



global witness

For immediate release: 17 August 2009

Global Witness calls for immediate release of Congo human rights activist

Global Witness today appealed to the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to release human rights activist Golden Misabiko without delay ahead of a court hearing due to take place on Wednesday. Misabiko has remained in detention for over three weeks in relation to the recent publication of a report, despite repeated calls for his release by Congolese and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Golden Misabiko, president of the *Association africaine de défense des droits de l'homme (ASADHO)* in Katanga province, south-eastern DRC, has campaigned on human rights and transparency for many years in Katanga. He has been intimidated, arrested and detained several times previously in relation to his work.

His latest arrest is part of a broader pattern of intimidation and attacks by Congolese authorities against journalists, human rights activists and other members of civil society, including those campaigning against abuses in the mining sector. Serious charges carrying heavy sentences such as threatening state security have been used in the past to silence criticism of the government. Global Witness views his arrest as a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression.

"Misabiko has been arrested and charged as a result of his attempt to bring attention to the misuse of natural resources by the Congolese government. This is a serious problem that is undermining efforts to bring peace and development to the country." said Patrick Alley, Director of Global Witness. "Misabiko should be released unconditionally."

Misabiko was arrested on 24 July 2009 by the *Agence nationale de renseignements (ANR)*, the national intelligence agency, in Lubumbashi, the provincial capital. He was charged with "threatening state security" [atteinte à la sûreté de l'Etat] and defamation [diffamation].

The arrest took place 12 days after the publication of a report by ASADHO-Katanga on the Shinkolobwe uranium mine, entitled "*Mine uranifère de Shinkolobwe: D'une exploitation artisanale illicite à l'accord entre la RD Congo et le groupe nucléaire français AREVA*" ["Shinkolobwe uranium mine: From illicit artisanal mining to the agreement between the DR Congo and French nuclear group AREVA"]. The report alleged that certain state institutions and officials were profiting from illegal mining at Shinkolobwe.

The mine is known to be unsafe (there was a serious accident there in 2004) and the report said the authorities should have prevented access. The report also criticised the lack of transparency surrounding a recent agreement between the Congolese government and French nuclear company AREVA, which granted AREVA exploration and mining rights to the site.

On 29 July, the international Publish What You Pay coalition of NGOs, including Global Witness, published a statement calling for Misabiko's immediate release. On 3 August, more than 200 Congolese NGOs wrote to President Joseph Kabila calling for the release of Misabiko and for "an end to all interference by the executive power in the administration of justice in the case". On 7 August, a coalition of Katanga-based NGOs organised a demonstration in support of Misabiko's release, which resulted in the arrest of five other activists; they were released without charge after a few hours.

Patrick Alley: "President Kabila should heed the calls of national and international groups to restore justice in the case of Mr Misabiko. In doing so he would send an important signal that the government is prepared to protect the freedom of speech of all Congolese people."

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