

8 May 2020

## Angola: Series of attacks against NGO MBAKITA and its members

On the night of 23 April 2020, unknown individuals forcibly entered the home of human rights defender **Pascoal Baptistiny**, director of the NGO MBAKITA. Three computers and other work materials were stolen from the home. Only days before, the organisation's car had been vandalized over night. These are only the most recent incidents in a series of attacks against the organisation and its members.

Pascoal Baptistiny is the executive director of the NGO MBAKITA - *Missão de Beneficência Agropecuária do Kubango Inclusão Tecnologias e Ambiente* (Mission of Beneficence Agriculture of Kubango Inclusive Technologies and Environment), an NGO founded in 2002 which works to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities in the southern provinces of Angola. It promotes the rights of these communities, denouncing the discriminations they suffer and the expropriation of their lands, while advocating for better social and economic integration, and respect of the rights to food, land and citizenship.

On 23 April, unknown individuals broke into Pascoal Baptistiny's home, breaking eight outdoor spotlights and stealing three computers belonging to MBAKITA. The defender had brought them to his home as the MBAKITA office was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, and the office had been broken into in 2018 and 2019 and computers and other IT material were stolen.

This is the second robbery of Pascoal Baptistiny's home in two weeks. On 17 April 2020 at approximately 1:30am, three hooded men armed with guns broke into the defender's house. They immobilized the two security guards and stole two laptops, a camera, memory cards and mobile phones. Pascoal Baptistiny's wife and two children were sleeping in the home at the time but were not hurt. The previous day, on 16 April, the human rights defender received an anonymous message asking him to cease his work for indigenous communities, stating that his car was known and threatening to injure him. On the night of 16 April, the defender found that salt had been put in the radiator of the organizations car parked outside his home, which caused the car to break down.

Pascoal Baptistiny believes these attacks may be linked to the publication of a statement by an international organisation denouncing the physical assault and arbitrary detention of MBAKITA activists during COVID-19 prevention campaigns in Cuando Cubango province. On 9 April 2020, two MBAKITA activists were beaten with clubs by members of the security force on their way to the MBAKITA office to collect protective equipment to be distributed to communities in Menongue during COVID-19. On 2 April, nine members of MBIATIKA who were conducting an awareness-raising campaign about COVID-19 were assaulted with baton sticks and threatened with guns by the police before being arrested and detained for eight hours. No known charges were brought against them. Since the arrest and subsequent release of these nine members, MBIATIKA has been awaiting permission from the provincial authorities to continue the awareness campaign in indigenous communities. The authorities are yet to reply to MBAKITA's formal request.

These recent incidents are not isolated, but rather reflect a systematic pattern of harassment and intimidation against MBAKITA members, who have been targeted several times in recent years. They and their families have been targeted with death threats and physical assaults, many of which have not been made public in order to ensure their safety and the safety of their families.

The work of human rights defenders, such as the work carried out by MBAKITA members, is of even greater importance in the context of COVID-19. They are working tirelessly with communities,

complementing strategies adopted by local governments to combat the spread of the virus and helping to protect the health and lives of people in Angola.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the attacks against Pascoal Baptistiny and all members of MBACKITA. It believes that the lack of effective investigations into the attacks against them, the failure to sanction the perpetrators and provide adequate protection to human rights defenders generates a climate of impunity and discouragement to the legitimate and necessary work of human rights defenders in Angola.

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

1. Strongly condemn the acts of intimidation and harassment against Pascoal Baptistiny and all members of MBACKITA, as they are believed to be directly motivated by their peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Pascoal Baptistiny and all members of MBACKITA;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks against all members of MBACKITA, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Angola are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment and threats.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson  
*Executive Director*