The Southern Illinois University School of Law 2014 Rule of Law Citation is a formal recognition by our Faculty of the important tradition of the legal profession that requires lawyers to stand firm in support of liberty and justice in the face of oppression and, by their words and actions, to honor and support the Rule of Law even at great personal risk.

Thulani Maseko is a lawyer and human rights activist who works closely with Lawyers for Human Rights Swaziland. Maseko was arrested and detained on March 18, 2014, after authoring two articles which raised concerns about the judicial independence and integrity of courts in Swaziland. The very judge Maseko criticized, Chief Justice Michael Ramodibedi, was the justice who issued the warrant for Maseko’s arrest. This same justice is currently fighting impeachment proceedings. Swaziland, which is ranked 156th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, does not tolerate public criticism of its courts or government.

In response to his human rights activism, Maseko was charged with criminal contempt of court, and subsequently arrested under irregular legal procedures that Amnesty International describes as “arbitrary” and “defective.” He was denied access to his attorney and subjected to confidential summary proceedings. Such treatment violates human rights international law, which requires a fair and public hearing before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal.

Lucie Morillon, the head of research and advocacy at Reporters Without Borders, said, “The arbitrary arrest[] of Maseko . . . [is] the latest example[] of the persecution that awaits anyone voicing the least criticism of Swaziland’s institutions.” Swaziland’s constitution promotes freedom of expression for its people, yet Maseko continues to be held in a Swaziland jail. Human rights activists around the globe are calling for his release and praising his bravery in speaking out against an unjust political system.