

1 November 2016

## **DRC – Members of LUCHA arrested, detained and physically attacked**

Fourteen members of *The Struggle for Change (Lutte pour le changement - LUCHA)* were arrested and detained in Goma between 24 and 26 October 2016, for mobilising students to participate in legal and peaceful demonstrations organised on 26 and 27 October 2016 throughout the DRC.

[LUCHA](#) 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. Since President Joseph Kabila's announcement to postpone the DRC presidential elections, which would unconstitutionally extend his 2-term mandate, LUCHA and its members have been instrumental in organising civil society to call for the respect of the rule of law and human rights in DRC. They have advocated for a peaceful transition of power including fair and timely elections.

On 24 October 2016, six members of LUCHA were arrested at different times outside of the Higher Institute of Commerce in Goma. The six were apprehended while distributing flyers about the protests organised for the 26 and 27 October 2016. Three members of LUCHA were arrested by the student law enforcement brigade who was sent by the General Director of the Institute, while the remaining three went to ask the General Director the reasons for the arrest, and for this were themselves arrested. All six human rights defenders were brought to a small holding cell known as "P2" where they were hit 35-50 times with police batons by law enforcement officials. Three of the six human rights defenders are currently detained in the cell of the Court of First Instance in Goma, three were released on 28 October 2016.

On 26 October 2016, eight members of LUCHA were arrested by the police at approximately 9:30 am outside of the Rusina Hotel in Goma. The human rights defenders were arrested at the meeting point for a sit-in that they had planned to hold at the headquarters of the MONUSCO office. After they were arrested, they were transported in a police jeep to the provincial police commissariat where they were detained. The eight human rights defenders were subsequently released at 6 pm that evening.

Front Line Defenders expresses sincere concern for the arbitrary detention and physical attacks against members of LUCHA. The arrests are part of a larger pattern of harassment and threats targeting human rights defenders who are advocating for the rule of law, and the subsequent departure of President Kabila in keeping with his two-term mandate. Since September 2016, human rights defenders have been targeted by authorities for their efforts to hold President Kabila and his government accountable to their responsibility to schedule fair elections and ensure a peaceful transition of power.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in DRC to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release all six members of LUCHA who are still in detention, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of the six members of LUCHA, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the physical attacks against LUCHA members while in detention, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in DRC and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.