
[Land defender violently killed by a security guard of Canadian palm oil company Feronia in the DRC](#)

A member of the Congolese environmental and human rights organisation RIAO-RDC, Mr. Joël Imbangola Luneu, was brutally beaten and killed by a security guard of the palm oil company Feronia-PHC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The killing follows months of intimidation directed at members of RIAO-RDC. RIAO-RDC has been supporting the struggle of communities against the illegal occupation of their land by Feronia. RIAO-RDC has witnessed an increasing escalation of conflicts between security personnel on the plantations and community members.

Read [here](#) the RIAO-RDC Press Release from 22nd of July, 2019

A letter signed by over 140 organizations and social movements from different countries around the world and by over 110,000 individuals (responding to a [petition](#) by the organisation **Rettet den Regenwald / Sauvons la Forêt)** has been sent to the President of the DRC and the Governor of Equateur province, where the killing took place. The letter calls on the President of the DRC to initiate a full investigation of the assassination of Mr. Joël Imbangola Luneu immediately, and to ensure that those responsible for his killing be held to account. The letter further urges the President of the DRC and the Governors of the three provinces where Feronia's plantations are located to guarantee the security of members of RIAO-RDC and the communities affected by the FERONIA plantations.

[>>>Download here the letter with signatures in pdf format](#)

Letter:

À Son Excellence Monsieur le Président de la République démocratique du Congo

En copie à:

Son Excellence Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Province de l'Equateur
Son Excellence Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Province de Tschopo
Son Excellence Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Province de Mongala
Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur
Son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre de la Justice

Aussi en copie à:

CDC Group Inc – UK
AECID – Spain
PROPARCO – France
OPIC – USA
DEGinvest – Germany
FMO – The Netherlands

Your Excellency,

We understand that around 3pm, on Sunday, July 21, 2019, Mr. Joël Imbangola Lunea was preparing to transport several passengers and their luggage on his small boat when he was approached by a security guard working at the Boteka plantations of the palm oil company Feronia-PHC. The security guard, whose identity is known, accused Mr. Joël Imbangola Lunea of transporting containers of stolen palm oil from the Feronia-PHC plantations. The passengers and other witnesses to the scene say that when Mr. Joel denied the charge, the security guard proceeded to beat him, eventually strangled him to death and threw his body into the Moboyo River. We understand that the security guard is now in hiding.

Mr. Joël Imbangola Lunea was member of the Congolese environmental and human rights organisation RIAO-RDC. The killing follows months of intimidation directed at members of RIAO-RDC and community members affected by the Feronia-PHC plantations who have been working with RIAO. RIAO-RDC is supporting communities who in November 2018 submitted a grievance with the Independent Complaints Mechanism (ICM) of the German, Dutch and French development banks against the company's occupation of their land. These development banks as well as the development banks of Spain, Belgium, the UK and the USA have provided financing to Feronia-PHC.

While the central issue of the grievance is the illegal occupation of community land by Feronia-PHC, the complainants note frequent escalation of conflicts between security personnel working in the plantations and community members. Complainants state that arbitrary accusations of theft of palm nuts and transport of palm oil are a frequent cause for conflict and harassment by security personnel.

The killing of the RIAO-RDC activist was committed in the context of such an arbitrary accusation of transporting stolen palm oil. Joël Imbangola Lunea was the driver of a motorised boat used to transport people and goods between the villages around Feronia-PHC's Boteka plantations and the city of Mbandaka. He was also an activist working for his community and a member of RIAO-RDC.

Your Excellency, we urge you to ensure that the perpetrator of this brutal killing of Joël Imbangola Lunea be held to account. We ask that you:

- Immediately set up an urgent investigation into the assassination of Mr. Joël Imbangola Lunea;
- Ensure those responsible for the assassination of Mr. Joël Imbangola Lunea will be held to account;
- Impress on the governors of the three provinces where Feronia-PHC operates its disputed oil palm plantations and on the company that members of RIAO-RDC must be able to carry out their work safely. Their safety must be guaranteed and harassment and intimidation against members of RIAO-RDC and community members supported by RIAO must stop immediately. It is this atmosphere of intimidation and harassment that creates the breeding ground for the violent brutality through which Joël Imbangola Lunea lost was robbed of his life.

Sincerely,