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## **Democratic Republic of the Congo must investigate activist's death**

The Congolese government must immediately launch a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the death of one of the country's leading human rights activists, Amnesty International said today.

Floribert Chebeya Bahizire was found dead early on Wednesday after being summoned by the police in Kinshasa on Tuesday. He was the executive director of one of Congo's largest human rights organisations Voix des Sans Voix (VSV) and of the national network of human rights groups.

"We are stunned and appalled by the suspicious death of such a prominent and respected human rights defender," said Veronique Aubert, deputy director of Amnesty International's Africa Program. "Floribert has been arrested and harassed by the authorities in the past. It seems he may have paid the ultimate price for his valuable work."

My Chebeya told Amnesty International on several occasions that he felt he had been followed and that he was under surveillance by the security services.

On the morning of June 1, Mr Chebeya received a telephone call requesting his presence at the office of General John Numbi, the General Inspectorate of Police in Ligwala, Kinshasa. He left his offices at 5pm to go to the Inspectorate.

Mr Chebeya was in phone contact with his family until just after 9pm on Tuesday night. Just before 8pm he sent a text message to relatives saying he had not yet met with Numbi but was still waiting at the Inspectorate.

His last message said he was leaving the Inspectorate and stopping briefly at the University on the way home. Since then his phone has been unreachable.

His body was found by passers by early on Wednesday in a suburb close to his home.

"The government must urgently investigate this cold blooded murder and prosecute those responsible," said Veronique Aubert. "Those who defend the rights of others must be allowed to continue their work free of harassment and persecution."

Amnesty International has observed in the past year increased oppression of human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of Congo, including by illegal arrest, prosecution, phone threats, repeated summoning to the offices of the intelligence services.

"Floribert's death is a great loss for the human rights community," said Veronique Aubert.