

URGENT ACTION

PEACEFUL ACTIVISTS RELEASED ON BAIL

On 24 July, human rights defenders **Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia** and **Eric Muhindo Muvumbu** were released on bail. They were arrested on 19 April while calling for a general strike to protest against increased deadly armed attacks in the north eastern territory of Beni. The two activists have been charged with “inciting civil disobedience” and “threatening an attack.” Amnesty International believes the charges, which remain pending, are baseless and must be dropped.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister of Human Rights
Mr. Albert Fabrice Puela
Email: fabricepuela@outlook.com
puelaalbertfabrice@gmail.com

Dear Minister,

I write to thank you for your efforts for the release of human rights defenders, **Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia** and **Eric Muhindo Muvumbu**, members of the youth movement, *Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA)*. The two men were granted bail on 21 July and released on 24 July, following three months of arbitrary detention. While we celebrate their release, they still face serious trumped-up charges of “inciting civil disobedience” and “threatening an attack.” They have also been placed under stringent bail conditions and not allowed to leave the city of Butembo, return to public places, or places like airports, train stations, stadiums. They are also required to present themselves before the judicial authorities when needed. These conditions infringe on their basic rights to freedom of movement and expression.

Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu were arrested on 19 April in the town of Butembo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) North Kivu province, by officers believed to be members of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR), while they were walking on the street with megaphones calling for a general strike in Butembo to protest against increased security incidents and killings of civilians in the neighbouring territory of Beni. The call to strike was an appeal from LUCHA and other civil society organizations in the region to peacefully protest against the government's failure to protect civilians from armed groups attacks.

Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu's peaceful act of calling for a general strike to express their views on the government's responsibility to protect civilians is not a crime. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the prosecution of the two human rights defenders is a violation of their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly as guaranteed by DRC's constitution and the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights.

I therefore call on you to do everything in your power to ensure that the charges against Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu are dropped, the arbitrary restrictions imposed on their right to freedom of movement and expression are lifted, and that they and are able to continue to do their vital human rights work without fear of further prosecution and/or reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Prior to Elisée Lwatumba Kaonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu's release, the Minister of Human Rights [publicly called for their release](#) during his visit in North Kivu on 14 July.

Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia is in his last year of high school. He has been denied the opportunity to complete pre-tests for the upcoming national exam which gives access to tertiary education. Eric Muhindo Muvumbu is married and a father of two children, aged two and eight. His small business has gone bankrupt due to his prolonged absence, leaving his wife struggling to provide for their two children alone.

On 6 May, the DRC authorities announced a "State of Siege" for two provinces in the eastern part of the country, North Kivu and Ituri. This decision, according to the authorities, was meant to restore security and peace in the two provinces where decades of armed conflict and violence have left thousands of people dead and forced many more to flee their homes. Under this martial law, the civilian administration, including justice, was replaced by the military. Amnesty International is firmly opposed to the trials of civilians before military courts. To date, military courts are not fully operational, delaying the administration of justice to thousands of people in the two provinces. Amnesty International's statement on the proclamation of the "State of Siege" is available [here](#).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 September 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Elisée Lwatumba Kasonia and Eric Muhindo Muvumbu [both he/him/his]

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr62/4346/2021/en/>