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@Recent arrests in Kinshasa signal crackdown on opposition to President

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At least 22 known or suspected opponents of President Mobutu Sese Seko are currently held in various detention centres in the Zairian capital, Kinshasa. The detainees include politicians, journalists and trade unionists arrested, in a new wave of arrests which began in late April 1993. Many of them have been arrested by members of the security police or armed forces loyal to President Mobutu. They are initially held in secret or incommunicado at detention centres controlled by the security forces for several weeks before being moved on to Kinshasa's Makala central prison. It is feared that many of them are being subjected to torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment when they are first arrested and held in secret cells. Reports from Kinshasa indicate that virtually all of them have been arrested because of their non-violent opposition to or criticism of the President Mobutu and most of them are considered by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience.

Since President Mobutu announced political reforms, including a move from a one-party state to a multi-party political system in April 1990 members of the security forces have killed hundreds of civilians and maimed several thousand others. Hundreds of opponents of the President have been arrested and detained, usually for short periods during and after demonstrations. Recent arrests indicate a new phase in efforts by President Mobutu and his supporters to use imprisonment to crush opposition.

This apparent targeting of opponents and critics of President Mobutu occurs at a time when Zaire has reached near political stalemate between political parties and other groups campaigning for democratic change and President Mobutu and his supporters who oppose change. President Mobutu is locked in a bitter power struggle with an opposition Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the *Union pour le démocratie et progrès social* (UDPS), Union for Democracy and Social Progress, who was elected by a pro-democracy National Conference in August 1992. Following a mutiny by soldiers in January 1993, who were angry at being paid in controversial new banknotes which had been denounced as illegal tender by Prime Minister Tshisekedi and boycotted by supporters of his government, President Mobutu

announced the dismissal of Etienne Tshisekedi and named a new Prime Minister, Faustin Birindwa. A transitional legislative body, nominated by the National Conference, the *Haut conseil de la république* (HCR), Higher Council of the Republic, has rejected Faustin Birindwa as Prime Minister and is trying to negotiate a compromise with President Mobutu.

Zaire now effectively has two governments led by two Prime Ministers, who are competing for power. However, the security forces and the state media, in particular the radio and the television, are still controlled by President Mobutu, who continues to defy foreign pressure to yield to democratic reforms and now appears to be attempting to silence all domestic pro-democracy activists with repression.

One of the first arrests reported was of **Mukengeshayi Kenge**, the Editor-in-Chief of *Le Phare* newspaper, who was arrested by agents of the *Service national d'intelligence et de protection* (SNIP), National Service for Intelligence and Protection, Zaire's security police, on the night of 23 April 1993. After being held for five days in a secret detention centre at the SNIP headquarters his case was referred to the Procuracy (public prosecutor's office) on 28 April 1993. The grounds for his arrest were apparently *propagation de faux bruits* (spreading false rumours) but the details of the charge remains unknown. On 30 April a court decided he should be released immediately but the Procurator General contravened the court's decision and signed a warrant authorising his continuing detention and he is apparently still in custody. It is not clear that the decision to remand him in custody despite a court release order has any basis in law and it appears that Mukengeshayi Kenge is a victim of arbitrary detention and probably also a prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International is also concerned for the safety of another of *Le Phare's* staff, an editor known as **M. Muboyayi** and two members of his household, all of whom have reportedly gone into hiding following his attempted arrest in late April.

A third journalist, **Mulumba Kandolo**, from *Le Potentiel* newspaper, was arrested on 28 April 1993 when he was accused of stealing a letter from the chambers of the Procurator General. He is currently detained at Makala prison along with a court clerk, Babibango, who is suspected of having handed over the letter to him. Kandolo is known to have presented before a judge but it is unclear whether he has been formally charged and, if so, when he will be brought to trial.

At least 18 members of the opposition UDPS and associated political parties, which are members of a coalition known as *L'Union Sacrée*, The Sacred Union, were arrested during April and many are believed to be still held. **Joseph Olenga Nkoyi**, an envoy (*chargé de mission*) of Etienne Tshisekedi and leader of the *Force novatrice de l'union sacrée*, Innovative force of the Sacred Union, was arrested on 29 April, and was first held at the Kinshasa headquarters of the National Gendarmerie, known as the "CIRCO" (*circonscription militaire*). There are reports that he was subjected to torture there. After being charged with inciting disobedience against a legally established authority (*incitation à la revolte contre l'autorité légalement établie*), his case was dropped by an examining magistrate and he was released on 11 May. However, reports from Kinshasa indicate that the magistrate who released him has been suspended from his post and that Joseph Olenga Nkoyi was rearrested on two days after his release on 13 May. He is now believed to be held at Makala prison.

The most recent reports reaching Amnesty International indicate that at least five trade union leaders have been arrested following a strike by civil servants on 17 and 18 May. They include **Kuku Gedila** and **Ngandu Tshilombo** leaders of the *Confédération Démocratique du Travail* (CDT), Democratic Federation of Workers. They are all said to be held in cells below the procuracy.

Amnesty International is concerned that all those arrested may be prisoners of conscience held solely because of they exercised the right to freedom of association and expression and calls for the immediate

release of all those detained following recent arrests.

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