



POLITICAL UNREST IN ESWATINI

It is a complicated time for the people of eSwatini. I am recently back from a three week trip there. I was last here and left in a massive-covid-rush around March 18th, 2020, when we are all rushing somewhere.

I tried to return this July, when a pro-democracy movement took flight. The country was thrown into chaos and violence between civilian-protesters, police and the king's army. The "peaceful Swazi people" had finally woken up. It started with the suspicious killing by police of a controversial law student. This led to student protests, which led onto full on de-throne the king and "we want a proper democracy" efforts.

The democracy as it exists goes like this; the parliament is made up of 40% elected officials from their districts and 60%

appointed by the king. The cabinet is made up those only appointed by the king. As such the people's people are always in the shadows, with little, if any, real clout. The King can move and manipulate laws, the courts, businesses and tax dollars to suit his needs and those of his friends and family. He can take over prosperous businesses for his own gain and rescind land ownership, if it suits him.

From early July, roughly 600 people are still incarcerated. They estimate 80 students and young adults have been killed by the country's own military and police. It is widely accepted that their bodies have been burned in a mass grave.



Rioters in July destroyed this entire lot of cars for sale

There are 3 elected MPs behind this movement in leadership, they all come from one area where, coincidentally, we have built a secondary school. The town is Siphofaneni. Two of these MPs are now in jail, charged with treason. The 3rd has escaped to South Africa, where he conducts movements, called “Family Meetings” from a safe distance.



Young men who have lost limbs from gun shot wounds in July rioting

I cancelled the July trip and moved it to August. By August, South Africa’s political situation was a REAL mess with massive violence calling for the release of past president Jacob Zuma from jail. Although the protests in Swazi had reduced to daily marches of the safe kind, the entire region was covered in a 3rd wave of Covid, which hit South Africa particularly hard. Borders were closed and lockdowns, curfews, roadblocks etc. were all in place. I moved the trip to October.

As the universe would have it, things erupted again about one day after I arrived! The higher level of organized and legal

protesting with intention had devolved into unrelated low-level thuggery, with young people just creating chaos for their own sport and fun. Like rioters here after a Stanley Cup win or loss! They were not armed with guns, but they would pull off chunks of concrete, rocks, roll metal barrels into the middle of busy road ways. At times they would brandish machetes and bush knives or crash the wind screen with a rock. Then they would demand a fee to let you pass, which was then exchanged for liquor. It created real problems to travel on the roads and interfered with my ability to go about my usual routines there.



Most sadly, somehow students, down to the elementary level, were also drawn into the fray. They were seen burning their own desks, chairs and buildings. They would make ridiculous claims for their needs from a new democracy, such as “we need pizza for lunch!” Some speculated that the teachers were actually behind the actions of the students. Consequently, shortly after I arrived, the schools closed for the balance of my stay, due more to the protests than to Covid.



School Building burning



IMPACT OF COVID-19 SO FAR:

The mortality from Covid-19 has been relatively low down there. There are several contributing factors that could have made this population surprisingly more resilient.

- Mortality of children 0-5 years is relatively high, so many of the weaker individuals have died young, they are therefore naturally resilient or stronger already
- HIV has many still on anti-retro-viral drugs which may have offered some degree of baseline protection
- Their lifestyles are largely outdoors, most do not travel nor are they in crowded situations-there is no mass transit and very few indoor gatherings
- Most are on the occasional or regular administration of the antiparasitic drug, Ivermectin, which is now used by many countries for prevention and early treatment of Covid-19
- BCG is a vaccine that has been given to all babies on day one of life for TB in most of Africa, it has been in use for decades, some researchers have been studying it as it may also offer some blanket level of underlying immunity

There was one Covid wave that hit hard for 10 days after Christmas 2020, but when you place these losses in contrast to the years of HIV, Covid has been a relatively mild for the Swazis. Over the course of the HIV crisis, of about 6-7 years about 200,000 people died in Swaziland. In 20 months of Covid, this country has seen just over 1,000 deaths.

MY OVERVIEW



Although by no means am I a Swazi historian or a political analyst, I suppose that after 22 years of coming here, my views might be worth something. Here goes:

This is the generation of youth either born into or were young at a time when many of their parents died of AIDS. The social safety net there doesn't exist and without outside help these kids wouldn't have even received a primary school education. (In its own small way, this is when and where Swazi Kids stepped in, in 1999.) These youth either raised themselves or were in crowded, impoverished, often very unlovely and abusive living situations. Teen pregnancy, childhood HIV, incest, sexual and physical abuse has been absolutely rampant here for all of these years. So one simply can not imagine the lack of role modeling, mentoring, leadership and love

from which a vast number of young adults have suffered.

Now these young people have increasing access to the internet and can see how much of the western world are living. Then they see their own conditions, and those of their extended families and neighbours. Then they see their king and his excesses, iconized by every generation before them, and they wonder why and how such a situation can exist in these times.



[TIMESLIVE.CO.ZA](https://www.timeslive.co.za)

'A conditional love': King Mswati's long reign became a sleepwalk into disaster

The king is now 53 years old, he has 15 wives and unknown number of offspring. He lives a lavish lifestyle. Recall this is a country of only about 1.1 million citizens. Maybe 35% of them have jobs that might pay enough to contribute to the personal tax income. There is huge outside monetary support and all kinds international aid. Those details I won't go into, but suffice to say that the king and his many families live WAY, WAY, WAY beyond the means of his countrymen and women.



So now a generation, born into a time without parents, largely without jobs or a future are now hit with the lockdowns associated with Covid and whamooo, it is a quadruple insult.

To quote a good friend of mine down there, originally from Zimbabwe, "For us Africans, this Covid is child's play. We survived AIDS. Bring us a real problem." In other words, the economic impact is what has led to this political situation. People are hungry, tired, angry and with little or nothing on the horizon. They have nothing left to lose.



THE WAY FORWARD

The truth is that I simply do not know. Schools have been closed for most of the past two years. The country is political turmoil. What I can say that is encouraging, is that this movement is serious. Change WILL happen. The genie is out of the bottle. These people believe that King Mswati III will be their last king. The question remains, will he come to the bargaining table and withdraw in peace, while likely maintaining most of his luxurious lifestyle? (A choice

King Mswati III's Jet has landed in Maputo, Mozambique this Saturday Morning after a 10 hour flight. This comes after it departed Rebat-Sale Airport (RBA/GMME) in Morocco in the early hours of today. The four engine powered jet departed Eswatini for Morocco on the 21st of October 2021.



that could be before him.) Or will he draw this out with more loss of life and livelihood? Early indicators are that he is not interested in managing these issues in any kind of a timely manner.

He lies quiet, ignores, taunts, teases and ridicules his people. He has denied having any part to play in the deaths. These people were shot by the military and the citizens have no guns.

OUR COVID-19 SUPPORT UPDATES



MANY of you gave generously to help out our families at a dire time of need! In total, we were the mainstay of support for 350 families from May 2020 until July 2021. Their gratitude was so palpable when I was there. Although I could not go to the families in the rural areas at this time, I really look forward to visiting them and hearing their stories first hand. We will be supporting fewer families into 2022, but food will be delivered, so feel free to continue to support in this area.

STATUS OF OUR YOUNGER STUDENTS

The kids we support in secondary and elementary schools have had it the hardest. In the rural areas, in poorer schools, there is

no online option. For the most part, these kids have been free ranging, which is not good news at all. When the dust settles and the losses are assembled, we will have kids that don't return at all to classroom and some teen pregnancies. The few of our students who were grades 7, 10, 12 writing external exams with the support of our mentor and employee, Joseph, will have fared somewhat better. In keeping with Covid protocols, we had to close down our mentoring program, which was a lifeline for many. Now with the protests, it is unsafe for Joe to return to those areas also. So it's rather a double bind.

OUR UNIVERSITY AND TRADE SCHOOL STUDENTS

They have navigated this better. Schooling was moved online and Swazi Kids provided needed airtime, smart phones, laptops as we could, to make sure our students could remain in their programs. I know these times have been incredibly hard for those students to manage the internet, the platforms, the inconsistent networks, timelines etc. but many have managed.



OUR GRADUATING STUDENTS

At the beginning of the pandemic, they were also benched from finding jobs. However, most of them have found something to subsist on, or started very basic small businesses while they await a turn in the economic situation. I am proud of their efforts to hold onto their dreams. One such self-starter is Angel, who has begun a sneaker cleaning business.



A FEW INDIVIDUAL STUDENT UPDATES

Zethu works full time for Old Mutual a huge insurance company in the region, and has a gorgeous baby daughter. She seems very thrilled with her life, working often from home, in relationship with the father and caring for her baby.



Our HIV positive young man who is legally blind is amazing. After 3 years on eye medication for damage to his corneas, regular visits to the ophthalmologist and the wearing of good quality sun protective eyeglasses, he now sees much better. He won't ever see well enough to drive a car or read from a book, but he sees again. He

is enrolled in a course to be an electrical auto mechanic. Upon graduation, he will be able to run his own business and be self-sufficient for life. This young man and his story make my heart sing!

Xondile is nearly finished high school at the private school, St. Michaels, thank you Tafelmachers for all you do for her.





Phumlile completed her teaching diploma. She is a doll and worked incredibly hard, asking for very little from us.

Njabulo Medical Doctor: This young man approached me this year who had just completed four years of medical school in South Africa. He was short of a large amount of money to complete his year four tuition payments. Our sponsors

responded to the call! I would love to tell you his story of survival and the eight years it took him to finance four years of med school, but it would take an entire newsletter on its own. Suffice to say that I am thrilled to have Njabulo as part of the top-end of our program to support and encourage our kids to work hard and hang in. He is a delight!



Mangaliso: After a few hiccups along the way, he has graduated with a B Comm., thank you to the Keilty's for standing by him throughout.



NEW STARTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION



In total we will be supporting 30 students at university/tertiary education level in 2021-22, with 10 new students starting. Their career choices are: civil engineering, B Comm., pharmacy, teachers colleges, editing, IT, and Bach of Arts with her end game being a secondary school teacher.



Two young women and one man started pharmacy this year. This is a new program being offered in country and I think it's a great career choice! We now have 2 female civil engineering students, one is Thabani.

HELP FAMILIES IN NEED!

1 family is fed for 1 month for \$35,

2 families for \$70

5 families for \$175 and

10 families for \$350.

You will see links for these options on our website:

www.swazikids.org

AS FOR ONGOING SUPPORT & SPONSORSHIP

With school closed for most of 2021, we still do have funds on account to hold going into 2022. Of course, Swazi Kids welcomes any end-of-year donations that you feel moved to send along. The means to do so are on the Ways to Help page, attached.

For 2022, things remain uncertain. I am unable to bring you any detailed updates on individual students at this time. For next year, our tertiary program will continue and always needs funding. We plan on building one or two school structures in 2022 also. When things re-organize in the schooling system there will be infrastructure upgrades waiting.



I thank you deeply for your support in the past and for those who hang in with us, I thank you for your ongoing trust in our judgement to place your funds where best needed at the time.

Wishing you a happy holiday season, surrounded by healthy family members and friends and here's to things swinging back for the better, all-around in 2022!

Best from Pam Carlson & Joe Aryee

Reach Out!

Our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of children in Swaziland require significant funds. If you wish to make a contribution make sure to fill out our **Ways To Help Swazi Kids 2021** form.

1-250-309-2522

swazikids@gmail.com



Any more questions, just ask!

Swazi Kids

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Kelowna, BC, V1W 5A7
Canada



Ways to Help Swazi Kids 2021

I wish to help out in the following way(s)
Please fill in the appropriate blanks

Ongoing food support for families during the pandemic \$35/family/month:

I would like to help 10 families \$350 _____

I would like to help 5 families \$175 _____

I can help one family \$35 _____

Tertiary/university education; \$100/student/month provides:

Airtime, cash, travel home, toiletries, haircuts and a
small amount for food _____

Tertiary/education rental support:

\$250/student/month pays rent, a bit of electricity,
some basic food supplies and the above list of
toiletries etc. _____

Schools to be built in 2022. Our costs run about \$25,000 per structure.

Donations of any amount can go here: _____

METHODS OF DONATING

1. Using credit card or Paypal, directly from our website. If this is your method, cut and paste this URL address into your address bar on your search engine; <https://swazikids.net/donate> It will take you to our donate page, which is a self-serve method of easy payment using your credit card or Paypal.
2. If sending via an e-transfer, please use email address: swazikids@gmail.com and use password: swazikids
3. If you are able to donate to write a cheque, please make payable to Swazi Kids and post the cheque along with this form filled in to:

Swazi Kids Society
4531 Gaspardone, Rd,
Kelowna, BC,
V1W 5A7, Canada

