

PUBLIC

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UA 98/98 Violent attack on human rights activist

27 March 1998

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO Floribert Chebeya Bahizire,
human rights activist

A violent attack on Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, the president of *La Voix des Sans Voix* (VSV), a non-governmental human rights organisation in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, has caused serious concerns for his safety.

During the night of 20 March 1998, five men who had apparently been hiding in Floribert Chebeya's house, attacked him as he slept. Four of the men wore the uniform of the *Forces armées congolaises*, Congolese Armed Forces. Armed with rifles and bayonets, they punched Floribert Chebeya in the face and hit him on the leg with rifle butts. They repeatedly threatened to kill him. Also demanding money, the men looted the house before eventually leaving.

The attack may be linked to an ongoing property dispute between a private individual and VSV. On 22 December 1997, this individual threatened to kill Floribert Chebeya. On 19 January 1998, the same man came to his house accompanied by soldiers. Floribert Chebeya was not at home at the time.

Amnesty International, however, fears that the assault on Floribert Chebeya is directly linked to his human rights activities. No investigations are known to have been undertaken by the authorities into the incident so far.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of people have been arrested in various parts of the DRC since the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL) took power on 17 May 1997. Many of those arrested are leading members of political opposition groups, journalists and human rights activists. Human rights activists have also been repeatedly harassed, threatened and searched by the security forces.

Examples of the emerging pattern of abuses against human rights activists in DRC include Roger Sala Nzo Badila and Nyabirungu Mwene Songa, both leading members of the *Centre National des droits de l'homme* (CENADHO), National Centre for Human Rights. They have been detained for more than two months. In March 1998 The Vice-President of the *Association Zairoise de Droits de l'Homme* (AZADHO), Zairian Human Rights Association, was summoned to court because of a press statement on massacres in Eastern Congo issued by his organization, and copies of the organisation's annual report have been seized. In November 1997, Nsii Luanda Shandwe, president of the *Comité des observateurs des droits de l'homme* (CODHO), Committee of human rights observers, was warned that the security forces were looking for him. On 12 February 1998, high ranking military officials reportedly said that they were still searching for Nsii Luanda Shandwe, in order to arrest him.

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

- expressing concern about the emerging pattern of harassment and intimidation of human rights activists in DRC;
- urging the Congolese government to ensure Floribert Chebeya Bahizire's safety;

- calling upon the Congolese government to immediately start a full and independent investigation into the violent attack on Floribert Chebeya on 20 March 1998, as well as into previous threats against him;
- stating that even if the incident were an armed robbery carried out by private individuals, the authorities still have a duty to investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- urging the Congolese authorities to bring to justice those responsible for threatening and attacking Floribert Chebeya;
- calling upon the Congolese government to allow human rights organizations to work without fear for their safety.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Laurent-Désiré KABILA

Président de la République

Présidence de la République

Kinshasa-Ngaliema

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Ministère de la Justice

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Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of State for Internal Affairs

Gaetan KAKUDJI

Ministre d'Etat à l'Intérieur

Hôtel du Conseil exécutif

Kinshasa-Gombe

Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Le Phare (independent newspaper)

Fax: + 1 212 3769270 (this is a number in the United States but the fax will be transmitted to *Le Phare*)

and to diplomatic representatives of the 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 8 May 1998.