

3 June 2010

DRC: Presumed assassination of human rights defender Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, executive director of “La Voix des Sans-Voix”

Front Line is extremely concerned following the presumed assassination of human rights defender Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire. According to police sources, the body of Floribert Chebeya Bahizire was found in the back of his car on the morning of 2 June 2010 in the outskirts of Kinshasa, after his disappearance had been reported on the evening of 1 June 2010. His driver, Mr Fidèle Bazana Edadi, also a member of the association La Voix des Sans-Voix - VSV (The Voice of the Voiceless), disappeared and according to certain sources, his body was found on 3 June 2010. Floribert Chebeya Bahizire was the executive director of the VSV and the executive secretary of the Réseau national des ONG des droits de l'Homme de la RDC – RENADHOC (National Network of Human Rights NGOs of the DRC), based in Kinshasa. An eminent human rights defender subjected to repeated threats over many years, Floribert Chebeya Bahizire had participated in the first Dublin Platform for human rights defenders in January 2002.

On the afternoon of Tuesday 1 June 2010, Floribert Chebeya Bahizire received a call from the central police headquarters, requiring him to attend a meeting with the Inspector General of the Congolese National Police, Mr John Numbi Banza Tambo. No reason was given for the meeting. Floribert Chebeya Bahizire was not able to meet the inspector, and just before 8pm he informed his family by SMS that he was returning to the city.

His body was found the following morning, Wednesday 2 June, in his abandoned car in the outskirts of Kinshasa. According to police sources, his body showed no signs of violence. However, the deputy executive director of VSV was not allowed to view the body on 2 June. Fidèle Bazana Edadi, who disappeared on 1 June at the same time as Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, has disappeared and, according to information received, his body was found on Thursday 3 June, which would confirm that both human rights defenders were assassinated.

Front Line believes that the presumed assassination of Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and the disappearance of Fidèle Bazana Edadi are a direct result of their legitimate work in defence of human rights in the DRC. Front Line is also gravely concerned for the security of the families of said defenders and other members of the VSV, considering the climate which has become extremely dangerous for human rights defenders in the DRC.

Front Line calls on you to urge the authorities in the DRC to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances of the death of human rights defender Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and the disappearance pending confirmation of death or otherwise – of Fidèle Bazana Edadi, with a view to publishing its results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take immediate measures to guarantee the protection of the families of the aforementioned human rights defenders, other members of La Voix des Sans Voix, and the persons who have condemned the recent killings of human rights defenders from any attempt to threaten their security;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in the DRC are able to carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions and threats to their physical and psychological security and that of their families.