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HUBERT H. HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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Statement from Professor Padideh Ala'i, Director of AUWCL Hubert Humphrey Program and International & Comparative Legal Studies Program on the killing of Thulani Maseko

Dear all,

It is with great sadness - and significant outrage - that the Humphrey Fellowship Program and the Center for Human Rights at American University Washington College of Law (AUWCL) received the news of the brutal killing of our alumnus, Thulani Maseko (LLM 2011), on January 21, 2023. Thulani was a [Humphrey Fellow](#) at our school in 2010-2011.

Thulani was a prominent human rights lawyer in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) who, during his time at AUWCL, focused his studies on constitutional law and human rights, considering how these concepts could be applied in his home country. In recent years, Thulani had been a strong, leading force of the pro-democracy movement in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

On Saturday night, Thulani was at home with his family when he was shot through the living room window. Thulani was a leader, a visionary, and a nimble activist. He was also a devoted husband and father. His murder is a horrible loss for the people of Eswatini, the AUWCL community, and to each of us who works in any capacity to promote and protect democracy and human rights.

Our Humphrey Fellows are drivers of social justice in their countries and an inspiration to all of us. Thulani was no different. He was passionate about the rule of law, human rights, and most importantly, making his country a better place; and he died speaking out for what he believed in.

Thulani had long been a voice of social justice in his country. In 2014, he was arrested, together with newspaper editor Bheki Mkhubu, after he published an op-ed criticizing the then Swazi judiciary. In an effort to free Thulani, AUWCL's Center for Human Rights and Humphrey Fellowship Program launched a global campaign, together with organizational partners from around the world. As part of the campaign, we produced this [video](#), which brought together human rights experts to speak out on his behalf. When Thulani was finally released, he spoke at the [Oslo Freedom Forum](#) and continued his work to create a free and democratic Eswatini.

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At the time of his killing, Thulani had a pending case against King Mswati III, challenging the King's unilateral decision to change the name of the country from Swaziland to Eswatini in honor of its 50th anniversary without proper constitutional process. He was also representing two members of Parliament who are facing charges related to the unrest that shook Eswatini in 2021. Thulani was the chairperson of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, an umbrella association of civil society organizations, business and trade unions, political parties, and faith-based groups that advocates for a peaceful transition to multi-party democracy in Eswatini.

While AUWCL lost a cherished alumnus, the world lost a visionary leader, and Thulani's family and friends lost a beloved husband, father and friend. We stand with Thulani's family and loved ones, the Eswatini people, and human rights advocates from all over the world to demand justice and accountability for this horrific crime.