

Bill lets King Mswati control broadcasting

King Mswati III of Swaziland will be given the powers to take over all radio and television stations in the kingdom, if a bill before Parliament becomes law.

The Swaziland Broadcasting Bill 2013 gives the king, who rules as sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch, the authority to take over the stations if there is a 'threatened public emergency'.

The Swaziland Broadcasting Bill says there would need to be a 'proclamation of a state of public emergency or threatened public emergency' before the king could intervene. The Bill allows him to appoint someone to take over any or all broadcasting stations and control and direct them, 'for so long as the king considers it expedient'.

Media in Swaziland is largely censored, but the Bill extends the king's powers. All broadcasting, except one TV channel and one radio station, are under state control. News and information broadcast are strictly censored and no criticism of the king and the ruling elite is allowed.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa-Swaziland chapter, described the Bill's provisions as 'somewhat extreme'.

In a statement it said it was concerned at the extent the new law would give the king 'absolute power' over broadcasting.

It added, 'However, to give one person the opportunity to take unfettered control and direction over all broadcast media seems somewhat extreme and, it might be said, counter-productive.'

'Moreover, MISA-Swaziland calls for a clear definition of "public emergency" and "threatened public emergency", as it is not clear what these terms mean. There is a fear that these terms, and this Article, could be used to further entrench the control and influence already wielded by the state-owned and controlled broadcasters.'

'Dictators in other parts of the world have used similar legal provisions to abuse power and take over the media.'

Source: [allafrica](http://allafrica.com)