

POUR DIFFUSION IMMEDIATE

URGENT

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Death threats against members of the “Natural Resources Network” in Lubumbashi.

The Natural Resources Network of the DR Congo expresses its profound anxiety, following several threats directed at its members in Lubumbashi, capital of the Province of Katanga. These threats follow the publication, on April 19th 2006, of the final declaration of a workshop held in the city under the following heading: “The Role of the Media and Civil Society in the exploitation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo”. The declaration contained a denunciation of the way in which the DR Congo’s natural resources are mismanaged. Among the issues mentioned in the document are: deals and contracts that only benefit a few, environmental degradation, corruption in marketing and trading. At the same workshop, the Natural Resources Network of the DR Congo was established and its members have pledged to fight against the pillage of the nation’s natural resources and for the promotion of good governance in the mining sector, particularly in Katanga.

Since then, Maître Jean Claude KATENDE and Jean-Pierre MUTEBA, president of the African Association for the Defence of Human Rights (Asadho-Katanga) and Secretary-General of Nouvelle Dynamique Syndicale (NDS) respectively have received various anonymous phone calls. The callers say that Messrs Katende and Muteba are distributing reports of their foreign partners, in which Congolese political personalities and parties are accused of pillaging natural resources. The callers also tell our members to remain silent or face death.

In the same vein, individuals cited in the report “The State vs. the People”, and other persons close to the political parties have appeared on local television and made interventions on local radio stations, in an attempt to smear the names of the organisers of the April workshop, saying that they are on the payroll of foreign NGOs whose aim it is to interfere with the interests of the powers that be.

The final declaration of the April workshop was based on a number of reports from various national and international organisations. These included the report of the United Nations Panel on the illegal exploitation of the DR Congo’s natural resources, a Fatal Transactions report entitled “The State vs. the People” and the report of the Special Parliamentary “Lutundula” Commission, which was charged with examining the validity of the contracts that were signed between the wars of 1996 and 1998 and which has served to demonstrate bad governance of the DR Congo’s natural resources by the civil administration.

On April 20th 2006, one day after the publication of the final workshop declaration, the provincial chairman of the Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et de la Démocratie organised a press conference, in which he launched a vicious attack against “organisations that pilfer internal documents belonging to a political party, exploit them thoughtlessly, and peddle cases in order to provide their external partners with a pretext to attack national institutions and their actions”. The provincial chairman did not cite the names of any of the organisations he accused. But he did qualify the “tenacity” of these attacks as “a new type of warfare, against which we must fight in order to retain our dignity, secure the independence of our country and safeguard our already maturing democratic process...”

In view of all this, the Natural Resources Network of the DR Congo assures the public that it has never harboured any intention of seeking to harm without reason the interests of certain personalities or political parties, whoever or whatever they may be. The Network is solely guided by its concern for transparency in view of the role that natural resources play in the development of the DR Congo. Therefore, the Network asks of the provincial authorities of Katanga to do everything in its powers to stop these attacks against its members and assure their physical safety.

For the Natural Resources Network (Réseau Ressources Naturelles)
Journaliste en Danger (JED)
ASADHO-KATANGA
Nouvelle Dynamique Sociale (NDS)

JOURNALISTE EN DANGER (JED)

374, avenue Colonel Mondjiba, Complexe Utexafrica
Galerie St Pierre - Kinshasa/Ngaliema B.P. 633 Kinshasa 1
Téléphone: +243 819 929 323 ou +243 999 996 353
E-Fax : + 44 20 7504 3544
E-mail : direction@jed-afcentre.org
Internet : <http://www.Jed-afrique.org>
République démocratique du Congo