

27 May 2021

Democratic Republic of Congo: Arbitrary detention of human rights defender Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul

On 3 May 2021, human rights defender **Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul** was arrested at a taxi station as he was trying to accompany a community member, whom he provided legal assistance, to the police station in Rutshuru to follow up on their case. Since the human rights defender's arrest, he has not been brought before a judge nor has he been charged with any offence. Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul is currently being detained at the Auditorat Militaire in Rutshuru.

Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul is a human rights defender and the chair of the regional office of *Ligue des Sacrifices Volontaires pour les Droits Humains et d'Environnement* (LISVDHE) in Rutsiro, Ntamugenga. LISVDHE is a non-profit NGO that promotes and defends human rights, through providing legal assistance to victims of police abuse and through reporting on human rights violations in the region. Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul's work specifically focuses on reporting abuses by the military in the region.

On 3 May 2021, Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul was arrested by military officers in Rutsiro without a warrant. He was taken to Kalengera and later that day was transferred to the Auditorat Militaire de Rutshuru where he remains detained. Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul has not been brought before a judge or charged. The military officers who detained the human rights defender have informally accused him of being linked to the death of a military officer in November 2020.. The defender's family was required to pay a fee to the authorities in the Auditorat Militaire in Rutshuru in order to visit him. Following the visit, a representative from LISVDHE and a family member reported that prison authorities are refusing to provide Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul with medical treatment for a head injury he received in prison. The human rights defenders colleagues have told Front Line Defenders that Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul is being physically assaulted by a cellmate.

In November 2020, a military officer approached Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul as he was sitting outside a shop with other residents of his village. According to several eye-witnesses, the officer pulled his gun and threatened to kill Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul because of his work denouncing human rights abuses. The human rights defender fled as police arrived on site and witnesses tried to stop the officer waving his gun. In this attempt to de-escalate the situation, the officer in question's gun went off and the bullet ricocheted, resulting in his death. The investigation was led by the unit the deceased officer was a part of. The officer currently in charge of Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul's present case reportedly responded that the defender should now suffer as the deceased military officer had suffered.

Front Line Defenders condemns the detention and ill-treatment of human rights defender Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul and believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work defending human rights.

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

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being detained solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arrest and reports of ill-treatment toward Tumaini Muhoza Jean Paul with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Ensure that all the necessary measures are taken to guarantee that his case is treated with due process as well as guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security while in detention;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of Congo are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment and threats.