

Swaziland Police News

Police attack PUDEMO marchers - again.

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Yesterday, the Royal Swaziland Police's Operation Support Services Unit lived up to popular expectation, when they severely bashed marching members of the People's United Democratic Movement, and its youth wing, the Swaziland Youth Congress yesterday. The beatings occur in a wake of reports that members of the two formations are receiving military training aimed at toppling the current government, in favour of a democratic one. The over 200 marching members of the two progressive formations, including street vendors and children, were dispersed using teargas canisters and batons at noon - before the rally could start.

The skirmish started at 12:50pm, while senior police officers and leaders of the march negotiated on the rightful venue for the event, which was to honour fallen heroes of the two formations. According to information gathered during the negotiation, the Manzini City Council had approved that the party could use Lukhuni Park, which is situated next to Mjingo High School, and only to march along Turnbungen Street, which has relatively less activity. This, leaders of PUDEMO, felt was defeating the purpose of the event, "We want to speak to the people. Why should they allocate us a park located in the bushes," lamented PUDEMO Treasurer General Vusi Mnisi. Another PUDEMO official, Penuel Malinga, who was responsible for organising the event, said had they been allocated Freedom Square, located at the centre of the busiest Nkoseluhlaza Street, or the Millennium Park, they would have been more comfortable because of their closeness to people. However, they agreed that the marchers should not deviate from agreements made with Council. But, as leaders of the two formations attempted to communicate the decision to the rowdy marchers, it apparently was not what the marchers had wished for, as a missile was thrown at the direction of the police, sparking mayhem. They were already demonstrating next to the Manzini Post Office, while police had created a wall barring them from proceeding with the march. As if they were provoking a beating from the police, the marchers chanted political slogans and hurled insults at the police. It took a single stone, thrown from the side of the marchers to the police, to trigger what appeared to have been eagerly expected by the police officers as they charged at them vigorously. When the missile was thrown at police, two shots of teargas were immediately fired, sending the marchers running for cover. A majority of them ran towards the direction of Transworld radio, while others ran towards the police station and Liqhaga flats. As they dispersed, some were severely assaulted with batons while others were rounded up by the police. During the skirmish, several motor vehicles, including one from the Manzini police Station were maliciously damaged. Some of the PUDEMO and SWAYOCO members were arrested during the skirmish, while others claim that they were assaulted and released by the police. Eight others were arrested in the evening, and

charged with contravening traffic laws, specifically jay walking, after they were found demonstrating in a public road. More than 10 people were treated at the RFM Hospital for severe body injuries sustained during the beatings; one of them was so weak he could hardly speak. The office of the Swaziland Transport and Allied Workers Union, which is located near the scene, was briefly turned into a medical ward, as marchers flocked it to report their injuries.