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US Deportation Policy Expands to Eswatini's Prisons

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In a striking development, the United States has intensified its controversial deportation strategy by sending five men, a Vietnamese, Jamaican, Cuban, Yemeni, and Laotian citizen, to Eswatini, a small African nation ruled by an absolute monarch. This move, authorised by a recent US Supreme Court ruling in July 2025, marks a bold expansion of the Trump administration's covert third-country deportation programme. It raises urgent questions

about justice, diplomacy, and the treatment of vulnerable individuals in a country with a troubling human rights record.

The US Department of Homeland Security has described these deportees as "individuals so uniquely dangerous that their home countries refused to accept them." Yet, human rights advocates and policy experts argue the real story lies in what happens after these men arrive in Eswatini. Formerly known as Swaziland, Eswatini is notorious for its brutal suppression of dissent, dire prison conditions, and a legal system that often fails to deliver justice.

The US State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices noted "credible reports of unlawful killings by security forces, widespread impunity, and inhumane prison conditions" as commonplace. Eswatini's government claims the men are merely "in transit" under the supervision of the United Nations' migration agency, with plans for eventual repatriation. However, no firm timeline exists, and reports from Human Rights Watch's 2024 World Report detail overcrowded cells, inadequate food, and allegations of torture, particularly for those linked to political charges.

This policy does not exist in isolation. The US has leaned heavily on diplomatic tools, tariffs, aid adjustments, and visa restrictions to secure cooperation from African nations. While Nigeria has resisted such pressure, Rwanda's foreign minister has confirmed ongoing talks with the US, echoing the now-defunct UK-Rwanda asylum scheme, which the UK Supreme Court ruled unlawful in 2023 due to risks of refoulement, the act of returning individuals to countries where they face persecution. In a recent statement, UN human rights experts warned, "International law prohibits sending anyone to a place where they face a real risk of serious human rights violations, such as torture or arbitrary deprivation of life." They further criticised the US's accelerated removal processes, which can deport individuals in as little as a day without a court hearing, noting that "diplomatic assurances from receiving countries cannot be taken at face value."

Historical parallels are sobering. Australia's offshore processing in Nauru and Papua New Guinea left thousands in limbo under appalling conditions, while Israel's deportation agreement with Rwanda saw many deportees leave shortly after arrival, often embarking on perilous journeys to Europe. These examples highlight the dangers of outsourcing migration responsibilities to nations ill-equipped to uphold human rights. The doctrine of non-refoulement, a cornerstone of international law, explicitly forbids returning individuals to

places where they risk torture or persecution. Yet, the US's latest actions appear to test these boundaries, prioritising political expediency over moral and legal obligations.

The Eswatini case is more than a story of five men; it reflects a broader trend in global migration management, where powerful nations sidestep responsibilities at the expense of the vulnerable. As the US pushes the limits of international law and diplomatic leverage, the world watches closely, waiting to see whether justice or pragmatism will prevail.