



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' ASSOCIATIONS

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-- PRESS STATEMENT --

**The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA)
Condemns the Unjust Arrests of Air Traffic Controllers in the Democratic Republic of
the Congo**

Montreal, Canada — The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) expresses its profound concern and strong condemnation over the arbitrary arrest and ongoing detention of multiple air traffic controllers across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These arrests are occurring amid unsafe and inadequate working conditions, without due process, and in clear violation of the fundamental rights of aviation professionals.

In February 2024, Mr. Japhett Baluengele Bebiki, an experienced controller on duty at Goma Airport, was managing air traffic without the benefit of essential surveillance systems such as radar or ADS-B. At approximately 15:00 local time, a Fokker 50 aircraft (9S-AHT) operated by Busy Bee Congo departed Goma for Bunia in full compliance with an ATC clearance. During climb, the pilot reported observing another aircraft nearby — an aircraft invisible to controllers due to the complete absence of radar coverage and reliance solely on radio communications.

Upon investigation, the controller verified all known traffic and accurately informed the pilot that no recorded or coordinated flight was operating overhead, and that the only known aircraft nearby was descending toward LUKSA, a completely different route.

Despite his professional conduct and the lack of any safety incident, Mr. Baluengele was arrested on 18 February 2024, two days after his shift, and later transferred to Kinshasa. There is no legal, professional, or ethical justification for his detention.

These arrests are not isolated. Several controllers have been unjustly detained over the past two years:

24 June 2023: An ATC Supervisor and one ATCO were arrested. The Supervisor was released on 26 June 2023, while the ATCO spent eight days in custody before release on 2 July 2023.

January 2024: Douglas Nganga Bakoli, an ATCO in Bukavu, was arrested and remains detained without official explanation.

18 February 2025: The Tower Supervisor at Kinshasa Control Tower, was detained for ten days over alleged information leaks during a confidential presidential trip.

10–11 September 2025: Two senior ATC officials from N'Djili Airport, Kinshasa, were arrested following a power outage incident during a presidential arrival. Both remain in detention with no official communication or legal clarification.

Air traffic controllers in the DRC, especially in Goma and Bukavu, operate under extremely difficult conditions. The country has no radar surveillance, and its ADS-B coverage does not extend across the entire FIR, leaving major areas such as Goma and Bukavu without any surveillance capability. Frequent power outages further disrupt operations, forcing controllers to rely solely on radio communication and procedural separation to manage air traffic.

When pilots report unidentified traffic, controllers are required to issue avoidance instructions and log the occurrence for subsequent investigation by authorities. Punishing controllers for such circumstances is not only unjust but dangerously undermines aviation safety.

The wrongful arrest of controllers represents a grave miscarriage of justice, a direct threat to aviation safety, and a violation of workers' rights.

In solidarity with the Congolese Air Traffic Controllers' Association (ACCA-CONGO), IFATCA calls for:

- Immediate release of, or fair legal representation for, all detained controllers.
- Full disclosure of the whereabouts, charges, and health conditions of the detainees.
- A transparent, independent investigation into the procedures used by DEMIAP and other security services.
- Immediate legal and institutional support by the Régie des Voies Aériennes (RVA) for its affected employees.
- Government commitment to upgrade DRC's air traffic control infrastructure to internationally recognized safety standards.

The DRC's recent election to the United Nations Human Rights Council comes with a solemn duty to uphold the rights and dignity of all its citizens, including those who dedicate their lives to the safety of its skies.

IFATCA calls upon the Ministry of Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority, and the Ministry of Defense to act swiftly and decisively to end these unjust arrests and to protect air traffic controllers from intimidation and abuse.

Safety in the skies cannot be achieved through fear or intimidation, but through investment, professionalism, and respect for human rights.

IFATCA, Montreal, Canada

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) is the recognized global body representing air traffic controller associations. Founded more than 60 years ago, IFATCA now represents professionals in over 130 countries, advocating for safety, efficiency, and the welfare of air traffic controllers worldwide.