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DRC: Eleven human rights defenders arrested while preparing for peaceful demonstration

On 19 September 2017, human rights defenders **Naguy Godhi, Joseph Ubegiu, Sifa Alambic, Malosi Coco, Blessing Maki, Mary Adiyé, Lobho Désire, Lufungura Lubanga, Akwa Moïse, Busu Caleb** and **Kambale Jonas** were arbitrarily arrested while preparing for a peaceful demonstration to commemorate those killed during protests on 19 September 2016.

The 11 arrested human right defenders are affiliated with [Filimbi](#), a pro-democracy and civil society movement which advocates against poor governance and human rights abuses, and which demands respect for the constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Filimbi promotes the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly as well as freedom of thought, working specifically with youth. The movement organises peaceful protests including sit-ins, demonstrations, debates and press conferences.

On 19 September 2017, Naguy Godhi, Joseph Ubegiu, Sifa Alambic, Malosi Coco, Blessing Maki, Mary Adiyé, Lobho Désire, Lufungura Lubanga, Akwa Moïse, Busu Caleb and Kambale Jonas were preparing for a peaceful demonstration. The demonstration was held to commemorate those killed during a protest on 19 September 2016 against the incumbent president, for not respecting the constitutional presidential term limits. The 11 human rights defenders were arrested by police officers while leaving the office of Filimbi's Provincial Coordinator, Naguy Godhi, and were taken to the police station in Bunia in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The human rights defenders remain in detention at the police station and have been charged with “*disobedience to public authorities*” and “*disturbing public order*”.

This incident is part of a larger pattern of targeted action and harassment against youth-led civil society movements in the DRC. Between 24 and 26 October 2016 fourteen members of **LUCHA** – a non-violent, non-partisan youth civil society [movement](#) - were arrested for mobilising students to participate in legal and peaceful demonstrations organised on 26 and 27 October 2016 throughout the DRC. Another LUCHA activist, **Nicolas Mbiya**, was [arrested](#) on 14 July 2017, and remains in detention. Despite being held for 69 days so far, he has not yet been informed of the formal charges against him. He had previously been arrested on both 18 December 2016 and 15 May 2017 as a result of his human rights work.

Human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been subjected to arbitrary detention and violent attacks, including killings, that often go unpunished. Not only does the government fail to offer protection, but in many cases, government officers are involved in the violations themselves. Within 2017 alone, Front Line Defenders has reported on the killings of human rights defenders [Tsongo Sikuliwako Alex](#), [Alphonse Luanda Kalyamba](#), [Marcel Tengeneza](#), the attempted killing of [Butoto Kiza](#) and the death threats against [Philippe Busimba](#).

Front Line Defenders condemns the arbitrary arrest and detention of the aforementioned human rights defenders as it believes they have been targeted for the legitimate exercise of their freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the DRC to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release, and drop all charges against, Naguy Godhi, Joseph Ubegiu, Sifa Alambic, Malosi Coco, Blessing Maki, Mary Adiyé, Lobho Désire, Lufungura Lubanga, Akwa Moïse, Busu Caleb, Kambale Jonas and Nicolas Mbiya as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the eleven human rights defenders while in detention adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in the DRC and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.