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20 July 2018

COD106125.FE

Democratic Republic of Congo: The Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) movement, including its political agenda, structure, offices and documents issued to members; relations with the government and with other political parties; treatment of members by the authorities (2016-July 2018)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. The BDK Movement

The BDK is described by various sources as a [translation] “politico-religious sect” (VOA Afrique 30 Jan. 2018; RFI 7 Aug. 2017) or a [translation] “politico-mystic-religious organization” (RFI 14 Feb. 2017), as well as a secessionist (RFI 14 Feb. 2017) or separatist group (IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017). Sources state that the expression *Bundu dia Kongo* means [translation] “Union of the Bakongo people” (RFI 7 Aug. 2017) or [translation] “Kingdom of Kongo” in the Kikongo language (IBTimes

16 Feb. 2017). An article from the British edition of the International Business Times (IBTimes), an international news portal headquartered in New York, indicates that the leader of that organization has campaigned for greater independence for the “generally ethnically homogeneous” Kongo Central region (IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017). According to International Crisis Group, ethnic mobilization is one of the ways the BDK mobilizes members (International Crisis Group 4 Dec. 2017, 18). Sources designate Kongo Central (formerly Bas-Congo) as the stronghold of the BDK (IFRI Mar. 2018, 22; *Le Potentiel* 1 Feb. 2018). Some sources call followers of the BDK *makesa* (*Jeune Afrique* 19 Aug. 2017; ADIAC 16 Feb. 2017). For information on the BDK prior to 2011, see Response to Information Request COD103713 of April 2011.

1.1 The Bundu dia Mayala (BDM) Party

Sources report that in 2009 or 2010, after being banned or dissolved, the BDK reconstituted itself into the BDM political party (BBC 18 May 2017; UN Mar. 2018, 5). The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) indicate that the government withdrew its approval of the BDM before the 2011 elections and gave it back in 2015 (UN Mar. 2018, 5). The Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI) [1] notes that [translation] “the BDK is the religious branch” of the BDM and that “in practice, it is difficult (and probably unnecessary) to make a distinction between the BDK and the BDM” (IFRI Mar. 2018, 23).

1.2 Political Agenda

According to sources, the BDK’s main objective is to revive the ancient Kongo kingdom (IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017; BBC 18 May 2017). Radio France internationale (RFI) indicates that the BDK agenda has two components: [translation] “the elimination of the borders created by colonialism” and “the rehabilitation of the spiritual and historical heritage of the great ancestors,” and that it falls under “a broad federalism rooted in ethnicity” (RFI 14 Feb. 2017).

The OHCHR and MONUSCO mention that the BDK/BDM wants to [translation] “expel” Rwandans from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (UN Mar. 2018, 5). In stating that the leader of the BDK/BDM incited violence against the [UN English version] “Rwandans,” a report from the UN Security Council explains that that is what Ne Muanda Nsemi calls “Kinyarwanda speakers from the Hutu and Tutsi communities” (UN 29 Sept. 2017, para. 30).

According to sources, the BDK/BDM is opposed to President Joseph Kabila staying in power (UN Mar. 2018, para. 7; VOA Afrique 30 Jan. 2018).

1.3 Leader

The leader of the BDK is Ne Muanda [Mwanda] Nsemi (ADIAC 4 Apr. 2018; IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017; RFI 14 Feb. 2017). He is also the founder (BBC 18 May 2017; RFI 14 Feb. 2017). According to sources, Ne Muanda Nsemi is also leader of the BDM (RFI 14 Feb. 2017; BDM n.d.). The BDM website indicates that Ne Muanda Nsemi is the [translation] “supreme leader” of the BDK and the “national president” of the BDM (BDM n.d.). Sources report that he was elected to parliament in 2006 (IFRI Mar. 2018, 23; BBC 18 May 2017) and in 2011 (IFRI Mar. 2018, 23). *Jeune Afrique* mentioned in August 2017 that he was the member of parliament for the Funa district in Kinshasa (*Jeune Afrique* 19 Aug. 2017).

Further information on the structure of the BDK could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.4 Offices

The BDK website indicates that the movement's headquarters are in the DRC and that it has academies and *zikuas* [initiation, practice and spiritual teaching centres] throughout Africa and the world (BDK n.d.a). The same source mentions *zikuas* based in Birmingham and London, in the United Kingdom (BDK n.d.b).

Further information on the offices of the BDK or information on the number of BDK/BDM members and the documents issued to them could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

2. Relations with the Government and Treatment of Members by the Authorities

Sources report that there was a brief reconciliation between Ne Muanda Nsemi and Joseph Kabila around 2015 (IFRI Mar. 2018, 24; IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017; RFI 7 Aug. 2017). According to RFI, at that time, the leader of the BDK/BDM supported keeping Kabila in power beyond his constitutional mandate (RFI 7 Aug. 2017).

According to the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH), tension in Kongo Central between the BDM and the authorities has grown considerably since 2016 (FIDH Dec. 2017, 23). According to RFI, the BDK/BDM's discourse changed [translation] “drastically” after it obtained only one deputy minister nomination when the new government was formed [in late 2016] (RFI 7 August 2017). Sources indicate that Ne Muanda Nsemi then resumed his verbal attacks against Joseph Kabila and his calls for insurrection (RFI 7 Aug. 2017; IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017).

At the beginning of 2017, the BDK clashed with security forces in Kongo Central (ACLED Mar. 2017, 11; IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017) and in Kinshasa (IBTimes 16 Feb. 2017). The UN reports that clashes between the BDM, the national police and the Armed Forces of the DRC (Forces armées de la RDC, FARDC) in January 2017 resulted in the death of two presumed BDM supporters and one police officer (UN 10 Mar. 2017, para. 24).

Sources report that in February 2017, the Congolese police besieged the home of Ne Muanda Nsemi in Kinshasa for two weeks (UN 4 Sept. 2017, para. 15; BBC 18 May 2017; Reuters 4 Mar. 2017) and clashed with BDK supporters (Reuters 4 Mar. 2017). According to the UN, the authorities accused the BDK leader of sedition (UN 10 Mar. 2017, para. 24). RFI also indicates that the BDK was accused of causing unrest in the west of the country (RFI 14 Feb. 2017). The UN reports that two BDM members were killed, a number of civilians were injured, and 22 people were arrested (UN 10 Mar. 2017, para. 24). According to Reuters, at least six BDK members were killed (Reuters 4 Mar. 2017). The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) [2] reports that during January and February 2017, clashes between the BDK and the Congolese security forces resulted in dozens killed, “primarily” BDK members (ACLED Mar. 2017, 11). According to Human Rights

Watch, in January and February 2017, 20 people were killed by security forces during a “violent crackdown” on members of the BDM movement in the Kongo Central province and in Kinshasa (Human Rights Watch 1 June 2017).

Sources indicate that Ne Muanda Nsemi was arrested by the Congolese authorities at the end of the siege on his house in early March 2017 (UN 4 Sept. 2017, para. 15; Reuters 4 Mar. 2017; ACLED Mar. 2017, 11). According to the UN, [UN English version] “one police officer and three BDM elements were killed” and the police “arrested 307 people, 170 of whom were released the same day” (UN 10 Mar. 2017, para. 24).

According to sources, Ne Muanda Nsemi escaped from [Makala] prison in Kinshasa in mid-May 2017, during an attack allegedly carried out by his supporters, during which some 50 to 4,000 detainees escaped (ACLED 20 June 2018; UN 4 Sept. 2017, para. 15; BBC 18 May 2017). Sources report that dozens of people were killed in the violence (*The New York Times* 19 May 2017; BBC 18 May 2017).

According to the OHCHR and MONUSCO, [translation] “starting on May 25, Ne Muanda Nsemi and his followers called on the population to mobilize on 7 August 2017 to demand the departure of President Kabila and ‘expel Rwandans from the Democratic Republic of the Congo’” (UN Mar. 2018, 5). IFRI also reports that [translation] “shortly after his escape, the BDK leader reappeared on [YouTube] and called for insurrection against the government on 30 June 2017, the DRC’s day of independence, and on August 7” (IFRI Mar. 2018, 25).

According to RFI, violent clashes between the BDK/BDM and Congolese security forces broke out on 7 August 2017 in Kinshasa and in the cities of Matadi and Boma, in Kongo Central (RFI 7 Aug. 2017). According to the UN, the BDK/BDM attacked strategic facilities and Congolese security forces (UN 29 Sept. 2017, para. 30). Sources indicate that the BDK/BDM protested to demand the departure of President Kabila (IRIN 5 Oct. 2017; UN Mar. 2018, para. 7) and the organization of elections (UN Mar. 2018, para. 7). According to Freedom House, “[s]ecurity forces fired live ammunition at the protesters, and at least 27 people were killed” (Freedom House 2018). According to the UN, the violence in Kinshasa and Kongo Central resulted in the death of 70 people (UN 29 Sept. 2017, para. 30). The OHCHR and MONUSCO also indicate that in March 2018, [translation] “according to the UNJHRO [United Nations Joint Human Rights Office], at least 17 people were killed, 58 were

shot and at least 52 were arbitrarily arrested or illegally detained by the security and defence forces” (UN Mar. 2018, para. 56). The same source states the following with respect to BDK/BDM supporters during the 7 August 2017 protests:

[translation]

Although some were armed with sticks and brooms and adopted a violent attitude toward Congolese state agents, most of the supporters, joined by local populations, began peaceful marches and chanted antigovernment slogans. These actions were violently repressed by security services and defence forces, resulting in dozens of deaths. (UN Mar. 2018, para. 7)

Human Rights Watch notes that, during the violent incidents from January to August 2017, [Human Rights Watch English version] “[s]ome of the BDK members also used violence, killing at least five police officers” (Human Rights Watch 18 Jan. 2018).

In October 2017, according to the UN, [UN English version] “two senior police officers were convicted for the murder of members of the [BDK/BDM] movement, in connection with their responsibility in the repression of a protest held in February 2017” (UN 5 Jan. 2018, para. 30).

The Congolese media state that at the end of January 2018, after being absent for several months following his escape, Ne Muanda Nsemi reappeared in an online video broadcast criticizing the sociopolitical situation in the DRC (Top Congo Info 31 Jan. 2018; VOA Afrique 30 Jan. 2018).

Sources reported in March 2018 that 5 or 7 alleged members of the BDK/BDM were sentenced to death for insurrection and 11 were sentenced to 10 years in prison following clashes between the police and the BDK in Kongo Central in January and February 2017 (Actualite.cd 10 Mar. 2018; Radio Okapi 8 Mar. 2018).

The Agence d’information d’Afrique centrale (ADIAC) reports in April 2018 that the leader of the BDK is still in hiding and continues to broadcast videos on social networks in which he [translation] “threaten[s]” to attack the government, but the article also states that “no one knows exactly what became of him” and that he has “not been seen alive” (ADIAC 4 Apr. 2018).

ADIAAC indicates that BDK followers are [translation] “on the radar” of the Congolese authorities and that they are being sought by the security services, forcing some to live in hiding (ADIAAC 4 Apr. 2018). Similarly, the Congolese daily *Le Potentiel* reports that BDK/BDM followers are mistreated by security services, including [translation] “arbitrary” arrests and torture (*Le Potentiel* 1 Feb. 2018). The same source states that this is the situation in Kinshasa and in the Kongo Central province (*Le Potentiel* 1 Feb. 2018).

3. Relations with Other Political Parties

Information on relations between the BDK/BDM and other political parties in the DRC could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI) is [translation] “the main independent centre for research, information and debate on major international issues” in France; it is a recognized association of public utility that brings together policy makers and experts at the international level (IFRI Mar. 2018).

[2] The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which receives financial support from the US Department of State and the European Research Council (ERC), is a project that collects the dates and locations of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, South Asia, South East Asia, and the Middle East (ACLED n.d.).

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