

21 June 2021

Democratic Republic of Congo: Judicial harassment of human rights defender Jean François Mombia Atuku

On 15 June 2021, human rights defender **Jean François Mombia Atuku** was summoned by the Tribunal de Grande Instance de Kinshasa/Gombé. This summons names neither a plaintiff nor a clear motive for the summoning of the human rights defender. It simply states that the human rights defender is required to present himself to the court, as he is being accused of “infractions”, which are not listed in the summons document.

[Jean François Mombia Atuku](#) is the President of *Réseau d'Information et d'Appui aux ONGs en République Démocratique du Congo* – Information and Support Network for NGOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (RIAO), an umbrella organisation that brings together several dozen NGOs and farmer associations located in various provinces of the country. The aim of this network is to strengthen the capacities of its members, whilst acting as their representative in their dealings with different actors, including the media. Since its creation in 2006, RIAO has been particularly active in the defence of land and resource rights in rural areas of DRC.

On 13 March 2021, Jean François Mombia Atuku returned to Goma from his long exile. On 15 June 2021, the human rights defender received a summons to the Tribunal de Grande Instance de Kinshasa/Gombé. He was requested to present himself to the tribunal on 17 June 2021, with little explanation as to why he had been summoned. The document delivered to him at his current residence by an agent of the tribunal, states that he is being accused of “infractions”. The human rights defender’s legal counsel went to the summoning as his representative but was informed by the public prosecutor that Jean François Mombia Atuku’s presence was mandatory. The prosecutor also revealed that he is keenly aware of the human rights defender’s movements and refused to disclose the details as to why Jean François Mombia Atuku was being summoned to his lawyer. The date of the summons has been moved to 22 June 2021 in light of the human rights defender’s absence.

This harassment from law enforcement is nothing new for Jean François Mombia Atuku. After giving an interview with RFI on 25 May 2012, about a police operation in the city of Kinshasa called “*Opération ville propre*” (Operation Clean City), the human rights defender was subjected to constant police surveillance and shadowing. On the morning of 29 May 2012, Jean François Mombia Atuku was accosted by 6 men from the special services of the police, who accused him of insulting the President in his interview with RFI. They took him to the police station, locked him up in a cell for a few hours and threatened to make him disappear. He was eventually released after a bribe of USD 300 was paid.

The human rights defender then decided to temporarily leave the city of Kinshasa. He relocated to the province of Equateur and stayed there for 12 days in the hope that those who were threatening him would eventually stop. In mid-June 2012, Jean François Mombia Atuku returned to Kinshasa, but he soon realised that the shadowing and surveillance had not stopped in spite of his attempts to keep a low profile.

At the beginning of July 2012, an army officer who knows him informed the human rights defender that his name was on the security services' blacklist. On 6 July 2012, Jean François Mombia Atuku escaped an attempted kidnapping by unknown individuals while travelling to Kinshasa. Between 8 and 13 July 2012, the human rights defender’s home was raided by unknown individuals, who broke a light and injured one of his dogs. As a consequence of these intimidations and threats,

Jean François Mombia resolved to flee Kinshasa once again. In his absence from the DRC, the human rights violations against RIAO did not stop. On 15 July 2019, human rights defender Joël Imbangola Luneza, a colleague of Jean François Mombia Atuku and a member of RIAO, was brutally beaten and killed. There have been claims that the killing of this human rights defender was linked to a security guard of palm oil company Plantation Huilerie du Congo (PHC), a subsidiary of Feronia which has received investment from European development finance institutions, BIO (Belgium), DEG (Germany), and FMO (the Netherlands) as well as the British CDC Group. RIAO and Jean François Mombia Atuku had been significantly involved in raising concerns about human rights and environmental abuses reportedly linked to the company. An investigation commissioned by British development finance institution CDC Group (an equity investor of Feronia), found no link between the killing of Joël Imbangola Luneza and Feronia and a further investigation by DRC authorities led to the acquittal of the security guard for the murder of Joël Imbangola Luneza.

Front Line Defenders believes that the acts of harassment to which Jean François Mombia Atuku is subject to are solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo to:

1. Immediately cease all further harassment of Jean François Mombia Atuku and his family, as Front Line believes that the summons against him is solely as a result of his legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the DRC are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment, namely the members of RIAO.