

! URGENT ACTION HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT !

27 AUGUST 2007

Congolese Conservation Expert Under Attack for Speaking Out About Corruption involving Western Conservation and Humanitarian Organizations in Central Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): On Monday, 27 August 2007, Congolese national Mr. Vital Katembo Mushegezi, a state Conservator and Senior Game Warden, sent out an urgent SOS appeal from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mr. Katembo has come under attack from powerful forces seeking to maintain the long-standing silence about corruption, extortion, and criminality involving international non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the conservation, development and humanitarian sector in Central Africa. While previously concerned for his livelihood and security, Mr. Katembo has now been barred from his offices at the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) and he is deeply concerned for his life and his family's security.

Vital Katembo Mushegezi has worked for years for the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN), a state-run entity in control of Congo's national parks. In the past year Mr. Katembo has been increasingly concerned about "conservation" in Central Africa, and he has shown unflinching courage by publicly challenging organizations and individuals who are profiting from the billion dollar conservation, development and humanitarian sectors at the expense of human suffering and exploitation of the environment. Mr. Katembo has been increasingly vocal, notwithstanding the threat and actualization of retaliation over past months.

An August 16 communication by Mr. Katembo challenging the activities and agenda of Richard Leakey's newly formed Wildlife Direct and other NGOs in Central Africa has prompted direct retaliation. (For background see: <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13445>>).

"I have now worked in the Virunga for almost 15 years and my experience of the last 2 years is of deception," Vital Katembo wrote on August 16, 2007, responding to communications from Wildlife Direct director Emmanuel De Merode. "Are we saving wildlife or are we trying our best to save so called wildlife direct managers and experts? You are not new to learn that good people can do evil and this is so obvious in the conservation arena... Conservation in the Virungas is the last stand of oppression, corruption and colonialism."

Mr. Katembo previously worked in the Ituri Forest for Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and has been active in the Virunga National Park since 1994. In 1998 he was a project leader for Mt. Tshiaberimu conservation project and field assistant for Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund-Europe (renamed The Gorilla Organization in 2006), in North Kivu, DRC.

An email from ICCN Executive Director Cosma Wilungula Balongelwa circulated privately on Saturday, August 25, 2007 makes it clear that Mr. Katembo is specifically being targeted by

powerful conservation forces aligned with officials working for the Congolese state and ICCN. Mr. Wilungula's email specifically cites a previous communication by Mr. Katembo sent to Emmanuel De Merode of Wildlife Direct and certain former affiliates providing funding from the U.S. It does not mention the actions or threats taken to retaliate against Mr. Katembo.

The response by the ICCN Executive Director makes it clear that the ICCN is beholden to powerful Western organizations whose interests—often hostile to the environment—have been served through bribery, extortion and corruption, at the expense of the environment, the wildlife, the Congolese state and the millions of Congolese people who have suffered, or continue to suffer, various forms of western corporate exploitation. (For extensive background on these issues see: < <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13445> > and < <http://www.allthingspass.com/journalism.php?catid=45> >).

The list of recipients of the ICCN email include top level expatriate personnel and in-country officials working for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, UNESCO, Africa Wildlife Foundation (AWF), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Wildlife Direct, UNDP, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the USAID (U. S. Agency for International Development) funded Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment. The list is posted below, with several key names added to it (as noted), and we ask that letters of complaint and concern be sent to this list (a sample letter is included below for easy electronic paste and post). We ask that the United Nations Observers Mission in Congo (MONUC) take the appropriate action to insure the safety of Mr. Katembo. Notably, the MONUC Public Information Officers have not publicized the conservation expose's that address this subject, even though they have been informed, showing a clear bias in favor of international NGOs and their public relations agendas. We ask that recipients of this email post alerts on their web sites and forward to appropriate individuals.

In the event of Mr. Katembo's persecution, detention, or disappearance the individuals listed below will be considered accomplices to an international crime. The names and information have been turned over to officials of the U.S. Department of Justice offices involved in ongoing investigations over allegations of misappropriation of funds, extortion, and corruption in Central Africa by the organizations named above, and others, including the Africa Conservation Fund, Conservation International, Fauna and Flora International, Jane Goodall Institute, Frankfurt Zoological Society, U.S. Forest Service and the Born Free Foundation.

The courage shown by Vital Katembo Mushegezi is exemplary of a human rights defender faced with the most severe conditions and hardship. The fear of persecution and professional ostracism by these conservation entities has led to a universal silence in and amongst the expatriate professionals who are aware of the realities that Mr. Katembo has dared to publicly name. It is because of the silence of the countless others who are aware of the corruption, extortion and expropriation of funds that Mr. Katembo's life is now at risk. We encourage conservation and humanitarian professionals to break this silence and make their knowledge heard, for the benefit of nature conservation, social justice and human rights everywhere.

Keith Harmon Snow
&
Georgianne Nienaber

Keith Harmon Snow <www.allthingspass.com> worked as human rights investigator for the United Nations, Genocide Watch and Survivor's Rights International, and his series on conservation realities in Central Africa, co-authored by investigative journalist Georgianne Nienaber <www.thelegacyofdianfossey.com>, is published under the title KONG: < http://www.allthingspass.com/journalism.php?catid=45>.

RECIPIENTS OF THE ICCN EMAIL TARGETING VITAL KATEMBO

Emmanuel Demerode <edemerode@wildlifedirect.org>, <edemerode@uuplus.com, "José" Kalpers <jkalpers@gmail.com>, Schoorl Jaap GTZ CD <jaap.schoorl@gtz.de>, Patrick Memlman <ptmehlman@hotmail.com>, Filippo Saracco <filippo.saracco@ec.europa.eu>, Filippo Saracco <filippo.saracco@cec.eu.int>, Robbert Bekker <robbert.bekker@undp.org>, YALOLO <yalolob@yahoo.fr>, Eugene Rutagarama <erutagarama@awfke.org>, Augustin Basabose <augubasabose@yahoo.com>, Raymond Lumbuenamo <rlumbuenamo@wwfcarpo.org>, Lisa Steel <lsteel@wwfcarpo.org>, mushelusenge@yahoo.fr, sitepnvi@yahoo.fr, wwfpnkb@yahoo.fr, WWFpevi <dnganziwwfpevi@yahoo.fr>, ROSMARIE RUF <rosmarieruf@hotmail.com>, Yvette Kaboza <y.kaboza@unesco.org>, Guy Debonnet <g.debonnet@unesco.org>, Samy Mankoto <s.mankoto@unesco.org>, Schuler Karl GTZ CD <carlos.schuler@gtz.de>, Jean Claude Kyungu <jckyungu@yahoo.fr>, dirsitemnkb@yahoo.fr, didierbolamba@yahoo.fr, "Honoré" MALINGANE <dpicnprov.orientale@yahoo.fr>, DP <isaac_chifurura2004@yahoo.fr>, lukasumbayo@yahoo.fr, parcgaramba@yahoo.fr, Henri Paul Eloma <henripaul.eloma@undp.org>, Henry Cirhuza <henrycirhuza@yahoo.fr>, Josianna Falla <jofalla@yahoo.com>, PAULIN <pngobobopnvi@yahoo.fr>, snewport@wildlifedirect.org, Marc Languy <mlanguy@wwfcarpo.org>, teresehart@gmail.com, "John A. Hart" <jhart@wcs.org>, deokujirak@yahoo.fr, wathaut2002@yahoo.fr, Richard Tshombe rtshombe@wcs.org,

Additional notables:

"Rob Poppe" rob_poppe@mac.com, "ROB MUIR" robertmuir@fzs.org,

SAMPLE LETTER FOLLOWS

RE: ICCN Conservator VITAL Katembo

Date: August 27, 2007

TO: ICCN Executive Director
L'Administrateur-Délégué Général,
Past. Cosma WILUNGULA BALONGELWA
ICCN ICCN <pdg.iccn@yahoo.fr>

Dear Cosma Wilungula Balongelwa:

I have read about the recent targeting of ICCN Conservator and Senior Park Warden Vital Katembo Mushegezi. I am writing to express my concern and to formally request that you support Mr. Katembo and insure his livelihood and safety.

I request that you insure that Mr. Katembo is able to perform his duties, reinstate his position, and provide him with whatever he needs to do the job which he has dedicated his life to.

I am aware that you have issued a formal letter distancing the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of nature from Mr. Katembo. I want you to be aware that if any harm comes to Mr. Katembo I will hold you and the other people to whom you communicated your position personally responsible, and I will support calls for an investigation and justice in an International Court.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS HERE

Sincerely,

SIGNED