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Democratic Republic of Congo: Arbitrary arrests and trial of woman human rights defender Consolee Mukirania and seven other LUCHA members

On 13 January, the sixth court session took place during which the testimonies of the witnesses in the trial of woman human rights defender **Consolee Mukirania** and seven other members of **LUCHA**. On 19 December 2020, human rights defenders Consolee Mukirania, **Kasereka Muhetsya Eze, Kakule Mutsuva Clovis, Mbusa Kikene Elie, Muhindo Vagheni Aziz, Nzila Patrick Pierre, Mumbere Sikuli Delivrance and Lwanzo Nasereka Kahongya** were arbitrarily arrested by police officers during a peaceful protest in Beni. The defenders remained in detention and were brought before the military Court of Beni-Butembo, where they were all charged with “rebellion”.

Consolee Mukirania, Kasereka Muhetsya Eze, Kakule Mutsuva Clovis, Mbusa Kikene Elie, Muhindo Vagheni Aziz, Nzila Patrick Pierre, Mumbere Sikuli Delivrance and Lwanzo Nasereka Kahongya are human rights defenders and members of [Lutte pour le Changement \(Fight for Change – LUCHA\)](#). LUCHA is a non-violent and non-partisan youth civil society movement founded in June 2012 in Goma, North Kivu. The movement advocates for social justice and accountability in DRC through campaigns, and encourages Congolese citizens to fight for the promotion and respect of human rights.

On 13 January, the sixth court session took place during which the testimonies of the witnesses in the trial of woman human rights defender Consolee Mukirania and seven other members of LUCHA. On 19 December 2020, the eight human rights defenders were arrested during a peaceful protest organised by LUCHA in Beni, North-Kivu. The peaceful protest was organised to denounce the inaction of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) in response to the continuous killing of civilians by armed groups in Beni, and to call for their departure from the country. The LUCHA members reported that they were beaten by the police during the peaceful protest, resulting in the injury of twelve and arrest of eight of its members. Among those arrested and beaten was woman human rights defender Consolee Mukirania, who is suffering from a head wound as a result and has been denied access to a doctor. They were brought before the military court of Beni-Butembo, despite that fact that they are civilians who were unarmed at the time of their arrest.

LUCHA members believe these arbitrary arrests and trial are a reprisal for the organisation’s legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Over the past years, LUCHA members have been targeted for their work in defence of human rights, being subject to arbitrary arrests, detentions, beatings and killings by police officers when asking for the respect of democracy and human rights.

On 26 May 2020, seven LUCHA members were arbitrarily arrested during a peaceful protest when they placed a box draped in the DRC flag outside the front of the Kiwanja police station, to symbolise the coffin of Frédéric-Marcus Kambale, a member of the LUCHA who was shot and killed by a police officer during a peaceful protest organised in Beni, in North-Kivu, on 21 May 2020. They were charged with contempt of national emblem and were released three days later after the Court of Rutshuru cleared them all of the charge.

On 9 September 2019, four LUCHA members were [admitted](#) to the hospital after being wounded by police officers in Kananga, Kasai Central province. Eighteen human rights defenders were detained and reportedly whipped by police at the station of the Police Inspector in Kinshasa on 6 September 2019, after organising a peaceful march to demand transparency in a case of alleged misappropriation of USD 15 million of public funds.

On 21 January 2018, four members of LUCHA were [arrested](#) by police officers in front of St Joseph's Cathedral, Goma, while preparing for a protest demanding respect for the constitution.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the arbitrary detention and trial of the eight human rights defenders and members of LUCHA by a military court as it strongly believes that it is directly linked to their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in DRC to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Consolee Mukirania, Kasereka Muhetsya Eze, Kakule Mutsuva Clovis, Mbusa Kikene Elie, Muhindo Vagheni Aziz, Nzila Patrick Pierre, Mumbere Sikuli Delivrance and Lwanzo Nasereka Kahongya, as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been arbitrarily arrested and are being tried by a military Court solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the eight 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. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in DRC are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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