

3 September 2020

Democratic Republic of Congo: Death threats against human rights defender Josué Aruna

On 27 August 2020, human rights defender **Josué Aruna** received an anonymous phone call threatening him and his family if he continues his human rights work.

[Josué Aruna](#) is a human rights defender, the provincial president of Société Civile Environnementale et Agro-Rurale du Congo (Environmental and Agro-Rural Civil Society of Congo - SOCEARUCO) in South Kivu province and the executive director of the Congo Conservation Society (CBCS). The defender advocates for better governance of natural resources and the protection of the environment and the human rights of local communities. Since June 2020, the defender has denounced the illegal exploitation and trade of red wood in South Kivu province.

On 27 August 2020, around 11 p.m., while at his home in Bukavu, Josué Aruna received a phone call from a withheld number threatening him and his family if he continues his human rights work. This incident is not isolated. Since 1 August 2020, Josué Aruna has received several death threats via calls from unknown numbers. After receiving a WhatsApp call on 19 August around 8:15 a.m. threatening to harm him, the defender filed a complaint to the public prosecutor on 24 August.

The human rights defender believes he is being targeted for his work denouncing the illegal exploitation and trade of red wood in South Kivu province. On 29 and 30 June 2020, Josué Aruna and the organisation SOCEARUCO organised a dialogue bringing together stakeholders in South Kivu province. As a result of this discussion, recommendations on the governance of natural resources were made regarding the illegal trade and exploitation of red wood. On 31 July 2020, following the denunciation of this illegal trade, the Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development wrote to the Governor of South Kivu Province to take measures including the establishment of a team to conduct an investigation.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the death threats against human rights defender Josué Aruna as it believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Democratic Republic of Congo to:

1. Strongly condemn the death threats against Josué Aruna, as it is believed to be directly motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Josué Aruna;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against human rights defender Josué Aruna with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Democratic Republic of Congo are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment and threats.