

28 May 2020

Democratic Republic of Congo: Arbitrary arrest of LUCHA members

On 26 May 2020, human rights defenders **François Kamate, Joyeux Nduwayesu, Elias Bizimungu, Joachim Maronga, Dieume Ndungu, Consolateur Kakuru and Alyos Bigirimwami** were arbitrarily arrested by police officers of the Kiwanja police station, in North-Kivu. The defenders remain in detention in Kiwanja police station.

François Kamate, Joyeux Nduwayesu, Elias Bizimungu, Joachim Maronga, Dieume Ndungu, Consolateur Kakuru and Alyos Bigirimwami are human rights defenders affiliated with the organization [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 26 May 2020, the seven human rights defenders placed a box covered 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 organized in Beni, in North-Kivu on 21 May 2020. The peaceful march was organised to denounce the rising insecurity and resurgence of violence in the city. On the day of Frédéric-Marcus Kambale's funeral in Beni, the seven defenders symbolically laid the coffin-shaped box to denounce the death of their comrade and the excessive use of violence by the police in the area.

Whilst in front of the police station, LUCHA members François Kamate, Joyeux Nduwayesu, Elias Bizimungu, Joachim Maronga, Dieume Ndungu, Consolateur Kakuru and Alyos Bigirimwami were arrested by police officers and detained in a cell of the Kiwanja police station. That same day they were transferred to the civil prosecutor's office in Rutshuru, but were not brought before a judge and remain unaware of the charges against them. The seven defenders were then transferred back to the Kiwanja police station, where they remain at the time of writing. Front Line Defenders is concerned regarding the detention conditions for the defenders, placing them at risk of being infected by COVID-19, as well as their lack of access to their lawyers since being detained.

LUCHA members believe that this arbitrary arrest is in reprisal for the organization's legitimate and peaceful human rights activities. In recent years, LUCHA members have been targeted for their work in defence of human rights, and subjected to arbitrary arrests, detentions and beatings by police officers when campaigning for the respect of democracy and human rights.

On 9 September 2019, four LUCHA members were [admitted](#) to the hospital after being wounded by police officers in Kananga, Kasai Central province. Days prior, on 6 September 2019, 18 LUCHA members were detained and whipped by police at the Police Inspector's station in Kinshasa. The 18 human rights defenders were arrested for organizing a peaceful march to demand transparency in a case of alleged misappropriation of USD 15 million of public funds.

On 21 January 2018, four human rights defenders affiliated with 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 of the seven human rights defenders 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 François Kamate, Joyeux Nduwayesu, Elias Bizimungu, Joachim Maronga, Dieume Ndungo, Consolateur Kakuru and Alyos Bigirimwami, as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been arbitrarily arrested and are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the seven 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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