

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Freddy Loseke Lisumbu la Yayenga, journalist

A journalist imprisoned by a military court is reported to be gravely ill with kidney failure, and may die if he is not released for specialist medical care. Severe beatings and other ill-treatment in custody appear to have caused or aggravated his illness.

Freddy Loseke Lisumbu la Yayenga is the editor of the newspaper *La Libre Afrique* (Free Africa). In December 1999 he published an article alleging that a military commander was plotting to kill President Kabila. He was arrested two days later. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his legitimate work as a journalist.

The *Cour d'ordre militaire* (COM), Military Order Court, found Freddy Loseke guilty of "insulting behaviour towards the army" (*outrage à l'armée*), and sentenced him to three years' imprisonment on 19 May 2000.

He is held at Kinshasa's central prison, the *Centre pénitentiaire et de rééducation de Kinshasa* (CPRK), Kinshasa Penitentiary and Reeducation Centre. The authorities have ignored reports by medical experts and an appeal by his lawyer that he should be released to receive specialized medical care.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Freedom of expression in the DRC has been severely curtailed since president Laurent-Désiré Kabila took power in May 1997. There is probably less freedom to express oneself now than in the final years of the reign of the previous president, Mobutu Sese Seko, a period notorious for its disregard of basic human rights.

The DRC is one of the most repressive countries in the world for journalists. Because it is part of their job to report on the political and social issues of the day, journalists in the DRC frequently find themselves the target of government repression. According to the international NGO *Reporters sans frontières* (RSF), Reporters Without Borders, more than 110 journalists have been imprisoned since Kabila came to power. Journalists are arrested almost every week.

On 12 September the COM sent four other journalists to prison in connection with articles published by their newspapers. Editors Emile-Aimé Kakese Vinalu of *La Carrousel* and Jean-Pierre Ekanga Mukuna of *La Tribune de la Nation* were sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Richard Nsamba Olangi, editor of *Le Messager Africain*, and journalist Nicolas Katako were sentenced to one year's imprisonment, with six months suspended. The editor-in-chief of *La Référence Plus*, Franck Baku, is on trial now.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Freddy Loseke is gravely ill and the authorities have so far refused to release him so that he can get appropriate medical care;

- calling for his immediate and unconditional release, as Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for legitimate journalistic activities;
- asking the authorities to guarantee that, while he remains in prison, Freddy Loseke will be well treated and will receive without delay any medical treatment he requires;
- demanding an impartial inquiry into allegations that Freddy Loseke was tortured in detention, with a view to bringing any suspected torturers to justice.

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 Justice

Monsieur Mwenze KONGOLO
Ministre de la justice
Ministère de la justice
BP 3137 Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

COPIES TO:

Minister of Human Rights

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

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 27 October 2000.