



**Democratic Republic of the Congo – Researched and compiled by the  
Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 2 March 2015**

**Is there a risk by reason of ethnicity or political opinion to members of  
the Bembe ethnic group or persons who oppose the Banyamulenge  
living in Uvira, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)  
from:**

- A. The Banyamulenge?**
- B. The Mai Mai?**
- C. DRC State Forces ?**

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for  
information on the Bembe ethnic group states:

“The Wabembe, also called the Bembe or Babembe, live in the province of South Kivu, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC). Like most members of other ethnic groups in the area, the majority of the Babembe strongly oppose the presence of foreign troops in RDC, particularly the Rwandan military, whom they consider [translation] 'invaders.' The Babembe generally support the central government led by Joseph Kabila, and they oppose the Congolese Rally for Democracy (Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie, RCD), a rebel movement that sided with Rwanda against the government in the early stages of the war in August 1998. Nevertheless, some Babembe, though they are in the minority, support the RCD's fight against Kabila's regime.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1 October 2004) *Democratic Republic of Congo: The situation of members of the Wabembe ethnic group in South Kivu, including the existence of a group called Emo Imbondi, whose objective is to remove the government, the Banyarwanda (Rwandans) and the rebels, so that peace may be restored to the region; whether two demonstrations were held in Baraka on 6 and 13 May 2004, respectively, and, if so, whether any of the demonstrators were arrested or killed (2004)*)

The Introduction to a report from the Rift Valley Institute refers to the predominantly ethnic Bembe armed group led by William Amuri Yakutumba as follows:

“On 24 March 2013, William Amuri Yakutumba arrived in a Congolese army camp with his 60-member bodyguard, declaring that he was ready to join the army and serve the nation. The move followed a public statement three months earlier that he was ready to integrate into the FARDC—although many were sceptical about his real motives. Yakutumba has been leading one of the most influential armed groups in South Kivu, operating in the *territoire* of Fizi at the southern tip of the province. With other dissidents of Bembe origin, he had created the group in January 2007 after refusing to integrate his former rebel soldiers into the Congolese army and to be deployed outside Fizi. The stated motive behind his refusal was that

redployment could only happen if the Banyamulenge, a neighbouring ethnic community, also disarmed their combatants or sent them to army integration. Yakutumba was just the latest in a long line of rebel leaders in the southern part of South Kivu, where conflict dated back to the colonial period and mainly drew on tensions between the Banyamulenge and Bembe communities. Bembe leaderships claimed a tradition of resistance to any outside influence, let alone occupation, from the arrival of the first Arab slave traders during the nineteenth century to the imposition of central government rule from Kinshasa in the post-colonial era. In other parts of South Kivu, such as the *territoire* of Kalehe, armed mobilization did not begin on a large scale until the start of the First Congo War in 1996, and was subsequently connected to the dynamics of the larger regional conflict. In Fizi, by contrast, armed rebellion has a longer history. Here, the Banyamulenge had been living in conflict with the Bembe for decades as a result of competing claims over territory and local power.” (Rift Valley Institute (2013) *South Kivu: Identity, territory, and power in the eastern Congo*, p.10)

See also Rift Valley Institute report which, in a section titled “Communal tensions”, states:

“‘It is easy to recruit Bembe youths into an armed group,’ one local civil society activist suggested. ‘All you need to do is say that the Banyamulenge are threatening to trample their fields and rape their women, promise them some money, and you have a militia.’ Conversely, a local Munyamulenge chief in Fizi pointed out, ‘Most Banyamulenge families have weapons at home. They say they need them to protect their cattle and families against the Bembe. ‘Ethnic animosity runs deep in this region and makes it easy to justify militancy.’ (Rift Valley Institute (2013) *Rift Valley Institute (2013) Banyamulenge: Insurgency and Exclusion in the Mountains of South Kivu*, pp.48-49)

This section of the report also states:

“In such a climate, even the smallest incident may have far-ranging consequences. The 2011 electoral period provides an illustration of how rumors and prejudice may have lethal consequences. When the Mai-Mai Yakutumba, a group drawn largely from the Bembe community, massacred seven Banyamulenge aid workers in October 2011, rumours of upcoming revenge actions triggered a brief but intense episode of tit-for-tat killings between Bembe and Banyamulenge in the Itombwe part of the *Plateaux*.” (ibid, p.49)

A report published by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo states:

“Since the advent of the 23 March 2009 Movement (M23), there has been an increase in tension between the Bembe, Banyamulenge and Bafuliru communities living in this territory, under the guise of an alliance between some members or armed groups affiliated to these communities and the M23.” (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (25 January 2013) *MONUSCO Consolidates Peaceful Coexistence between the Fizi Communities in Sud Kivu*)

A briefing paper published by Oxfam, in a section titled “Ongoing, Everyday Violence” (section 2), states:

“Violence in North and South Kivu is deeply rooted and widespread. In the surveys that Oxfam carried out in August, September and November 2013, much of what communities told us echoed what Oxfam has heard each year since 2007. Any positive developments of 2013 have yet to be felt in these communities. Many communities reported ongoing armed attacks and their devastating results. However, they also explained that such attacks are only single moments in a wider pattern of abuse, and they consistently highlighted the long-term, everyday suffering that follows attacks, and the abuses that they live with daily. Attacks bring with them sexual violence, beatings, murder and looting. They are then followed by displacement, poverty, illegal detention and arrest, and harsh taxation; either by the armed group taking control or by state institutions re-establishing their authority. Violence in its different forms comes from all sides.” (Oxfam (27 January 2014) *In The Balance: Searching for protection in eastern DRC*, p.7)

In a section titled “In the Wake of the M23” (section 3) this paper states:

“Communities in Fizi and Uvira told a similar tale of their experiences with former members of armed groups. They explained that during repeated ad hoc integration processes, armed groups had been brought from the surrounding forests to camps on the outskirts of their villages and left there with no follow-up from state authorities. This led to an increase in abuses as the armed groups had limited resources and little or no incentives to end their exploitation of communities. One Mayi-Mayi group has been to a camp to disarm more than a dozen times, lived off the population and then returned to the hills with its weapons.” (ibid, p.11)

The 2015 Amnesty International report for the DRC, in a section titled “Abuses by armed groups”, states:

“Armed groups committed atrocities against civilians in eastern DRC, especially in northern Katanga, Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. Abuses included unlawful killings, summary executions, forced recruitment of children, rape and sexual violence, large-scale looting, burning of homes and destruction of property. Attacks were characterized by extreme violence, sometimes ethnically motivated. Some of the fighting was for control over natural resources and trade. The violence was facilitated by easy access to weapons and ammunition. Armed groups that committed abuses against civilians included: the FDLR; the ADF; Nyatura; the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA); the Nduma Defence of Congo (NDC) known as Mai Mai Sheka; and various other Mai Mai groups including Mai Mai Lafontaine, Mai Mai Simba and Mai Mai Bakata Katanga. In June, attacks by Nyatura in Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, left at least four civilians dead and dozens of houses burned to the ground.” (Amnesty International (25 February 2015) *Annual Report – Democratic Republic of the Congo*)

This section refers to an attack on a village in Uvira territory, South Kivu, as follows:

“On the night of 6 June, in Mutarule, Uvira territory, South Kivu, at least 30 civilians were killed in an attack by an unidentified armed group. Most of the

victims were from the Bafulero ethnic group. The attack took place just a few kilometres from a MONUSCO base. Between early October and late December, the ADF allegedly carried out a spate of attacks on civilians in several towns and villages in Beni territory, North Kivu, and Ituri district, Province Orientale, killing at least 270 civilians and abducting others. The assailants also looted civilians' property. Between 3 and 5 November, FDLR fighters killed 13 people in Misau and Misoke villages, Walikale territory, North Kivu." (ibid)

A UN Security Council report, in a section titled "Human rights" (paragraph 72) also refers to this attack:

"Serious human rights violations continued to be committed by armed groups and State agents. Investigations carried out by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in June and July indicated that at least 34 Bafuliiru had been killed, including 16 women and 8 children, and at least 24 people had been wounded. In addition, 10 houses and 1 church were burned down in an attack on 6 June by Banyamulenge and Barundi militias on Mutarule village, Uvira territory, in South Kivu. Some of the victims were allegedly burned alive and others were shot or hacked with machetes." (UN Security Council (24 September 2014) *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (September 2014)*)

A Human Rights Watch report states:

"The massacre occurred amid rising tensions between the Bafuliro and the Barundi and Banyamulenge ethnic groups. During a week-long Human Rights Watch research mission in and around Mutarule in mid-June, victims and witnesses described how a group of armed assailants, some of whom wore military uniforms and spoke Kirundi and Kinyamulenge – the languages of the Barundi and Banyamulenge – attacked an outdoor church service in the Bafuliro section of Mutarule. The assailants opened fire on nearly 200 people who were gathered outside the church between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. As people ran for cover, some were hit by gunfire or grenade shrapnel. The assailants then entered the worship area and started shooting people. They also targeted a health center and several houses, shot people at point-blank range, and then burned them to death. The victims included men, women, and at least eight children – among them a 4-year-old boy with mental and physical disabilities who was burned to death. Most of those killed were from the Bafuliro ethnic group." (Human Rights Watch (2 July 2014) *DR Congo: Army, UN Failed to Stop Massacre*)

An Agence France Presse report on recent events in Uvira territory states:

"Fearful villagers have been fleeing their homes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo as the army pursues Rwandan Hutu rebels in a new offensive, a resident said on Thursday. Troops have captured all positions of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) around Mulenge since it launched the offensive two days ago in the Uvira territory of South Kivu province, an officer told AFP by phone on Wednesday. A day later, 'Mulenge and the surrounding villages have no more FDLR in them, so there is no more fighting in these centres, but we are taking the battle to the deep forests where the FDLR hold out,' an officer said from the front." (Agence

France Presse (26 February 2015) *Villagers flee as DR Congo army pursues Rwandan rebels*

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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