become a buzzword for change and an icon of the people's aspirations in Swaziland. It

is very clear to everyone that there is no genuine solution to the crisis outside engagement with Pudemo and the mass democratic movement as a whole. Surely, for any lasting solution to emerge the people's organisations must be involved and the people's demands must be the primary determining factor. This means the people must own and control the process of engagement.

Pudemo emerged in the context of an extremely hostile political environment, characterised by demonising propaganda, state brutality to hide a corrupt moral fibre and economic system that enriches only a few parasites at the expense of the poor majority. Pudemo continues to contest *tinkbundla* hegemony and create space for a new democratic and progressive culture where respect for human rights and dignity are central. Through bitter struggles, Pudemo has immensely contributed in transforming the political landscape towards the realisation of the goals set out in the *People's Manifesto*.

We have come a long way, not without pains and sacrifices, but also victories and joys, advances and setbacks. This lengthy period has however also brought to the fore certain urgencies. Certain tendencies in the very recent past point to the need for intensified induction of members, political education and cadreship development as part of an established culture in the movement. There is also need to build a culture of discipline and high moral standards in our society through the exemplary conduct of Pudemo cadres in struggle and in their daily lives.

Pudemo represents the most advanced, highly disciplined and unwaveringly dedicated members of society and this must be upheld as a yardstick for the renewal of our noble traditions and principles. Pudemo members and structures do all and everything for the people and nothing against them!



*Bheki and Zonke Dlamini: jailed for standing up to Tinkhundla.*

## TRANSFORMATION POLICIES

The conference discussed a number of draft policies that aimed to chart a new way forward for the country and agreed that the policies needed to integrate the robust discussions as well as enrich further the policy frameworks agreed upon. The discussed draft policies included: economic planning and development, transformation of the state for democratic governance and quality public service, energy resources and industrialisation, land, agriculture and food security, education and training, health and international relations policy.

The institution of traditional leadership and the monarchy in the context of a democratic struggle was also discussed. The challenge of organisational renewal, which provided an opportunity to reflect on the state of Pudemo itself and the urgent need to reposition our movement in order to decisively respond to the current political environment in our country, was also discussed. Discussions sought to put Pudemo at the centre of the

people's struggle to determine their own destiny as free people, and to inspire confidence towards renewed momentum.

### ***On the transformation of the state, democratic governance and quality public service:***

1. The National Policy Conference reaffirmed our strongly held assertion that the *tinkhundla* system is undemocratic and alien to Swazi cultural values and the aspirations of our people as a whole. It is a system rooted in the ruthless entrenchment of royal supremacy in the name of Swazi culture and tradition, and a conduit for economic accumulation of the ruling elite and their friends, while the majority remain in dire conditions of squalor and dehumanising poverty.
2. At the forefront of Pudemo's approach to normalising the political, economic, and social breakdown in our country and setting a new agenda for development, is the issue of

establishing new institutions of democracy, such as a constitution born out of popular participation or a new social contract based on shared values, universally accepted principles of human rights and democratic values.

3. It is therefore fundamental that a new and democratic constitution that restores the sovereignty and dignity of the people to freely express their will and elect a government of their choice through a democratic process is established as a prelude to restoring normalcy in the society. To this end therefore a democratic constitution-making process agreed to by all political parties, civil society, and all sections of communities, must be established. As a way of national unity we need a situation whereby the constitution-making process can be driven by a committee of experts with equal representation by political parties and civil society, thereafter put to a national referendum for adoption.

4. This will build a momentum to rally the people for a transition for democracy in Swaziland. In order for the process to have local, regional and international buy-in and endorsement, the constitution-making process should be monitored and facilitated by a credible and properly mandated international or multilateral institution.

***Pudemo advocates for a constitution that will:***

1. Entrench the sovereignty of the people as a source of political power to govern the country.
2. Reverse the negative socio-cultural, political and economic impact of evictions, landlessness and the use of land by the traditional aristocracy to enforce *tinkbundla* royal hegemony.
3. Entrench the Bill of Rights and guarantees the rights of every Swazi, political parties, civil society organisations, and trade unions to fully participate in the development of the content, character, quality, and depth of our democracy. This will ensure that our people shape and benefit from their freedoms.
4. Ensure the separation of powers between the three arms of government. This will entrench a new culture of public accountability and respect for the sovereignty of the people.
5. Define the structure and the purpose of government. Until congress pronounces otherwise, the structure of government should be a unitary one, led by a head of government elected from the majority party in parliament who shall be accountable to parliament and the people of Swaziland. As to who the head of state becomes is another constitutional matter altogether, that will be determined by the obtaining conditions at the attainment of freedom.

6. Separate traditional governance under customary law or culture from the normal function of the central government and ensure the development of traditional and cultural institutions in accordance with democratic values, human rights, and human dignity or *bunfu*.
7. Entrench the rule of law or equal protection of all people regardless of social or political standing: the laws of the country under the constitution should be to advance and protect the interest of all citizens regardless of social standing or status and no one should be above the law of the land.
8. Embrace the idea of an open and free society where the constitution becomes the principal guardian of individual and collective liberties, rights and responsibilities ensuring that individuals and society can freely express views and make demands on the state without fear or favour.
9. Define the role of institutions of security and defence; the police and the army, and all intelligence services and ensure that they are reoriented and transformed to be in the service of the people and respect the sovereignty of the people and the constitution and to function under the values and principles of a democratic state. In this respect appropriate orientation would be required to ensure adaptation and transformation of our respective security forces into professional institutions that contribute positively in the building of a developmental state and the defence of the rule of law and the constitution based on the free will of every citizen of the country.
10. Establish institutions to support the values of a democratic state and to ensure public accountability and good governance. Pudemo government

will create institutions for the support of multiparty democracy, including but not limited to the creation of a fund by the state to defend popular participation through political party funding, proportional to representation in parliament

11. Respect and protection of the rights of minority groups in our society and provide for a comprehensive social security system for all economically disadvantaged social groupings, like the physically-challenged.
12. Multiparty elections where political parties contest elections and the majority party runs government; where there will be a mix and balance between proportional representation and constituency-based electoral system, in particular at the lower closer-to-the-people levels including some traditional structures. This system will allow minority groups and opposition parties to play a constructive role for the common good of the country.
13. The conference further re-affirmed that *Pudemo* shall not take part in the 2013 general selections guised as elections, unless they are under a multiparty dispensation. *Pudemo* will only participate in multiparty elections. Conference calls for unity of all forces to demand a Democratic People's Government and the total rejection by all progressive forces of any attempts to weaken the democratic forces by the co-option of others from the progressive camp to participate in the 2013 selections and in the process, legitimise them. ■

*Mario Masuku is the president of the Pudemo and this article is an edited part of a speech he gave at the 2nd Policy Conference in Nelspruit, held under the theme 'Uniting all forces towards a democratic people's government'.*