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ENVIRONMENT

DRC: Mystery and Collusion in the Disappearance of Environmental Defenders Fighting Palm Oil Multinationals

[3 May 2024](#) / [La Rédaction](#)

On Tuesday, April 30, 2024, a shocking act of repression took place in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, during a meeting of shareholders of Plantation et Huilerie du Congo (PHC) from different countries. Environmental rights defenders were arrested, and an environmental journalist was abducted after displaying three banners denouncing the mistreatment by the PHC company.

This event followed a letter from RIAO – DRC addressed to PHC in April 2024, which led the officials of this multinational company to urgently organize a meeting in Kinshasa. The protesters also demanded that the company establish a board of directors to avoid perpetuating the violation of people's rights through the national director, who refuses to respect the clauses without the authorization of the non-existent board of directors. This peaceful action aimed to exert pressure on the senior officials of PHC and the government to uphold the demands of the affected

communities. The protesters particularly demanded the release of unjustly imprisoned communities, compensation for work accidents, retirees, and other legitimate claims. Additionally, they called for the opening of the Lokutu and Boteka ports, asserting that they are public thoroughfares and not the property of PHC.



Le Président

REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO
PROVINCE DE LA TSHOPO
ASSEMBLEE PROVINCIALE
3^{ème} Législature



Kisangani, le 15 AVR 2024

N° APT/TSH/CAB/PRES/ KLM/ 110/2024

Objet : Nouvelles révélations dans le scandale de l'huile de palme en RDC : des mesures urgentes doivent être prises dans le cadre de la médiation

Accusé de réception

A Monsieur JEAN FRANCOIS MOMBIA ATUKU,
PCA MANAGER RIAD-RDC
Tél : 00243847122924
Nouvelle Galerie présidentielle,
Local prosec, 1^{er} niveau.
à KINSHASA-GOMBE

Monsieur le PCA Manager,

J'ai lu avec beaucoup d'attention la copie me destinée de la lettre des organisations de la société civile du 04 avril 2024 adressée respectivement à Monsieur NIELQ AMEN BMZ State Secretary of Germany, Madame BRUIS SLOT, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères Pays-Bas, Madame Caroline GENNEZ, Ministre de la Coopération en développement de Belgique par laquelle elles révèlent le conflit qui oppose la société PHC/LOKUTU et les communautés riveraines au sujet des titres fonciers, d'une part de la société et d'autre part des communautés riveraines.

A cet effet, je suis de l'avis émis par les organisations de la société civile, celui d'arrêter la médiation dans le but de chercher comment accompagner les communautés riveraines sur le plan juridique. Je souhaite que l'organe délibérant de la Tshopo, en sa qualité de représentant de la population, soit associé lorsque les négociations vont reprendre.

A la même occasion, je vous invite à mon office de travail pour plus d'éclaircissements.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le PCA Manager, l'expression de ma considération distinguée.


Honorable KANGA LONDIMO Mateus
Président

Assemblée provinciale de la Tshopo
Avenue lac Kisale n° 11, Commune Makiso Kisangani
Site web: www.assembleeprovinciale-tshopo.cd

This action also aimed to urge the state authorities present to act in accordance with an open letter from the Réseau d'Information et d'Appui aux ONG (RIO) – DRC and its partners, regarding certain claims related to the mediation of the ICM, funded by the German Bank (DEG) and the Dutch Development Bank (FMO) in favor of the communities affected by PHC. Unfortunately, the security forces were called on the order of some

members of PHC to suppress the protesters, vandalize their work equipment, and abduct the journalist and environmental defender. The national information and support network for NGOs, RIAO-RDC, issued an urgent appeal to the security authorities and all stakeholders to promptly locate their members, Dieumerci Mpay Ngomba, and the cameraman journalist from Numerica TV in Kinshasa.



The RIAO-RDC NGO described these actions as “kidnapping” and emphasized that defenders of the rights of forest communities in the DRC should not fall victim to politicization or rights violations. This organization urges the judiciary to play its role in finding the two individuals and ensuring their safety, in line with the principles of press freedom and human rights. Several analysts have raised questions following this situation:

- What is the responsibility of state authorities in protecting environmental defenders and journalists who denounce environmental abuses?
- What are the interests at stake for certain stakeholders to violently suppress legitimate claims for the rights of affected communities?
- How can the international community contribute to exerting pressure for the release of the disappeared environmental defenders and journalist?