

ANNEX 9

War Crimes Arrest of Congo Opposition Politician Prompts Warning of 'Consequences'

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Kinshasa

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The head of Congo's main opposition party says there will be "consequences" over the arrest last month of its member, militia leader turned politician Jean-Pierre Bemba, on war crimes charges in Belgium. VOA's Margaret Besheer has more from Kinshasa.



Jean-Pierre Bemba (file photo)
politically motivated.

AP Photo Jean-Pierre Bemba was arrested May 24 in Brussels on a warrant from the International Criminal Court in The Hague. He is accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity as head of a militia that allegedly carried out rape and torture in the Central African Republic during its 2002-2003 conflict.

The secretary-general of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, Francois Muamba, says Bemba's arrest shocked his supporters in Congo and was totally unwarranted. He said Bemba is innocent and is ready to go to The Hague to defend himself if the authorities in Belgium will let him go.

In an interview at his Kinshasa home this week, Muamba told VOA there would be "consequences" for Bemba's arrest, which many here say was

"You know the consequences that I am referring to as far as the MLC is concerned would not necessarily be another rebellion," he said. "If we take the process all the way through we will see if things do not unravel, that is also part of the problem." He says it is not that we have a hidden agenda. He says he cannot say what the consequences will be.

Bemba had been living in Portugal since last year, after losing the 2006 presidential election to Joseph Kabila. He was in Brussels to visit family and was arrested a day before he planned to return to Kinshasa.



AP Photo Party members, supporters of MLC (Movement for the Liberation of Congo) march in Kinshasa, 27 May 2008

Muamba called for the authorities in Belgium to return Bemba to the Congo, where he is a senator in the second largest bloc in parliament. Following his arrest, thousands took to Kinshasa's streets calling for his release.

Muamba says he is keeping his fingers crossed, so far those protests have been peaceful, but they are leaving the rest to God.

John, a Kinshasa taxi driver and MLC supporter, said he is upset Bemba was arrested, adding that the Congolese leader went to the Central African Republic to help President Ange Felix Patasse put down a rebellion, and that Patasse and some of his officials, should bear the responsibility for what happened and be detained before the court even considers arresting Bemba.

The Movement for the Liberation of Congo began as a political and military movement in 1998, but became part of the political process in 2002.