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Democratic Republic of Congo: Two human rights defenders tortured and released

On 18 April 2022, the two human rights defenders **Matendo Justin** and **Tubaholeze Kigabi** were released from the central police station of Ruziya. The two human rights defenders were arrested and detained on 7 April 2022 without any charges, but were released on 18 April 2022 due to injuries sustained during their detention, for which they are receiving traditional treatment.

[Matendo Justin](#) and [Tubaholeze Kigabi](#) are human rights defenders and members of the organisation [Lutte pour le changement](#) (Fight for Change – LUCHA) RDC Afrique. Together, they work on community outreach for the organisation. LUCHA RDC Afrique is a civil society movement that advocates for social justice and encourages citizens to peacefully fight for the promotion and respect of human rights through campaigns and petitions.

On 7 April 2022, Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi were organizing protestors for a peaceful protest. They intended to protest against the influx of military officers from Burundi. They also intended to protest their demand that the DRC's law enforcement protect the Ruzizi plain from the influx of Imbonerakure, a Burundian youth led movement associated with a political party in Burundi, who have moved into the high plateau of the Ruzizi plain and are carrying out human rights violations against the local population. The military forces of the DRC violently broke up the gathering on 7 April 2022 and arrested the two human rights defenders.

Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi were detained with no access to their lawyers. The two human rights defenders reported being held in small cells, they were stripped naked in front of fellow inmates and tortured with beatings and forced manual labour. The injuries they sustained during their detention resulted in their release on 18 April 2022. On 21 April 2022, human rights defender Tubaholeze Kigabi was urgently rushed to the hospital as a result of his injuries.

Front Line Defenders welcomes the release of the two human rights defenders Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi, however, it remains deeply concerned by the allegations of torture and maintains that the arbitrary arrest and detention of Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi was in retaliation for their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights. Front Line Defenders is concerned by the acts of reprisal against the human rights defenders and asks Congolese authorities to investigate these allegations of torture and to cease the targeting and repression of human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Democratic Republic of Congo to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the allegation of torture of Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Matendo Justin and Tubaholeze Kigabi;

3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Democratic Republic of Congo 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.