

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 62/19/00

UA 246/00

Denial of medical treatment/ Unfair trial/ Ill-treatment/ Possible prisoner of conscience

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo, MPR president

Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo, president of opposition political party, the *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* (MPR), Popular Revolution Movement, is in urgent need of medical attention after nearly a month in detention in the DRC capital Kinshasa.

She was arrested in the early hours of 22 July 2000 and held for five days in security service custody, where she was subjected to lengthy interrogation, including by members of the *Détection militaire des activités anti-patrie* (DEMIAP), Military Detection of Unpatriotic Activities. Throughout most of this period, including at night, she was reportedly forced to remain seated in a chair, causing her considerable physical discomfort and preventing her from sleeping.

On 27 July Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo appeared before the *Cour d'ordre militaire* (COM), Military Order Court, and was charged with endangering state security (*atteinte à la sûreté de l'Etat*). The charges are apparently based on articles she wrote for the newspaper *Le Potentiel* and radio interviews she gave, in which she was reportedly critical of government policy and complained about government harassment of MPR members. The COM, which was initially created to try military cases, does not meet international standards for fair trials and may impose the death penalty. There is no right of appeal against the COM's verdicts.

Later on 27 July Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo was transferred to Kinshasa's main prison, the *Centre pénitentiaire et de rééducation de Kinshasa* (CPRK), Kinshasa Penitentiary and Re-education Centre. She remains in pain from her ill-treatment in security service custody and is reported to be suffering from heart palpitations and dizziness. She requires immediate medical attention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Overt opposition political activity is effectively banned in the DRC. A law was recently passed requiring all political parties to re-register before they would be allowed to undertake political activity. However, many existing parties were either unable to meet the new conditions for registration or, like the MPR, refused to re-register, arguing that they were already legitimate parties. The MPR was founded in 1966 by former president Mobutu Sese Seko and until 1990 was the only legal party in what was then Zaire.

The charge of endangering state security is frequently contrived by President Laurent-Désiré Kabila's government as a means of silencing perceived or actual political opponents.

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

- expressing deep concern for the well-being of Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo and urging that she immediately be given any medical treatment she may require, including hospitalisation if necessary;
- protesting at her ill-treatment in security service custody where she was reportedly forced to remain seated almost continuously for five days;
- expressing concern that Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo will not receive a fair trial before the COM and urging that instead she be tried before a court which meets international standards of fairness, including a guarantee of her right to appeal to a higher court if she is convicted;
- seeking further information on the charges against Catherine Nzuzi wa Mbombo and stating that if she has been detained solely on account of non-violent political activities as president of the MPR you would consider her a prisoner of conscience who should be released immediately.

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: UPP@ic.cd

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

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear Président

Minister of State for Internal Affairs

Monsieur Gaëtan Kakudji
Ministre d'Etat chargé des Affaires intérieures
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Kinshasa-Gombe

République Démocratique du Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Kakudji, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre d'Etat

COPIES TO:

Minister of Human Rights

Monsieur Léonard SHE OKITUNDU
Ministre des Droits humains
Ministère des Droits humains
Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

e-mails: mininfordc@ic.cd

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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 28 September 2000.