

1 August 2018

DRC: Detention, ill-treatment and charges against human rights defender Elias Bizimungu

On 24 July 2018, **Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba** appeared before the High Court in Rutshuru. He is charged with “disturbing the public order in connection with a peaceful protest”, which he helped to organise. His next hearing is on 2 August 2018.

[Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba](#) is human rights defender and member of the *Collectif d'Actions de la Société Civile* (**Collective of Civil Society Actions – CASC**), a platform of civil society organisations actively campaigning against human rights violations caused by deficiencies in the constitutional order in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is also the vice-president of the youth movement in the chieftaincy of Bwisha.

On 10 July 2018, the High Court of Rutshuru postponed Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba's first hearing until 24 July 2018, as the State Prosecutor failed to appear in court. Prior to this hearing, the human rights defender and four of his colleagues had been detained without charges for just over one month in the central prison of Rutshuru. Before this, Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba had been detained in a military camp for five days where he was severely beaten by soldiers. During meetings with his lawyer, Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba described physical and psychological ill-treatment which had been inflicted on them in the central prison of Rutshuru by other inmates under the supervision of prison guards. According to the defender, instances of ill-treatment included beatings and acts of humiliation by inmates, and denial of medical treatment and access to visitors by prison guards.

On 31 May 2018, Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba and fifteen fellow protesters, including six women, were arrested by members of the armed forces on the streets of Rutshuru during a peaceful protest demanding the release of a number of minor girls kidnapped by armed groups in the region. The authorities allege that the protesters disobeyed orders given by law enforcement officers and endangered public order.

Prior to the protest, on 28 and 29 May 2018, Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba had received threatening phone calls from the territorial administrator of Rutshuru region, Mr. Justin Mukanya, requesting him to abandon the planned protest. As a result, the human rights defender and his family were forced to vacate their house for a number of days in fear for their lives and safety.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the continued detention of Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba and strongly condemns the ill-treatment and charges against him as it believes he is being solely targeted as a result of his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the DRC to:

1. Drop all charges against Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba and release him as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being detained and charged solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba and those arrested with him, 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. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the acts of ill-treatment against Elias Bizimungu Rwaramba, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Democratic Republic of Congo in all circumstances and ensure that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.