

Brussels, The Hague, September 20, 2011

Concerning: alarming situation of human rights defenders journalists and opposition leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Excellence Mr Theuermann,

We as co-signatories and as organisations highly committed to the human rights situation in the Great Lakes Region are deeply concerned about the security and the right to freedom of expression of human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists and opposition leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The first presidential elections in 2006, were characterized by various human rights violations, often perpetrated with complete impunity. During the pre-electoral phase of the 2011 presidential elections, scheduled for late November, the number of threats against human rights defenders and opposition leaders reaches alarming proportions.

Since February this year, the co-signatories have observed an increase in both the number and the severity of threats. Threats are often related to a HRDs public statement against the incumbent government. Two lawyers from the organization ASADHO both received death threats after they held a press conference, whereby they condemned authorities for repression of members of the political opposition. After this conference they had to flee and one of the two lawyers was urged to continue his work outside the DR Congo.

We would like to draw your attention to the following human rights defenders and opposition leader, threatened in recent months. These people took the courage to speak out about their threats, something not every activist can afford. (Please see the attached documentation of the individual threats). The cases of the individuals below are just examples of the harsh climate in which human rights defenders and leaders of the opposition have to operate. They deserve all our support:

1. M. Dismas Kitenge Senga, director of the organization *Groupe Lotus* in Kisangani, and vice-president of the FIDH international human rights organization, July 8, 2011
2. Justin Bahirwe (SOS Information Juridique Multisector Elle IJM) - July 20, 2011
3. Jean Claude Katende director of the *Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de L'Homme* ASADHO –February 2011, July and August 2011
4. Kizito Mushizi Nfundiko former director of *Radio Maendeleo* and currently spokesperson for the *Union pour la Nation Congolaise-UNC* in the Kivus - August 15, 2011

We ask representatives of the European Union, the European Council, the European Parliament, EU-delegations and Member States, Permanent Representations and the COHOM chair to take measures so that human rights defenders in the DRC can continue their work in freedom and security.

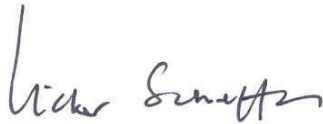
It is of crucial importance that human rights defenders, journalists and opposition leaders can continue to denounce human rights violations, knowing that the political space is limited and further decreasing towards the Presidential Elections. Without opposition one cannot speak of transparent or democratic elections.

In line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the European Union Guidelines for the protection of Human Rights Defenders, we request European representatives to:

- Make sure that the safety of these HRDs is monitored by the EU- delegations and Member States Embassies;
- Provide quickly emergency visas to human rights defenders when needed;
- Publicly express concern for threats and attacks against HRDs;
- Urge the Congolese authorities to:
  - guarantee adequate protection to these HRDs and opposition leader, as well as to all HRDs and political activists;
  - guarantee the rights to life and physical integrity, as stipulated in Article 16 and Article 17 of the DRC Constitution of February, 18, 2006, as well as in Article 6 and Article 9 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights of December, 16, 1966;
  - guarantee freedom of expression and information as stipulated in Article 23 and Article 24 of the DRC Constitution of February, 18, 2006 and to Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights of December, 16, 1966;
  - tackle the impunity of attacks and crimes committed against human rights defenders;
- Remind the authorities that all political parties should be able to play their role without suffering pressures and threats before, during and after the electoral process;
- Put into practise joint initiatives that directly support the protection of human rights defenders, like for example the Shelter City Initiative.

As concerned organizations, we continue to monitor the personal security situation of these and other defenders and we continue to support them wherever we can.

Sincerely,



drs. V.M. Scheffers,  
director Justitia et Pax Netherlands

Cordaid  
Justitia et Pax Netherlands  
Onz- Ökumenisches Netz Zentralafrika  
Pax Christi International  
Protection International

Cc:

Incoming chair of sub-committee of Human Rights:	Ms B. Lochbiler
PR of Belgium: (civilian crisis management)	Mr K. Dassen
PR of Hungary, human rights:	Ms K. Korossy
PR of Poland: (deputy head of PR in PSC)	Mr. D. Przeniosło
PR of Denmark: Deputy Defence Counsellor & Assistant Defence Counsellor	Pernille Brunse Mr K. Borg Nielsen
Directorate for Human Rights and Democracy EEAS:	Ms K. Leinonen
EEAS DRC Desk officer:	Ms C. Lopes
EEAS DRC Desk officer:	Mr J. Salgueiro
EUSEC:	Colonel J. Loureiro (DRC)

Cc: Special Rapporteur HRDs OHCHR  
Special Rapporteur HRDs ACHPR

Ms M. Sekaggya  
Mr M. Bechir Khalfalah