

Media contact:

Luke Allen, Senior Africa Programs Campaigner, EIA US, lallen@eia.org
Jean-Pierre Lwamba, Human Rights Program Director, Afrewatch, jeanpierrelwamba@afrewatch.org

11 Community Leaders Jailed in DRC: The Unacceptable Cost of Speaking Truth to Tenke Fungurume Mining

Lubumbashi, Washington, DC - A collective of international and national civil society organizations join their voices to condemn the arbitrary arrest and detention of 11 community leaders from Lualaba province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These leaders were arrested for protesting the impacts on their lives, livelihoods, and health from the operations of Tenke Fungurume Mining (TFM), one of the largest copper-cobalt mining companies in the world and subsidiary of the CMOC Group, the world's largest cobalt producer.

As first [reported](#) by l'Observatoire Africain des Ressources Naturelles (AFREWATCH), 11 leaders from the displaced community of Kabombwa were arrested on May 1, and for most of them have remained in detention since. The leaders were arrested in Kabombwa, their former village, where they had returned and resettled just a few days earlier to protest a resettlement process they judged unjust. Currently, eight people are still in custody. Community leaders had sent a letter to the Fungurume municipal authorities, dated April 7, 2026, before deciding to return to their former village.

In 2020, TFM built a lime plant near the community of Kabombwa without consulting the hundreds of residents who lived nearby – despite [longstanding concerns](#) over the environmental and public health impacts of developing the site. [Media outlets and civil society](#) have repeatedly reported—based on specific scientific analyses—that the lime plant caused air, water, and soil pollution, with various harmful effects on ecosystems and human health. TFM [denied](#) these accusations.

Displaced Kabombwa residents, media, and civil society organizations have [indicated](#) that relocated families are living with serious health impacts and in deeply precarious economic circumstances. DRC's mining regulations provide that anyone relocated due to mining operations is entitled to the “restoration or creation of living conditions that are equal to or better than their previous standard of living.” The relocation of Kabombwa residents seems to have occurred in sharp contrast with the explicit requirements enshrined in DRC law.

“The arrests of the leaders from Kabombwa are deeply concerning,” said Jean-Pierre Lwamba from AFREWATCH. **“To be clear, these arrests were arbitrary, and according to sources we have spoken with, appear to have taken place following a complaint lodged**

by TFM, and according to our information with the possible participation of TFM's agents."

The arrests follow the release of EIA and PremiCongo's report [Toxic Transition](#) in March 2026, documenting allegations of toxic pollution from TFM's 30k plant, which allegedly caused a public health crisis in the nearby community of Manomapia and led to another wave of relocations impacting thousands. Speaking to Kabombwa community members, only a few days before their arrest, Christian Bwenda, Coordinator of PremiCongo, had heard that with the release of the report, the national and international media coverage it received, and the public statement from the DRC government [that followed](#), people felt like their voices had finally been heard.

According to EIA and PremiCongo's findings, the cobalt hydroxide produced by TFM is widely used by automakers around the world, including in electric vehicles made by companies such as BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen and Stellantis.

"It has become increasingly difficult to reconcile the systemic harm caused to frontline communities and the promises that automakers who source cobalt from TFM make to their consumers, regarding ethically sourced electric vehicles," said Alexander von Bismarck, Executive Director at EIA.

In light of the above, the undersigned organizations recommend:

That the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

- Proceed with the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees.
- Ensure the protection of human rights defenders and put an end to all forms of intimidation, harassment, or criminalization of community actors.
- Launch an independent and transparent investigation into the circumstances of the arrests and allegations of human rights and community rights violations.

Companies who source their copper and cobalt from TFM:

- Exercise heightened vigilance to ensure respect for human rights and community rights in mining areas.
- Make their markets and supply chains contingent on compliance with international standards regarding human rights and responsible governance of natural resources.

Signatories

Action pour la Défense des Droits Humains (ADDH)

African Resources Watch (Afrewatch)

Centre d'Aide Juridico-Judiciaire (CAJJ)

Environmental Investigation Agency US (EIA)

Initiative pour la Bonne Gouvernance et les Droits Humains (IBGDH)

Initiative pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme et la Réinsertion Sociale (IPDHOR)
Observatoire d'Études et d'Appui à la Responsabilité Sociale et Environnementale (OEARSE)
Protection des Écorégions de Miombo au Congo (PremiCongo)
Resource Matters