

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS AND PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE FREED

In April and September 2022, King Mwamisyo Ndungo and Elias Bizimungu - two young human rights activists and members of Lutte pour le Changement - were arbitrarily arrested and later sentenced to five years in prison by a military court in Goma, solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. On 29 May 2023, Elias Bizimungu was released following an acquittal. On 27 January 2025, King Mwamisyo Ndungo was freed from prison. His release followed a mass prison escape during the January 2025 takeover of Goma by the Movement of 23 March (M23) armed group.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

At the time of their arrest, **King Mwamisyo Ndungo** and **Elias Bizimungu** were two human rights activists in the peoples' movement, Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They were arrested in April and September 2022, respectively, on trumped-up charges solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly after criticising the military and police authorities in the eastern province of Nord Kivu for failing to protect the people under their jurisdiction and for being complicit in human rights violations under the "state of siege" since May 2021. Amnesty International considered the two prisoners of conscience.

On 27 May 2023, Elias Bizimungu was acquitted by the Goma High Court and released from prison on the evening of 29 May 2023. The court found that the charges against him were baseless and ordered his immediate release.

King Mwamisyo Ndungo however remained in detention, and worse, in July 2023, a military appeal court confirmed his five-year sentence. He remained in arbitrary detention for nearly three years until January 2025 when M23 forces captured DRC's capital city of Goma, and chaos engulfed the central prison. During the takeover, a mass escape occurred, involving a large number of detainees. Tragically, this event was accompanied by a serious incident in the women's wing of the prison, which was set ablaze, reportedly resulting in the deaths of dozens of women, according to a journalist with knowledge of the situation. King Mwamisyo Ndungo was among the individuals who managed to flee the facility during the upheaval. For security reasons, Amnesty International delayed sharing this news until we could confirm that he was safely out of Goma and no longer at immediate risk.

While we welcome the fact that King Mwamisyo Ndungo is now free from prison and safe, Amnesty International condemns the injustice he has endured. King Mwamisyo Ndungo was imprisoned on trumped up charges because of his peaceful activism and civic engagement. In light of his escape under extraordinary circumstances, not through a judicial process, Amnesty International will be exploring advocacy opportunities to ensure his full exoneration.

On 3 September, King Mwamisyo Ndungo met with Amnesty International at its Nairobi office and received all the solidarity messages of support that he'd been sent by Amnesty activists during his time in detention. He passed on his deep thanks to all those who supported him: *'Hello dear members of Amnesty International. I'm a human rights defender and member of Lucha. I wanted to thank you for the messages of solidarity and encouragement that you sent me when I was in Goma [prison], DRC. I [also] wanted to thank you for standing by me and raising your voices for my cause. I'm so happy. I'm so proud of you, and I thank you. I love you.'*

NAME AND PRONOUN: King Mwamisyo, Elias Bizimungu (both he/him)

THIS IS THE SECOND AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 31/23

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr62/6629/2023/en/>

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