

URGENT ACTION

ARBITRARILY JAILED JOURNALIST MUST BE RELEASED

On 25 September, the High Court in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital, rejected detained journalist Stanis Bujakera's bail application. Stanis Bujakera was arbitrarily arrested on 8 September at N'djili Airport in Kinshasa as he was about to board a flight to the city of Lubumbashi. He was unlawfully detained for three days before being placed under provisional detention on 11 September. His mobile phones and computer were seized and searched without a warrant. The DRC authorities have charged him with "spreading rumours" and "disseminating fake news" in relation to an article they allege he authored. Amnesty International believes Stanis Bujakera is being persecuted for his journalistic work. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

President of the Republic

Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo

Email: communication@presidence.cd

cabinet@presidence.cd

Copies to: Minister of Justice

Mrs. Rose Mutombo

Email: contact@justice.gouv.cd

Dear Mr President,

I write to express my deep concern over the continued unlawful detention of journalist **Stanis Bujakera** since 8 September.

On 8 September, security forces arrested Stanis Bujakera – a correspondent for Thomson Reuters and Jeune Afrique - at the N'djili International Airport as he was about to travel on a business trip to Lubumbashi, a city in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The authorities detained him unlawfully and questioned him about an article that cited a leaked confidential report attributed to the National Intelligence Agency (ANR), implicating the military intelligence services in the abduction and murder of opposition MP Chérubin Okende last July and thus calling into question the authorities' official version of the case. The authorities confiscated and searched Stanis Bujakera's mobile phones and computer without a warrant. On 11 September, he was charged with "spreading rumors" and "disseminating fake news," even though he was not named as the author of the article in question. On 15 September, a Peace Tribunal in Kinshasa, DRC's capital, granted the Prosecution's request for 15 days of detention for further investigation. On 25 September, the High Court of Kinshasa–Gombe rejected his bail application.

Amnesty International believes Stanis Bujakera is being prosecuted because of his investigative work as a journalist. His baseless prosecution is a blatant violation of press freedoms guaranteed by regional and international human rights instruments to which DRC is a party, as well as DRC's constitution.

As the guarantor of the DRC's human rights obligations, I urge you to ensure that the charges against Stanis Bujakera are dropped and that he is immediately and unconditionally released. I also urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that DRC authorities abide by their obligations under the Constitution as well regional and international human rights instruments to protect press freedom.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is set to hold general elections in December 2023. Citizen movements, many human rights organizations, and opposition parties have raised concerns over the increasing restrictions on civic space and attacks ahead of the planned elections.

On 13 July 2023, the body of ex-minister turned opposition figure, **Cherubin Okende**, was discovered with gunshot wounds. At the time of his death, Cherubin Okende was spokesperson of the Ensemble pour la République, an opposition party led by President Tshisekedi's potential presidential challenger, Moïse Katumbi. Cherubin Okende's family had reported him abducted a few hours earlier. According to several news outlets, Cherubin Okende had left his house to drop off a 24-hour request to postpone an invitation to appear before a magistrate on 13 July 2023. A leaked note cited in an [article](#) published by Jeune Afrique on 31 August 2023 - and on which Stanis Bujakera is being prosecuted in relation to - mentions the military intelligence as being involved in the killing of Cherubin Okende. An independent inquiry was set to investigate his death. However, the family and other experts have raised concerns over the irregularities in preserving forensic evidence and the lack of transparency.

On 20 June 2023, the presidential guards arrested opposition MP **Frank Diongo** and accused him of illegally possessing a firearm. He was detained at the military intelligence headquarters and transferred to Ndolo military prison on 8 July 2023. He was released without charge on 15 July 2023. Another political opposition figure, Moïse Katumbi's adviser, **Salomon Kalonda**, was arrested on 30 May 2023 in Kinshasa. He remains in detention at the Ndolo military prison, where he was transferred after spending 11 days at the military intelligence headquarters. He is accused of "illegally possessing a weapon" and "undermining state security." The DRC officials had previously accused Salomon Kalonda of unsubstantiated allegations that he was in contact with the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group. He was charged on 14 August 2023 with "treason," "receiving classified documents," and "inciting military personnel to commit acts contrary to their duty".

Recently, the DRC authorities and security forces have increasingly prevented opposition parties from holding peaceful demonstrations. A peaceful protest against the high cost of living, insecurity, and the lack of preparedness for the electoral process, organized on 21 May 2023 by the opposition, was brutally suppressed by security forces. According to official accounts, at least 27 people (including police officers) were injured. Three days later, the police prevented Moïse Katumbi, one of the main challengers of President Tshisekedi for the upcoming presidential elections, from entering the province of Kongo-Central to hold political rallies. A sit-in at the National Independent Electoral Commission organized by Katumbi, Martin Fayulu, Delly Sesanga, and Matata Ponyo was brutally dispersed by the police on 25 May 2023. In the same month, in Lubumbashi, a stronghold of Moïse Katumbi, the authorities banned the meeting planned by the opposition.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 November 2023

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Stanis Bujakera (he/him)