

26 September 2017

## **Cameroon: Arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of human rights defender Nasako Besingi**

On 25 September 2017, human rights defender **Nasako Besingi** was arbitrarily arrested by local police officers, gendarmes and army officers in his office in Mundemba, Ndian Division, Cameroon.

[Nasako Besingi](#) is a human rights defender and the director of Struggle to Economize the Future Environment – SEFE, a non-governmental organisation based in the village of Mundemba, Ndian Division, Cameroon, which has asserted the land rights of local communities in the context of the development of palm oil plantations. Nasako Besingi has been leading his community in the protests against the development of palm oil plantations by the American agribusiness company Herakles Farm. Most recently, the human rights defender has vehemently condemned the situation with regards to the human rights violations in context of the current crises in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

On 25 September 2017, at around 6.30am, local police officers, gendarmes and army officers entered Nasako Besingi's office, located next to his home, and arrested the human rights defender. The officers searched Nasako Besingi's office and confiscated documents, a laptop, his phone, SIM cards as well as the human rights defender's identity card and passport. Following the search, Nasako Besingi was taken by car to the Gendarmerie brigade in Mundemba but was never informed of the charges against him. Twenty minutes after his arrival at the Gendarmerie brigade, he was seen being taken by car from the brigade to an unknown location.

The arrest of Nasako Besingi follows a larger pattern of judicial harassment against the human rights defender due to his peaceful work in promoting human rights in Cameroon. On 21 January 2016, the Court of First Instance of Mundemba [sentenced](#) Nasako Besingi to either pay a fine of 344,400 CFA Francs (approximately €524) or serve one year's imprisonment. On 3 November 2015, he was convicted on defamation charges brought against him after Herakles Farms claimed that an article published by the human rights defender caused injury to the company. In the article in question, the human rights defender reported a violent attack he had suffered in 2012, in which he recognised the assailants as employees of Herakles Farms. The human rights defender was ordered to pay a fine of 1 million CFA Francs (approximately €1,500) or face 3 years' imprisonment.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern at the arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of Nasako Besingi which is part of a larger pattern of harassment against the human rights defender.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cameroon to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Nasako Besingi, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Inform Nasako Besingi's family and lawyer of the location of his detention, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to him;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Nasako Besingi 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;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Cameroon 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.