

## State TV airs critical report on King

Two journalists at the state-censored Swazi TV were suspended from work for allowing an unauthorised item about King Mswati III to appear in a news bulletin.

It concerned the traditional Umhlanga Reed Dance that took place last week. A news report about the event sourced from Channel France International (CFI) did not give the king enough respect, according to Swazi TV bosses. The report mentioned the fact that sometimes the king uses the Reed Dance to find himself a wife from the tens of thousands of semi-naked women and girls, some as young as nine years old, who dance in front of him.

The media in Swaziland, where King Mswati rules as sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch, are highly censored when reporting the king and his large royal family - he has at least 13 wives, but the exact number is not officially known as this is considered information Swazi people are not allowed to know. Media reports in Swaziland of the Reed Dance generally concentrate on the large number (often exaggerated) of 'maidens' who dance for the king and how privileged and excited they are to be taking part in the event.

The CFI report that aired on Swazi TV said the king used the Reed Dance to find a wife and said that the Reed Dance was not only about culture. This year's dance was controversial because the 'maidens' were required to sing songs against political parties which are banned in Swaziland.

The CFI report on the Reed Dance was similar to many circulating in the international media that drew attention to the abject poverty of the king's subjects and his own personal wealth, estimated by Forbes to be about US\$200 million. They also talked about human rights abuses in the kingdom.

Vusi Gamedze, the acting assistant news editor of Swazi TV and an avid editor Ernest Mabaso, were suspended from work for 14 days after being accused of 'gross negligence', for allowing the CFI report to air, but the *Times of Swaziland* newspaper reported on 11 September 2012 the ban had been lifted prematurely and the pair were back at work.

This is not the first time there has been controversy in Swaziland over broadcast reports from foreign stations. In March 2011 the BBC World Service programme Focus on Africa that airs daily on state-controlled SBIS radio was taken off for several days after it ran an item that included interviews with people critical of King Mswati.

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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