DR Congo: Call for the immediate release of people arrested after a protest against the palm oil company PHC

RIAO-RDC and international coalition of NGOs calls for the immediate release of community leaders and villagers from the communities of Mwingi, Bolesa and Yanongo who were arrested after a peaceful protest against the palm oil company PHC. An urgent ACTION ALERT is open to individual sign-ons; it is available in French, English, Spanish and German.

Six people have been arrested in Lokutu, where the palm oil company Feronia-PHC has its headquarters for the Lokutu plantations. The villagers from the community of Mwingi were arrested following their peaceful protests last week.

They had travelled from their community of Mwingi to Lokutu where a delegation representing the new owner of PCH, Kalaa Mpinga and a company called Straight KKM was expected to arrive. Mpinga's company acquired PHC plantations, mills – and the decade long conflicts over land when the company previously managing the plantations, Feronia Inc., went bankrupt despite having received over US$ 150 million in development bank funding since 2013. The community members from Mwingi had prepared banners demanding that the company comply with commitment for community support it had many – and broken – many times over the past years.

Another nine people, four men and five women, were arrested near the community of Bolesa and five people from the community of Yanongo were also arrested. "People were beaten and tortured. They were taken away in handcuffs. There is one person who was tortured and is in hospital," the president of the Civil Society of Basoko said in an interview with RIAO-RDC.

The full interview is available in French and English.

RIAO-RDC and an international coalition of NGOs strongly condemn the violence and torture under Feronia-PH's watch and the arrest of people who were peacefully demanding that the company fulfil the promises the company had made to them. All those arrested must be released immediately and Feronia-PHC must drop the charges against them immediately.

The European development banks financing PHC must live up to their responsibility as funders of the company and demand that these kinds of atrocities against village leaders stop immediately.

A report released in January 2021 on the century-old struggle of the communities to reclaim the land occupied by the Feronia-PHC concessions which was taken from them in a colonial-era land theft is available in English and French.

The organisation Rettet den Regenwald / Sauvons la forêt launched an urgent action alert calling for the immediate release of those arrested and an investigation into the killing. The petition was signed by more than 125,000 people. It is available in French, English and German.