

PRESS STATEMENT

Belgian-Portuguese humanitarian Joseph Figueira Martin unjustly sentenced to 10 years forced labour in the Central African Republic. Protect Humanitarians strongly condemns this verdict and calls for his unconditional and immediate release.

Brussels, November 6, 2025 – On Tuesday 4 November 2025, humanitarian worker Joseph Figueira Martin was sentenced to 10 years of forced labour and a fine by a Central African court based on unfounded accusations against his humanitarian work. **Protect Humanitarians strongly condemns this verdict and calls for his unconditional and immediate release.**

"This verdict is a travesty of justice. My brother, a humanitarian researcher, has been kidnapped, tortured, detained for over a year, and now sentenced to 10 years of hard labor. He deserves protection, not punishment. We ask the Belgian, Portuguese, and European authorities to act now for his immediate release."

Georges Martin, brother of Joseph Figueira Martin.

On 26 May 2024, Joseph Figueira Martin, a Belgian-Portuguese humanitarian, was abducted in Zémio, a town in eastern CAR by the Wagner Group on the pretext of holding two passports. He is working for the non-profit organisation [Family Health International](#) (FHI 360) helping to design a program to reduce poverty, expand economic opportunities, and prevent gender-based violence. Joseph was later handed over to CAR authorities and subsequently detained at the *Office central pour la répression du banditisme* (OCRB) on accusations of alleged espionage. On July 5, 2024, Joseph was charged and was transferred to the military prison of *Camp de Roux*.

During more than 17 months of arbitrary detention, Joseph has been **tortured, threatened with death**, and kept in **inhumane conditions without proper access to justice, or urgent medical care**. His health has deteriorated severely.

After a week of trial in Bangui, he was sentenced to 10 years of forced labour and a fine of 50 million Central African Francs for the crimes of complicity, criminal conspiracy, and undermining the internal security of the State – **a profoundly unjust and unfounded verdict that criminalizes humanitarian work**.

His arbitrary detention and conviction are contrary to international norms and principles on procedural fairness and due process of law, resulting in a punishment of illegal forced labour and modern slavery in violation of his human rights. His defence lawyer stresses that there have been several procedural irregularities in his prosecution and sentencing. Joseph's defence plans to appeal his case to the Court of Cassation on 5 November 2025.

"The arbitrary detention of Joseph Figueira Martin and his unjust verdict exemplify a broader pattern of the criminalization of humanitarian action – fueled by mis- and disinformation campaigns. We must raise our voices and stand together to denounce and end this injustice."

Olivier Vandecasteele, Founder and Executive Director of Protect Humanitarians.

Join us in calling for Joseph's release and sign the petition [HERE](#).

Protect Humanitarians calls on:

- **Central African Republic** to respect its international obligations, to immediately and unconditionally release Joseph, to fully respect his human rights pending his release, and to cease the criminalization of humanitarian activities, and halt the mis- and disinformation campaigns against humanitarian workers.
- **Belgium, Portugal and the European Union** to condemn the verdict, redouble their efforts to secure the release of Joseph, and continue their engagements with the Central African Republic to ensure his right to a fair trial and access to legal assistance, with the objective of achieving his release.
- **The international community** to pursue justice and accountability as well as targeted sanctions against the persons responsible for the illegal arrest and arbitrary detention, acts of torture, and inhumane treatment that Joseph has been subjected to.

Protect Humanitarians stands in full solidarity with Joseph Figueira Martin and his family. We continue to advocate for his **immediate and unconditional release** – pushing for greater visibility of the case and broader international support.

Joseph Figueira Martin's brother and cousin and Olivier Vandecasteele, Founder and Director of *Protect Humanitarians* are available for comments and interviews.

Media Contact:

Sara De Grandis

Communication and Advocacy Officer

communication@protecthumanitarians.org

+39 3454581033