

09 September 2019

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Wave of reprisals against LUCHA members across the country

On 9 September 2019, four human rights defenders from the movement **LUCHA** were admitted to the hospital after being wounded by police officers in Kananga, Kasai Central province. The human rights defenders organised a march to request that the provincial governor rescind his decision to appoint local authorities as the move is not aligned with the Constitution. This comes just three days after 18 human rights defenders were detained and whipped by police at the station of the Police Inspector in Kinshasa on 6 September 2019. They were arrested during a peaceful march to demand transparency in a case of alleged misappropriation of USD 15 million of public funds.

[Lutte pour le Changement](#) – **LUCHA** (Struggle For Change) is a non-violent and non-partisan youth civil society movement founded in June 2012 in Goma, the capital of North Kivu. The movement advocates for social justice and accountability in the DRC through campaigns and encourages Congolese citizens to fight for the promotion and respect of human rights. LUCHA and its members have been on front line to call for the respect of the rule of law and human rights in DRC, including during the two-year delay in the presidential election. For the last six months, LUCHA has focused its efforts on good governance, accountability, and socio-economic rights. LUCHA is a winner of the [2018 Front Line Defenders Award](#) for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

On 9 September 2019, 16 human rights defenders from LUCHA were marching to the Kasai Central governor's office when they were stopped by tear gas shots and baton blows from the police. They were demonstrating against the Governor's unconstitutional appointment of the new mayor in Kananga and of other local authorities. Four human rights defenders were admitted in hospital after being trampled and beaten by police officers.

On 6 September 2019, 18 human rights defenders were detained and ill treated by the police at station of the Police Inspector in Kinshasa before being released the same day. They were arrested during a demonstration in Kinshasa to denounce corruption that came to light following a report of investigations conducted by the Inspectorate General of Finances, it was revealed that USD 15 million had disappeared from public coffers. LUCHA's demonstration aimed to request the Attorney General to take up the case in order to investigate and possibly initiate legal proceedings against the actors involved.

A pattern of reprisals against LUCHA and its membership has been ongoing, despite promises by the new presidential administration to allow freedom of expression and association. On 10 May 2019, in Goma, 13 human rights defenders demonstrating for consumer rights were beaten by police officers, the wounded were admitted at Heal Africa Hospital. So far no action has been taken against the police officers involved.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the escalating reprisals against LUCHA members across the DRC and the limitations imposed on their right to peacefully protest.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to:

1. Cease any further repression of peaceful demonstrations of LUCHA and facilitate and protect their right to freedom of assembly;

2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the ill treatment against LUCHA human rights defenders in Kananga and Kinshasa with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in DRC are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including online harassment and threats.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully”*.

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director