

UA 143/99 Medical/legal concern/fear of torture or ill-treatment 1999

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Professor Alidor Mwambantita]
Raymond Kabala]Members of opposition
Odile Kalala (f)]political party
Placide Mpoyi]

Etienne Richard Mbaya

Professor Alidor Mwambantita, a leading member of the DRC's largest opposition political party, the *Union pour la démocratie et le progrès sociale* (UDPS), Union for Democracy and Social Progress, was arrested together with three other leading members of the party holding a meeting at a house in the capital, Kinshasa, on 12 May 1999.

The four were arrested by soldiers and taken to Kinshasa's main military barracks, Camp Kokolo, where they are held without charge. When a friend of the detainees, former government minister Etienne Richard Mbaya, attempted to visit them on 2 June, he too was arrested and is also now detained without charge at Camp Kokolo. Since then no one else has tried to visit them, and Etienne Richard Mbaya's family are concerned for his health, as he suffers from high blood pressure and has effectively been denied access to medical care and medication. Amnesty International fears that all five detainees may be at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International believes that the five people named above were arrested and detained solely on account of their political activities, and as such considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several other groups of UDPS members, some of whom are known to Amnesty International, were reportedly arrested in May 1999 (see UA 126/99, 2 June 1999). This is part of a continuing pattern of intimidation and repression of opposition political activists.

Opposition political party activities were banned and the transitional constitution suspended by President Kabila in May 1997, after his *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, came to power.

In February 1999 a law was passed, allowing political parties to apply for official recognition, but the conditions were so prohibitive that no political party is yet known to have applied or have been officially recognized.

Since renewed armed conflict broke out in eastern DRC in August 1998, hundreds of people, both civilian and military, have been arrested for their perceived or actual opposition to the government of President Laurent Kabila. The atmosphere has been particularly tense in Kinshasa, where the government and its officials are especially sensitive to any form of criticism.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails/express/airmail letters in French, English or your own language:

- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Professor Alidor Mwambantita, Raymond Kabala, Odile Kalala, Placide Mpoyi and Etienne Richard Mbaya if they are not to be promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- calling for an end to the continuing pattern of arrest and detention of government critics, including members of political parties and journalists, solely because of their political activities or non-violent beliefs;
- pointing out that the DRC, as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is obliged to respect the right to freedom of expression and association.

APPEALS TO:

President

Président Laurent-Désiré KABILA
Président de la République, Présidence de la République
Kinshasa-Ngaliema, Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Président, Kinshasa, DR Congo

e-mail: UPP@ic.cd

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President Kabila

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Mwenze KONGOLO
Ministre de la justice
Ministère de la justice
BP 3137 Kinshasa-Gombe, Democratic Republic of Congo

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, DR Congo

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister for Human Rights

M. Léonard She OKITUNOU
Ministre des droits humains
Ministère des droits humains
Kinshasa-Gombe
République Démocratique du Congo

e-mail: mininfordc@ic.cd

Fax: + 243 88 21630 / 88 20513

and to diplomatic representatives of Democratic Republic of Congo accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 July 1999.