



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

**Please provide information on the Mai Mai of Kinshasa and
Banyamulenge militia groups In the Democratic Republic of the Congo
(DRC).**

An undated document published by the Enough Project, in a paragraph headed “Mai Mai Militias”, states:

“Mai Mai is a loosely grouped collection of Congolese militia operating in eastern Congo. There are currently six main groups operating in the Kivus: the Mai-Mai Yakutumba, Raia Mutomboki, Mai-Mai Nyakiliba, Mai-Mai Fujo, Mai-Mai Kirikicho, and Resistance Nationale Congolaise. Mai Mai groups are often formed by combatants who refuse to participate in FARDC reintegration processes, and ascribe to autochthonous beliefs, meaning they believe the land should belong to its original inhabitants. Mai Mai groups feel threatened by Rwandophone communities—Hutu and Tutsi—which they see as foreigners trying to take over their land and power. They are not unified under any political or racial affiliation, but all actively target civilians and U.N. peacekeeping forces in eastern Congo.” (Enough Project (undated) *Armed Groups*)

Footnote 1 of a report published on the Child Rights International Network website states:

“The term Mai-Mai is a generic term that refers to any community-led militia formed with the intention of defending their territory against other armed groups. The term does not describe any particular movement, affiliation or political objective, but groups which can be led by tribal elders, warlords, village heads or politically-motivated resistance fighters. Many were formed to resist the invasion of Rwandan forces and Rwandan-affiliated Congolese rebel groups. However, others have formed simply to exploit the war for their own means, such as by banditry, looting or cattle rustling.” (Child Rights International Network (CRIN) (15 November 2012) *Children and armed conflict: the Democratic Republic of Congo*)

A Human Rights Watch report, in a section titled “Who’s Who” (paragraph headed “Mai Mai militia”), states:

“The Mai Mai militia groups are local defense groups often organized on an ethnic basis. They have traditionally fought alongside the government army against ‘foreign invaders,’ including the CNDP and other Rwandan-backed rebel groups. In 2009 there were over 22 Mai Mai groups, ranging in size and effectiveness, in both North and South Kivu. Some joined the Congolese army as part of the rapid integration process in early 2009, while others refused, angry at the perceived preferential treatment given to the CNDP and unwilling to join the army unless they were able to stay in their communities.

The various Mai Mai groups are estimated to have some 8,000 to 12,000 combatants.” (Human Rights Watch (14 September 2010) *Always on the Run: The Vicious Cycle of Displacement in Eastern Congo*, p.4)

A Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI) report, in a section titled “Mai Mai community-based militia groups” (section 1.3.4), states:

“In January 2012 Belgian media RTL stated that Mai Mai local auto-defense militia groups were active in North Kivu and South Kivu. According to RTL, some elements of Mai Mai operated with the Forces démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and some against. RTL further reported that both armed groups have been pursued by DRC armed forces since 2009. RTL stated that due to their beliefs in magic, the Mai Mai cover their bodies with a mixture/lotion that they believe will prevent them from being shot.” (Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI) (April 2013) *CORI Country Report: Democratic Republic of Congo; Security Issues*, p.54)

A report published by the Jamestown Foundation states:

“‘Mai Mai’ is a term applied to a wide variety of militias that often have little in common other than a nominal emphasis on indigenous rights. The Mai Mai gather for large operations like the occupation of Lubumbashi, but usually operate in smaller groups, terrorizing villagers, looting food, engaging in mass rapes, killing village elders and combatting Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) patrols.” (Jamestown Foundation (4 April 2014) *New Offensive Expected Against Mai Mai Militias in Mineral-Rich Katanga*)

An article from UK newspaper The Observer states:

“It was there that they were ambushed by a Mai Mai Yakatumba group. Mai Mai is the name given to any of the shifting and desperate gangs who get hold of some semi-automatic weapons and call themselves a rebel militia. Yakatumba is the name of one of the more notorious local warlords.” (The Observer (16 October 2011) *How the teachers of hope I met in the Congo were brutally killed*)

A report published by the Rift Valley Institute, in a section titled “Summary and policy considerations”, refers to the group known as Mai Mai Yakatumba as follows:

“Yakatumba’s group was formed from a Mai-Mai faction that refused integration. This refusal has been exploited by political elites in Kinshasa and the Fizi diaspora, who have tried to harness the Mai-Mai to further their own agendas and ambitions. Successive peace processes in the DRC have done little to address this nexus of violence; they have even promoted it, allowing armed groups to be turned into instruments for gaining political power. At the start of 2013, William Amuri Yakatumba committed himself to integration into the national army and began, ostensibly, to regroup his combatants. However, in August of the same year, renewed fighting broke out between the FARDC and a group of Mai-Mai that had remained intact due to delays in the integration process. This demonstrates the danger of relying on rebel integration as the sole solution to ending armed group activity in the eastern

DRC.” (Rift Valley Institute (2013) *Mai-Mai Yakutumba: Resistance and Racketeering in Fizi, South Kivu*, p.10)

In a chapter titled “The trajectory of the Mai-Mai Yakutumba” (chapter 3) this report states:

“As self-styled division commander, Yakutumba began to use the title ‘General’. This did not compensate for the loose structure of the Reformed Mai-Mai, which served more as a vehicle for the exchange of ideas and experiences than a military hierarchy. The group had a short life span. However, even after the Reformed Mai-Mai ceased to exist, Yakutumba maintained contacts with its components, as well as other Mai-Mai groups, in particular in the neighbouring territory of Uvira. Over the years, as the Mai-Mai Yakutumba grew to be the most important Mai-Mai group in southern South Kivu, it built up an ideological influence over these other groups, serving as a source of inspiration and guidance, if not organisational coherence.” (ibid, p.31)

See also UN Security Council report which, in a section titled “Mai Mai Yakutumba” (paragraph 106), states:

“In its 2013 final report, the Group reported on the failure by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to integrate Mai Mai Yakutumba, a predominantly ethnic Bembe armed group, into the Congolese army, at a time when many armed groups had surrendered. This group, led by ‘General’ William Amuri, also known as Yakutumba, enjoys some popular and political support for its nationalism and its hostility towards populations perceived as originating in Rwanda, but its actions destabilize large areas of southern South Kivu, northern Katanga, and Lake Tanganyika. Mai Mai Yakutumba remains a significant group not only because of the insecurity it causes, but also because it is allied with other armed groups that oppose proposed changes to the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that could allow the President, Joseph Kabila, to run for a third term in office.” (UN Security Council (12 January 2015) *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, p.24)

A Rift Valley Institute report, in a section titled “Summary and policy considerations”, refers to the Banyamulenge as follows:

“The Banyamulenge, a Tutsi community in the Eastern DRC, have despite their small size, been at the centre of many of the disparate conflicts in the eastern DRC for most of the past two decades. The initial 1996 invasion by a Rwandan-backed insurgent coalition that aimed to topple Mobutu Sese Seko became known as ‘the Banyamulenge rebellion’, and the Second Congo War of 1998–2003 saw Banyamulenge take on top positions as rebel commanders and political leaders. During this period of nearly 20 years, the community has been stuck in a cycle of persecution and insurgency. Banyamulenge have been labelled by their neighbours as foreigners and fifth columnists operating on behalf of Rwanda. In response, many young Banyamulenge men have joined rebellions backed by Rwanda, creating a culture of soldiering and politics, and involving them in brutal counterinsurgency operations against local militias that have fuelled prejudice and conspiracies against the community as a whole.” (Rift Valley Institute (2013) *Banyamulenge: Insurgency and Exclusion in the Mountains of South Kivu*, p.8)

In a section titled “A final Banyamulenge insurgency? (2011–present)” this report states:

“With the FRF integrated, and with several Banyamulenge officers in influential and lucrative positions, the insurgent networks in the community have been largely dismantled. However, two small new groups have emerged since 2011, one led by Richard Tawimbi, the other, allied to the M23 rebellion, by Muhima Nkingi. Unlike previous insurgencies, in which security concerns and political marginalization played important roles, these two groups appear to be the product of personal ambitions and regional tensions, facilitated by an army in disarray. While these groups are extremely weak, as long as these causes of conflict do not subside, Banyamulenge insurgent groups are likely to persist.” (ibid, p.39)

See also section titled “The trajectory of Banyamulenge insurgencies” which states:

“These three trends—the drift away from Kigali, the rise of a military elite, and the fragmentation of the community—make a large, anti-Kinshasa insurgency unlikely, but also suggest that we have not seen the end of small, often opportunistic militias that try to leverage their military muscle for positions in the army or political influence. So while it may be tempting to declare an end to Banyamulenge armed groups—after all, the FRF have integrated into the army, almost no Banyamulenge heeded the call to join the M23, and the remaining Banyamulenge militias barely have a hundred soldiers altogether—this would be premature and, perhaps, myopic.” (ibid, p.47)

A Rift Valley Institute report on the M23 rebellion, in a section titled “Trying to broaden the rebellion”, states:

“The elites of the Congolese Hutu and Banyamulenge communities—which, along with the North Kivu Tutsi community, formed the backbone of both the RCD and, initially at least, the CNDP—have largely boycotted the M23. Hutu elites surrounding former governor Eugène Serufuli left the CNDP in 2005–6 and are not trusted by the M23 or members of the Rwandan government. Other leaders—such as Bigembe Turinkiko, Katoyi sector chief, or many Hutu leaders from the Bwisha chiefdom where the M23 is located—had never joined the RCD, and have not joined any of its successors. As for the Banyamulenge, they form a divided community. Even during the RCD’s time, some in the community opposed Rwandan influence in the eastern DRC. Many Banyamulenge leaders are wary of joining another Rwandan-backed movement, angry over what they perceive to have been their own use (or abuse) by Kigali in the past.” (Rift Valley Institute (2012) *From CNDP to M23: The evolution of an armed movement in Eastern Congo*, p.48)

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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