



## **ADF Statement on the Arrest of Robert Ilunga Numbi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

2 September 2009

The African Democracy Forum (ADF), a network of more than 450 democracy and human rights organizations throughout Africa, is deeply concerned about the recent arrest of Robert Ilunga Numbi, national president of the organization Amis de Nelson Mandela pour la Defense des Droits Humains (ANMDH) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mr. Ilunga Numbi has been an active member of the ADF and recently helped organize ADF's workshop on restrictive environments for civil society in central Africa.

Mr. Ilunga Numbi was arrested in the afternoon of 31 August, along with Marie-Thérèse Kalonda, director of programs for women and families; Jean Paul Itupa, head of public relations for Kalamu Radio; and member Toutou Ndumba Nsuala. The four were taken to the office of the National Agency for Information, where Mr. Ilunga Numbi was separated from the others. Later that day, the three others were released, but Mr. Ilunga Numbi remained in custody and unable to contact any of his colleagues.

It is believed the arrests were motivated by ANMDH's condemnation of the poor treatment of General Industrial Society workers. On 17 August 2009, ANMDH issued a joint statement with Young Peasants in Action regarding the exploitation of workers in Kasangulu who are treated practically as slaves by an organization that claims to protect their rights.

This arbitrary arrest is just one more example of the deterioration of democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It shows that the protection of free speech only exists as long as one does not question the authority of the state or criticize its actions. The DRC has faced an increasing number of challenges to its democracy in recent years, each of which, some ADF members in the DRC argue, represents another step towards authoritarianism.

The ADF urges the state authorities to allow Robert Ilunga Numbi to communicate with friends, family, and legal counsel while still in custody. Furthermore, the ADF demands his unconditional immediate release. The ADF also calls of the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to respect and adhere to the rights provided to all its citizens in the country's constitution, including the right to free speech and the press, and protection from arbitrary arrest.

Hannah Forster  
Chair – African Democracy Forum