

7 October 2016

DRC: Human rights defender Bernadette Ntumba facing death threats from a former rebel leader

On 3 October 2016, Mme **Bernadette Ntumba** faced death threats from a former rebel leader who came to her office. The incident was the latest in a series of threats against the human rights defender by this individual who is targeting her following her intervention in a rape case involving a minor.

[Bernadette Ntumba](#) is the coordinator of the *l'Association des Mamans Chrétiennes pour l'Assistance aux Vulnérables* – AMCAV (Association of Christian Mothers for assistance to vulnerable peoples), an organisation that provides services to disadvantaged peoples and to women who have survived sexual violence in South Kivu in the DRC. She is being targeted by a former rebel leader after a misunderstanding about a case of rape of a minor that her organisation was working on.

In mid-August 2016, M. Murandura, a former rebel leader who was reintegrated into the army, visited AMCAV's office to submit a follow-up request into the case of a 15 year-old woman, a survivor of rape. The young woman, who became pregnant after the rape, has family ties with M. Murandura. The investigation led by AMCAV reports that the primary suspect in the case was arrested two weeks after the crime, but was released the same day under unclear circumstances by a judicial police official.

As soon as the human rights defender learned of this, she contacted the family of the survivor to demand that the judicial police officer be held accountable following this misconduct. She and her colleagues even made visits to the police and to the prosecution to follow-up on the case. However, M. Murandura turned against Bernadette Ntumba who he accused of being in cahoots with the judicial police officer who allowed the primary suspect to escape justice. He also accused her of taking bribes to discontinue her efforts to follow-up on the issue. He then started to harass her with death threats, occasionally barging into her office.

On 9 September 2016, at approximately 1 pm, the former rebel leader lashed out at Bernadette Ntumba in AMCAV's office by saying: *"I can slit your throat here in your office and the blood would flow everywhere... You know very well that I am from the jungle and I store a lot of weapons... You don't know that these weapons could help me return to the jungle after slitting your throat..."*

When Bernadette Ntumba went to the authorities to lodge a complaint about these threats, the former rebel leader alerted her: *"Call who you will, I am warning you that I am not afraid of anyone"*. After this threat, he gave her one month to find a resolution to the case of the young woman who was raped; without a resolution, he told her, *"I will see who amongst us will stay in Uvira"*. The former rebel leader visited the AMCAV office on two other occasions without finding Bernadette Ntumba. When he finally found her, on 3 October 2016, he repeated the previous death threats.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the death threats that Bernadette Ntumba is facing, especially as they are targeted to dissuade her from continuing her legitimate work in the defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in DRC to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death threats made against Bernadette Ntumba and bring strict punishment against the rebel leader who is making them;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Bernadette Ntumba;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the DRC are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.