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Fear of torture

25 May 2000

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other members of La voix des Sans Voix,

Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other members of the Congolese human rights organization *Voix des Sans Voix* (VSV), Voice of the Voiceless, have gone into hiding to escape arrest. If captured they would be in grave danger of torture and Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience, unlawfully detained on account of their legitimate activities as human rights defenders.

The security services have been trying to arrest them since the VSV published a report on the human rights situation in the DRC on 22 May 2000. The report was widely publicised in the national press and appears to have antagonized the authorities.

For the last few days telephone calls to the VSV offices in Kinshasa have reportedly been diverted to the offices of the military security service known as the *Détection militaire des activités anti-patries* (DEMIAP), the Military Detection of Unpatriotic Activities.

The DEMIAP detention centre is notorious for routine ill-treatment and torture of detainees, and Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other VSV members would be at serious risk of torture if detained there.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other VSV members have in the past been harassed, arrested and ill-treated because of their human rights work. Human rights defenders, along with opposition political activists, journalists and trade unionists, are regularly targeted by the DRC authorities in an attempt to stifle real or perceived opposition to the government of President Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

The VSV is an independent non-governmental organization, established in the late 1980s, which produces regular reports on the human rights situation in the DRC.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French or English or your own language:

- expressing your concern at attempts by the security forces to arrest Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other members of the VSV;

- urging the DRC authorities to order the security forces not to arrest VSV members solely on account of the publication on 22 May 2000 of a VSV report on the human rights situation in the DRC;
- stating that you would consider Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and other members of the VSV to be prisoners of conscience if they were to be detained solely on account of their peaceful human rights activism;
- expressing your deep concern that they would be at serious risk of torture if detained by the *Détection militaire des activités anti-patries*.

APPEALS TO:

President

Président Laurent-Désiré KABILA
Président de la République, Présidence de la République
Kinshasa-Ngaliema, Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: President, Kinshasa, DR Congo

e-mails: BM_1_ UPP@ic.cd

Fax: +243 880 2120 (this number may be very difficult to get through)

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear Président

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Mwenze KONGOLO
Ministre de la justice
Ministère de la justice
BP 3137 Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

COPIES TO:

Minister of Human Rights

Monsieur Léonard SHE OKITUNDU
Ministre des Droits humains
Ministère des Droits humains
Kinshasa-Gombe
République Démocratique du Congo

and to diplomatic representatives of Democratic Republic of Congo accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 July 2000.