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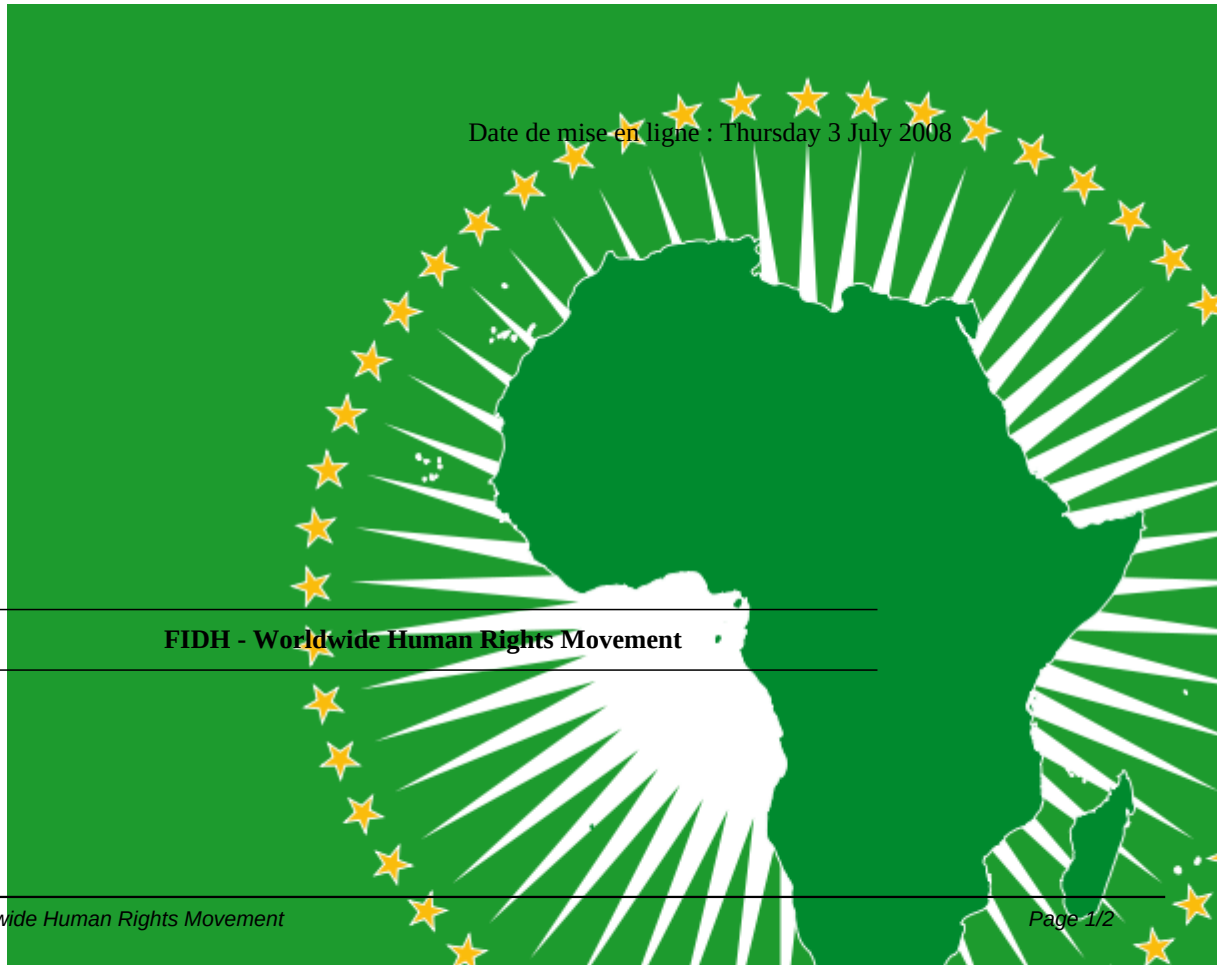
Bemba transferred to the International Criminal Court

- [english] - Africa - Central African Republic - CAR / ICC -



Date de mise en ligne : Thursday 3 July 2008

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Article published on the 2008-07-03 Latest update 2008-07-03 18:21 TU
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Jean-Pierre Bemba
Former Congolese rebel-leader Jean-Pierre Bemba was extradited on Thursday to the Netherlands. He is to appear before the International Criminal Court (ICC) on multiple charges stemming from fighting in the Central African Republic in 2002-03.

Bemba is to be tried on five counts of war crimes and three counts of crimes against humanity. He is accused of leading a campaign of systematic rape and torture in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The accusations concern crimes allegedly committed by troops under his command in 2002-03 when he lent his support to opposing a coup attempt in the CAR. The coup overturned then president Ange-Felix Patassé and brought François Bozizé to power.

Mariana Pena of the International Federation for Human Rights told RFI that the transfer of Bemba to the court "will bring some hope for victims in the Congo and the Central African Republic" Mariana Pena, FIDH

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The former Vice-president of the Democratic Republic of Congo was arrested in Belgium in late May. Following his extradition on Thursday the International Criminal Court said Bemba would appear in court on Friday.

Another of the ICC's detainees, the Congolese Thomas Lubanga was ordered to be released by court judges this week. The prosecution immediately lodged an appeal that prevented the release of the militaman who is charged with abducting children and using them as soldiers in the DRC in 2002 and 2003.

Bemba's party, the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), acknowleged the transfer of its leader on Thursday.

The party said it was convinced of the innocence of the man defeated by Joseph Kabila in the DRC's 2006 presidential election. The party said the country was in need of the "leadership and charisma" of Bemba. The question of the leadership of the MLC remains open.

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