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First UA: 92/23 Index: AFR 62/7244/2023 Democratic Republic of Congo of September 29, 2023

## **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO ARBITRARILY JAILED JOURNALIST MUST BE RELEASED**

On September 25, the High Court in Kinshasa rejected detained journalist Stanis Bujakera's bail application. Stanis Bujakera was arbitrarily arrested on September 8 at N'djili Airport in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo's capital, 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 September 11. His mobile phones and computer were seized and searched without a warrant. The DRC authorities have charged him with "spreading rumors" 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.

### **Write to the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo urging him to:**

- Ensure that the charges against Stanis Bujakera are dropped and that he is immediately and unconditionally released.
- 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.

### **Write to:**

President of the Republic  
Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo  
Email: [communication@presidence.cd](mailto:communication@presidence.cd)  
[cabinet@presidence.cd](mailto:cabinet@presidence.cd)  
Copies to: Minister of Justice  
Mrs. Rose Mutombo  
Email: [contact@justice.gouv.cd](mailto:contact@justice.gouv.cd)

### **And copy:**

His Excellency Joska KABONGO NGOY  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo  
18 Range Road  
Ottawa, ON K1N 8J3  
Tel: (613) 230-6582 / 291-1957  
Email: [ambardcongocan@rogers.com](mailto:ambardcongocan@rogers.com)

## **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 July 13, 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, Moise 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 July 13, 2023. A leaked note cited in an article published by Jeune Afrique on August 31, 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 June 20, 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 July 8, 2023. He was released without charge on July 15, 2023. Another political opposition figure, Moise 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 August 14, 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 May 21, 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 Moise 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 May 25, 2023. In the same month, in Lubumbashi, a stronghold of Moise Katumbi, the authorities banned the meeting planned by the opposition.