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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO ACTIVISTS AND PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE FREED

In April and September 2022, young human rights activists King Mwamisyo Ndungu and Elias Bizimungu, members of the movement Lutte pour le Changement, were arbitrarily arrested. They were later sentenced by a military court in Goma to five years in prison for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

On May 29, 2023, Elias Bizimungu was acquitted and released. On January 27, 2025, King Mwamisyo Ndungu was freed during a mass prison escape that followed the takeover of Goma by the armed group M23.

No further action is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

At the time of their arrest, King Mwamisyo Ndungu and Elias Bizimungu were human rights activists with the people's movement, Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA), in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They were arrested in April and September 2022 on trumped-up charges, solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Both had openly criticized the military and police in Nord Kivu province for failing to protect civilians under their jurisdiction and for being complicit in abuses under the "state of siege" imposed since May 2021. Amnesty International recognized both men as prisoners of conscience.

On 27 May 2023, the Goma High Court acquitted Elias Bizimungu, finding the charges against him to be baseless. He was released from prison two days later, on 29 May. His case highlighted the lack of credible evidence used to silence activists and the risks faced by those who challenge state authorities in the DRC. His freedom was celebrated as a rare instance of justice being served in an otherwise repressive environment.

While Elias was released, King Mwamisyo Ndungu remained behind bars. In July 2023, a military appeal court upheld his five-year sentence, prolonging his arbitrary detention. He remained imprisoned for nearly three years in harsh conditions. In January 2025, chaos erupted when M23 forces captured Goma, and a mass prison escape followed. During the upheaval, the women's wing of the prison was set ablaze, reportedly killing dozens of women. Amid this tragedy, King Mwamisyo Ndungu was among those who escaped. Amnesty International delayed sharing the news until confirming he was safely out of Goma and no longer at immediate risk.

While welcoming King Mwamisyo Ndungu's freedom and safety, Amnesty International condemned the injustice he endured. His release came not through a judicial process but extraordinary circumstances, leaving his name unexonerated. Amnesty has pledged to explore advocacy opportunities to ensure his conviction is overturned and his rights fully restored. The organization continues to denounce the persecution of activists in the DRC and call for accountability for abuses committed under the "state of siege."

On 3 September 2025, King Mwamisyo Ndungo met with Amnesty International at its Nairobi office, where he received the solidarity messages sent to him during his detention. He expressed heartfelt thanks, saying:

“Hello dear members of Amnesty International. I’m a human rights defender and member of Lucha. I wanted to thank you for the messages of solidarity and encouragement that you sent me when I was in Goma [prison], DRC. I [also] wanted to thank you for standing by me and raising your voices for my cause. I’m so happy. I’m so proud of you, and I thank you. I love you.”