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Democratic Republic of Congo: Authorities must prosecute the killers of human rights defender Pascal Kabungulu Kibembi

Amnesty International today joined with three other major international human rights and development organizations in an appeal to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government, the United Nations, the African Union and the UK government to ensure that justice is done in the case of Pascal Kabungulu Kibembi, a leading Congolese human rights defender assassinated on 31 July 2005.

Pascal Kabungulu Kibembi, Executive Secretary of Héritiers de la Justice (Heirs of Justice), was shot dead by three armed men in the early hours of 31 July at his home in Bukavu, South-Kivu province, DRC. Pascal Kabungulu was renowned for his courageous defence of human rights in a country torn by years of conflict and systematic human rights abuse. His death has sent a wave of sadness, shock and fear through the Congolese civilian population and NGO community of eastern DRC.

No one has yet been charged in connection with the killing. The DRC government established a Commission of Enquiry, chaired by the Military Prosecutor of South-Kivu, to investigate Pascal Kabungulu's killing. The Commission has, however, made little progress, has been poorly resourced and its members reportedly subject to intimidation. Local human rights organizations have questioned the Commission's impartiality. Elements of the DRC military have interfered with the investigations: on 4 August two DRC army soldiers detained on suspicion of involvement were illegally freed from Bukavu Central Prison, allegedly on the orders of a DRC army commander. After local protests, the suspects were returned to prison custody several days later.

The four organizations, Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Front Line and Human Rights Watch, addressed joint letters to DRC President Joseph Kabila; the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the DRC, Mr William Swing; the African Union Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, Mrs Janaïba Johm; and UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. In their letters, the organizations underlined the importance of bringing the killers of Pascal Kabungulu to justice and called for decisive measures to ensure that the investigation into the killing is conducted in an independent, thorough, impartial and transparent manner, is adequately resourced and able to proceed without fear of intimidation or interference.

In their letter to Mr Swing, the organization's also called on MONUC, the UN Organization Mission in the DRC, to undertake its own investigation into the killing, with the findings made public.

Pascal Kabungulu's assassination is part of a long-established pattern of attacks on human rights defenders in the DRC by government security forces or armed groups. With this in mind, the four organisations urged the DRC government and international community urgently to develop an action plan

for the protection of Congolese human rights defenders and to ensure investigations are carried out into reported threats and attacks against Congolese activists. The organizations called on the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, Mrs Janaiba Johm, to seek an invitation to visit the DRC at the earliest opportunity.