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Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) invites you to a seminar entitled:

**Democracy under Threat?:
What Attacks on Grassroots Activists Mean for our Politics**

DEMOCRACY requires that the right to express ourselves in association with others be enjoyed by all, not only those who are well connected and visible. Constant allegations over the past few years that grassroots social movements who are critical of the government have been subject to police action denying them those rights are, therefore, a severe threat to the credibility of South African democracy.

Until now, the evidence has suggested that attacks on the rights of grassroots citizens to free political activity have been the work of local politicians seeking to protect their turf, not of regional or national politicians. Recent violent attacks on leaders and members of the shack-dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban's Kennedy Road settlement have, however, been publicly endorsed by ministers in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government, raising the possibility that senior politicians are now endorsing attempts to suppress grassroots government critics. If these fears are accurate, democracy is under grave threat: if some are denied the right to express themselves, no-one can be sure that their rights and freedoms will be preserved.

The events at Kennedy Road and the repeated allegations that grassroots political activity is being suppressed therefore require careful scrutiny and analysis. We need to understand their implications for democracy and the steps which are needed to ensure that all are entitled to speak and to associate. The Centre for the Study of Democracy at Rhodes University and the University of Johannesburg will, therefore, host a seminar at which grassroots activists, scholars and human rights campaigners will discuss threats to free political activity and their implications.

Venue: Training Centre, 6th Floor, South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)

Time: 9am to 3pm

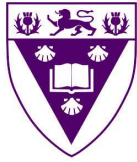
Date: Wednesday, 4 November 2009

RSVP: Johnny Selemani – jaselemani@gmail.com / 073 553 0726

Kate Tissington – kate.tissington@wits.ac.za / 072 220 9125 (by Friday 30 October 2009)



See programme on page 2...



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Provisional Programme

9am Introduction: Threats to Democracy at the Grassroots? Steven Friedman, Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD)

10:45 Panel One: The View from the Ground: The Perils of Organising in Kennedy Road - Chair: Pregs Govender (SAHRC)

S'bu Zikode (President, Abahlali basMjondolo)
Mnikelo Ndabankulu (Spokesperson, AbM)
Zodwa Nsibande (General Secretary of the Youth League, AbM)

12:30 Lunch

1-2:30 Panel Two: Is Democracy at Risk?: Understanding Conflict Between Social Movements and Local Elites - Chair: Michael Neocosmos (Monash University)

Richard Pithouse (Politics Department, Rhodes University)
Andile Mngxitama (Foundation for Human Rights)
Marcelle Dawson (Centre for Sociological Research - to be confirmed)
Noor Nieftagodien (History Department, University of the Witwatersrand)

2:30 – 3pm Summary: Concluding Discussion