



**THE SADC Lawyers' Association**

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The Southern African Development Community Lawyers Association (SADC LA) wishes to express its shock and sadness at the death of Mr Floribert Chebeya Bahizire, a well known and respected human rights defender in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mr Chebeya was the President of Voix des Sans Voix (Voice of the Voiceless - VSV) an NGO he founded in 1988. He was also the Executive Secretary of the Réseau National des ONG des Droits de l'homme de la République démocratique du Congo (DRC National Network of Human Rights NGOs - RENADHOC). He was a consistent and tireless human rights defender who worked through the governments of the late Mobutu Sese Seko, Laurent Desire Kabila and the current government of Joseph Kabila to condemn human rights abuses without fear or favor.

His body was found dumped on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2010, a day after he had disappeared following an appointment with the Inspector General of Police, General John Numbi Banza Tambo. His driver was also murdered.

It is sad to note that Mr Chebeya and his driver disappeared and were murdered following a scheduled meeting with a top police officer. Such circumstances can only be highly suspicious.

We strongly condemn the murder of Mr Chebeya and his driver and urge the DRC authorities to thoroughly investigate the cause and circumstances surrounding his death and ensure that those responsible for his death are swiftly brought before the courts to answer these charges. We urge the Government to do this in the most transparent manner, allowing the participation and observation of independent relevant experts and local and international human rights advocates. We call on the Government to determine to break with the past and ensure that unsolved murders do not remain part of the political culture of the DRC. It is critical for the DRC authorities to assure its citizens and the international community that they are making efforts to promote human rights and the rule of law so that the country does not slide back into a situation of anarchy.

We also call upon the Southern Africa development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to require accountability of the DRC Government for its responsibility for the protection of its citizens in general, and human rights advocates, in particular.

*Issued for and on Behalf of the Southern African Development Community Lawyers Association*

*By Mabvuto Hara*

*President*

16 June 2010.