

URGENT ACTION

PEACEFUL ACTIVISTS JAILED FOR CALL TO STRIKE

Human rights defenders, **Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia** and **Eric Muhindo Muvumbu** were arrested on 19 April by the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) in the town of Butembo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo's North Kivu province, while calling for a general strike to protest against increased deadly armed attacks in the north eastern territory of Beni. They spent a night in a cell at the ANR before being transferred to a cell at the Prosecutor's office. On 24 April, they were transferred to the Butembo Central Prison where they are currently being held. The two members of the youth movement, *Lutte pour le Changement* (LUCHA) are accused of "troubling public order" and "inciting for fiscal disobedience." They must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister of Human Rights

Mr. Albert Fabrice Puela

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Dear Minister,

*I am writing this letter to urge you and your government to release human rights defenders, **Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia** (22) and **Eric Muhindo Muvumbu** (32) who are being held in arbitrary detention. The two men are members of the youth movement, *Lutte pour le Changement* (LUCHA). On 19 April, they were arrested in the town of Butembo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) North Kivu province, by officers believed to be members of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR), while they were walking on the street with megaphones calling for a general strike in Butembo to protest against increased security incidents and killings of civilians in the neighbouring territory of Beni, in north eastern DRC. The call to strike was an appeal from LUCHA and other civil society organizations in the region to peacefully protest against the government failure to protect the civilians of Beni from deadly armed groups attacks.*

On 19 April, they spent a night in a cell at the ANR headquarters in Butembo before being transferred to a cell at the Prosecutor's office. On 24 April, they were transferred to the Butembo Central Prison where they remain held. The two human rights defenders have been accused of "troubling public order" and "inciting for fiscal disobedience". They have yet to be presented before a judge.

Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu's peaceful action to call for general strike to express their views on the failure by the government to guarantee effective security for the population in the Beni territory is not a crime. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that their arrest and detention is solely linked to the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Furthermore, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, I urge you to comply with Resolution 466 – 2020 of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which calls states to release human rights defenders as part of wider measures to reduce overcrowding in prisons and other places of detention.

I therefore call upon you to do anything in your power to ensure that **Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia** and **Eric Muhindo Muvumbu** are immediately and unconditionally released, as they are being detained solely in connection to their peaceful human rights activism. Pending their release, they must have regular and unfettered access to their lawyer and families and be protected from torture and other ill-treatment.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 6 May, the DRC authorities announced a “State of Siege” for two provinces in the eastern part of the country: North Kivu and Ituri. This decision, according to the authorities, was meant to restore security and peace in the two provinces where decades of armed conflicts and violence have left thousands of people dead and forced many more to flee their homes. Under this special regime, the civilian administration, including justice administration, was replaced by the military. Amnesty International is firmly opposed to the trials of civilians before military courts. And to date, the military courts are not fully operational, delaying the administration of justice to thousands of people in the two provinces. Amnesty International’s statement on the proclamation of the “State of Siege” is available [here](#).

Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia is in his last year of high school. He risks missing the national exam that gives access to tertiary education. Eric Muhindo Muvumbu is married and a father of two children, aged 8 and 2. His small business has gone bankrupt due to his prolonged absence, leaving his wife struggling to provide for their two children alone.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights must be immediately released. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has called on all member states, in its resolution 466 on prisons and conditions of detention in Africa, to release different groups of detainees amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, including human rights defenders, “in order to reduce overcrowding in prisons and curb the spread of the Coronavirus”.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 27 August 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia, Eric Muhindo Muvumbu (Both He/His/Him]