

Press Release

For immediate release

Wednesday, 2nd of October 2013

Joint statement of International NGOs on the arrest of Virunga Park Ranger,
Rodrigue Katembo Mugaruka

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - On Thursday, 19th September, Rodrigue Katembo Mugaruka a warden in Virunga National Park and recipient of the Abraham Conservation Award was arrested by Congolese security forces and taken to Goma. We, the undersigned, are extremely concerned about the ranger's well-being and the circumstances of his arrest.

Although more than 12 days have passed since Mugaruka's arrest, no legitimate formal charges have been brought against the ranger. The situation is in clear violation of Congolese law, which requires charges to be presented within 48 hours of an arrest.

The circumstances of ranger Mugaruka's arrest suggest that it is a direct consequence of his work in upholding the law and protecting the national park. Specifically, two days before his arrest, Mugaruka declined to allow officials acting on behalf of British oil company, SOCO International to carry out work inside the park for which they did not possess proper legal authorization. As a warden of Virunga National Park on active duty, Mugaruka is mandated under Congolese law to discharge his role of law enforcement officer for The Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN), DRC's national wildlife authority.

We are now calling for clarification of the charges that are to be leveled against him. We are increasingly concerned that due process is not being followed in Mugaruka's case in line with DRC law, which clearly require formal charges to be made within 48 hours of arrest.

We reiterate our support for the administration of Virunga National Park, its rangers, and the local communities. We also wish to manifest our support for the statement issued Friday 27th of September, by the local civil society of North Kivu.

The group notes that oil extraction in a world heritage site remains illegal under international law.

Signed By :

Rainforest Foundation
Norway



Greenpeace Africa/DRC



Synchronicity Earth



Notes for the Editor:

About VNP

Virunga is Africa's oldest national park and it contains the highest biological diversity of any protected area on the continent. Home to over 2,000 plant species, 706 bird species, and 218 mammal species, Virunga is the only park in the world that harbors three species of Great Apes, including chimpanzees, lowland gorillas, and the iconic mountain gorillas. About a quarter of the world's remaining mountain gorilla population can be found living in the park's southern sector. Hippos, elephants, African buffalos, and many other large mammal species can be found in the park's central and northern sectors. The 300-strong park ranger force that protects Virunga National Park's wildlife, habitats, and human populations constitute the main line of defence against a multitude of threats.