

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

6 April 1998

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Freddy Kitoko, human rights activist

There are grave concerns for the safety of leading members of the non-governmental *Association Zairoise de défense de droits de l'homme* (AZADHO), Zairian Association for the Defence of Human Rights. On 4 April 1998, heavily armed members of the security forces entered one of the AZADHO offices based in Lubumbashi, Katanga province, in search of its president, Freddy Kitoko.

Members of the *Agence nationale de renseignements* (ANR), National Intelligence Service, are also known to have been searching for Freddy Kitoko, now in hiding.

On 3 April, in a live television broadcast the Minister of Justice, Mwenze Kongolo, accused AZADHO of leading political campaigns against the government and receiving money from abroad. He duly declared the country's largest human rights organization illegal. He also criticised AZADHO for continuing to use the old country name of Zaïre in its title. He also demanded that all human rights organizations register at the Ministry of Justice within three days or face a ban.

On 20 March, human rights activist Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, president of *La voix des sans voix* (VSV), The Voiceless, another non-governmental human rights organization in Kinshasa, was attacked by five armed men at his home while he slept. They repeatedly threatened him with death and left him wounded. No investigations into this case are known to have been undertaken by the authorities (see UA 98/98, AFR 62/12/98, 27 March 1998).

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) Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre 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 défense 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.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Freddy Kitoko and other members of the *Association Zairoise de défense de droits de l'homme* (AZADHO), Zairian Association for the Defence of Human Rights;
- calling upon the authorities to guarantee the safety of Freddy Kitoko and other members of AZADHO;
- expressing concern that AZADHO was declared illegal on 3 April 1998;
- urging the government to stop harassment and arrests of human rights activists, in order for them to work without fear for their members' safety and to investigate incidents of harassment and attacks.

APPEALS TO:

(Please note: fax tones can be very difficult to obtain)

Son Excellence Laurent-Désiré KABILA

Président de la République
Présidence de la République
Kinshasa-Ngaliema

Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: President Kabila, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Faxes: + 243 88 02120

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President

Minister of Justice

M. Mwenze KONGOLO
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 3137, Kinshasa-Gombe
Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Kinshasa, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear President

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 / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Le Phare (independent newspaper)

Faxes: + 1 212 3769270 (Note: this is a number in the United States from where faxes are 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 18 May 1998.