Harassment and arbitrary arrests of land defenders in the DRC

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Community leaders and traditional chiefs in areas affected by the plantations of Canadian company PHC-Feronia in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continue to suffer all kinds of massive human rights violations committed by the company and its accomplices in the Congolese state services.

On Friday and Saturday, 25 and 26 October 2019, Mr. Mongulu Boyoha Alphonse and his son Bonyonge Gabuy were kidnapped at night in their community of Mwingi, Lokutu District, Tshopo Province by men in uniform from the provincial capital Kisangani, operating under the mandate of the Attorney General, following a complaint from PHC-Feronia for reasons that are not yet known.

Mr. Mongulu Boyoha is a member of the non-governmental organisation RIAO-RDC and a land defender in his community. He is active in the complaint process that communities around Lokutu are pursuing against PHC-Feronia for the illegal occupation of their land under the international complaint mechanism of the German development bank (DEG). During the most recent meeting with the panel of the complaint mechanism in Lokutu at the end of August, Mr. Mongulu Boyoha warned the panel members that the participation of community members in such meetings placed them at high risk. He had requested that the panel members provide a guarantee of security for the participants.

According to information in the possession of RIAO-RDC, Mr. Mongulu Boyoha was accused of stealing palm nuts from PHC-Feronia's plantations, a charge that is often used by the local police and PHC-Feronia security guards to harass communities near the plantations. He was also accused of maintaining a militia against the security guards.

During his hearing before the judicial police officer in Lokutu on Saturday, October 25, Mr. Mongulu Boyoha acknowledged that he is a member of RIAO-RDC in Lokutu. He was asked several questions, the tenor of which is as follows:

- Your organisation has set up a militia to fight the company security guards, do you acknowledge this?
- Who's your leader here?
- What means do you use to transmit your information internationally?
- How do you communicate with your boss Jean-François Mombia?
- Can you show us and give us the names of all the members of your group in the plantations and wherever else they are in Lokutu?

RIAO-RDC condemns with all its energy these violent threats against its members. This intimidation, attacks and harassment of members of an officially recognised human rights organisation follows a series of arrests of seven other RIAO-RDC members or community leaders in and around Lokutu

between 12-15 September 2019.

RIAO-RDC and its international partners demand the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Mongulu Boyoha, his son and the seven other members of RIAO-RDC and community leaders who are currently being held in Kisangani Central Prison under the direction of PHC-Feronia.

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