

PRESS RELEASE

Lesotho: prominent lawyer Khotso Nthonto arrested

- Lawyer Khotso Nthonto was arrested and released on Friday 12 February 2016
- Lawyers representing 23 soldiers accused of mutiny continue to be at risk
- There is concern for an escalation of threats against the legal community

Amsterdam / Vancouver, 19 February 2016 - Lawyers for Lawyers (**L4L**) and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) are concerned about the arrest of lawyer Khotso Nthonto on 12 February 2016 and the ongoing threats against lawyers in Lesotho. Particularly the lawyers representing 23 soldiers accused of plotting a mutiny seem to be at risk.

The arrest and release of lawyer Khotso Nthonto

Prominent Lesotho lawyer Khotso Nthonto was arrested in the early evening of 12 February 2016, on allegations of perjury. According to the Southern African Litigation Centre (SALC) it is understood that these allegations relate to Mr. Nthonto's representation of some of the soldiers charged with mutiny.

An urgent High Court Order was obtained for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nthonto and he was released under heavy security shortly before midnight on 12 February 2016.

While he was under arrest, Mr. Nthonto's family home in Maseru and personal vehicle appear to have been shot, causing serious damage to both.

Mr. Nthonto has been formally charged with perjury on 16 February 2016. The case is remanded to 26 February 2016, at which point the court will determine a hearing date.

Lawyers representing 23 soldiers accused of mutiny continue to be at risk

Mr. Nthonto is one of a team of five lawyers representing 23 soldiers accused of plotting a mutiny with ex-army chief Maaparankoe Mahao, who was killed on 25 June 2015. In recent months the lawyers, Haae Phoofolo, Christopher Lephuthing, Koili Ndebele, Tumisang Mosotho and Mr. Nthonto, have been victims of repeated threats and intimidation by the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), both in and outside the court. Late last year, an alleged 'hit list' was circulated that listed the names of Mr. Nthonto and the four other lawyers representing the accused soldiers.

Concern for an escalation of threats

L4L and LRWC are gravely concerned about the personal and professional safety of Mr. Nthonto and the other lawyers representing the soldiers.

L4L and LRWC call upon the authorities in Lesotho to:

- Withdraw all charges against Mr. Khotso Nthonto;
- Provide effective measures to ensure the personal and professional safety of Haae Phoofolo, Christopher Lephuthing, Koili Ndebele, Khotso Nthonto and Tumisang Mosotho and prevent and punish threats, attacks and interference against them;
; and,

- Ensure that the lawyers can carry out their professional duties free from intimidation, harassment and reprisal, in compliance with articles 16 and 17 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

Note to the editor, not for publication:

Attachment: [Letter from L4L and LRWC to the authorities of Lesotho dated 2 December 2015.](#)

For more information, please visit www.southernafricanlitigationcentre.org, www.lawyersforlawyers.nl or www.lrwc.org, or contact:

Ms Adrie van de Streek,
Executive Director Lawyers for Lawyers
info@lawyersforlawyers.nl

Or

Ms Gail Davidson
Executive Director LRWC
lrwc@portal.ca

The Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (L4L) is an independent and non-political Dutch foundation that seeks to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law by pursuing freedom and independence of the legal profession. **L4L** has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee that campaigns for advocates in danger and engages in research and education about international human rights. LRWC has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Click [here](#) to register to the monthly newsletter of Lawyers for Lawyers and stay informed on the activities of the foundation.