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DR Congo: Prominent Activist Abducted

Grave Concern for Gloria Sengha's Possible Enforced Disappearance



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Gloria Sengha Panda Shala in Kinshasa, DR Congo, in 2018. Credit: CPGLCONGO

(Nairobi) – The [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) government should urgently investigate and publicly report on the whereabouts of the prominent opposition and civil society activist Gloria Sengha, Human Rights Watch said today. The abduction of Sengha and two of her colleagues appears linked to a wave of repression by Congolese authorities that has severely restricted the rights of activists, journalists, and opposition party members.

At about 5 p.m. on May 17, 2024, unidentified men, including some wearing balaclavas and police uniforms and bearing arms, abducted Sengha, a founder of the movement Citizen Awareness (Vigilance Citoyenne), along with Robert Bunda and Chadrack Tshadio, in Kinshasa, the country's capital. All are members of Tolembe Pasi ("We are done with suffering" in Lingala), which campaigns against social injustice and high living costs. The assailants forced them into a black SUV with no license plate and drove away. The three had just attended a Tolembe Pasi meeting. Bunda and Tshadio were located in police custody on May 20.

"Human Rights Watch is deeply concerned for the activist Gloria Sengha's safety," said [Carine Kaneza Nantulya](#), deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Congolese authorities should urgently locate and report on Sengha's whereabouts and obtain her release."

Sengha has long been known as an activist working to advance social justice in Congo. In May 2023, she [announced](#) that she had joined the political party Envol (“Take-Off”).

Congolese [rights groups](#) have called for her immediate release.

“Gloria’s arrest is the latest in a trend of increasing attacks and arbitrary arrests against activists that has been going on for months,” said Fred Bauma, executive director at [Ebuteli](#), a Congolese research institute. “The ANR [National Intelligence Agency] and other intelligence services have been playing an increasingly active role in this repression, which is reminiscent of the [Joseph] Kabila years.”

Sengha is a former member of the activist movement Struggle for Change (Lutte pour le Changement, or Lucha), and had previously [told](#) Human Rights Watch that she and another female activist had faced abuse, including sexual abuse, from police agents when the government arrested pro-democracy activists ahead of the 2018 presidential elections.

In May 2023, [Lens Omelonga](#), the Envol party’s digital communications coordinator, was also abducted after attending a political meeting. He told Human Rights Watch that ANR agents in civilian clothes forced him into a white SUV and drove him away under circumstances that appear similar to Sengha’s case. He eventually spent seven months in custody for having retweeted a post criticizing a foundation established by Denise Nyakeru Tshisekedi, the wife of President Félix Tshisekedi.

The authorities have increasingly cracked down on opposition members, civil society activists, critics, and journalists throughout the 2023 presidential election period and ever since. Others targeted included the prominent journalist [Stanis Bujakera](#), who spent weeks in detention on dubious charges, and the comedian [Junior Nkole](#), who was arbitrarily arrested and detained for his satirical videos exploring socioeconomic realities in the country.

“Sengha’s abduction just months after President Félix Tshisekedi was sworn in for a second term sends a terrible message for civil liberties in Congo,” Kaneza Nantulya said. “Tshisekedi’s administration should seize the opportunity of the new term to show genuine support for fundamental liberties and ensure that opposition activists can gather and speak freely.”