

PRESS RELEASE

Global Witness condemns arrest of Congolese human rights activist 22 March 2008

Global Witness today condemned the arrest of Congolese human rights activist Hubert Tshiswaka on 21 March 2008 and appealed to the government to stop intimidating members of civil society.

Hubert Tshiswaka is a longstanding human rights activist in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and is currently DRC Programme Manager at the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). He was arrested by plainclothes officials of the *Agence nationale de renseignements* (ANR, national intelligence services) on the morning of 21 March at the Park Hotel in Lubumbashi, Katanga province, southeastern DRC. He was held for several hours, without access to a lawyer. Following international pressure, he was released the same evening without charge.

ANR officials accused Hubert Tshiswaka of distributing an anonymous leaflet which was critical of the Congolese government. Among other things, the leaflet criticised the performance of the government in terms of the humanitarian situation, corruption and the mismanagement of natural resources. The ANR also questioned Hubert Tshiswaka about comments he had allegedly made during a conference on the mining sector organised by the Ministry of Mines in the capital Kinshasa a few days earlier.

Hubert Tshiswaka has been active in denouncing abuses and corruption in the mining sector in the DRC for many years, both in his current OSISA role and as Executive Director of the Congolese human rights organisation *Action contre l'impunité pour les droits humains* (ACIDH).

The arrest of Hubert Tshiswaka is part of a broader, well-documented pattern of harassment, intimidation and attacks on activists, journalists and other members of civil society in the DRC. Global Witness views his arrest as a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression.

The organisation is calling on the Congolese government to ensure that human rights activists and other members of civil society are allowed to conduct their legitimate and peaceful activities without interference and without threats to their physical safety.

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