

# Responses to Information Requests - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Kenya: The Mungiki group, including organizational structure, leadership, membership, recruitment and activities; the relationship between the government and the group, including protection offered to its victims (2016-April 2018)

## 1. Overview

For information on the Mungiki group for the period of 2010 to 2013, see Response to Information Request KEN104594 of November 2013. Sources describe the Mungiki as an "outlawed religious Kikuyu Kenyan sect" (M&G Africa 15 July 2016) or an outlawed sect "which originally stems from members of Kenya's influential Kikuyu tribe" (FPA 14 Apr. 2016). According to sources, the Kikuyu are the largest ethnic group in Kenya (IRIN 26 Oct. 2017; *The Washington Times* 11 May 2017). *The Washington Times* reports that the Kikuyu comprise an "estimated 20 percent of the total population of 46 million" and has "produced three out [of] Kenya's four presidents since independence," including President Uhuru Kenyatta (*The Washington Times* 11 May 2017). Freedom House refers to the Mungiki as an "ethnically affiliated gan[gl]" (Freedom House 2017). Sources refer to the Mungiki as a pro-government "gang" (*The Washington Post* 28 Nov. 2017) or "militia" (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018). A 2017 report by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) and the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) [1] states, without providing further details, that the Mungiki group "seems to have rebranded as Eminants of Mungiki" (FIDH and KHRC July 2017, 29).

According to sources, the group was banned in 2003 (M&G Africa 15 July 2016; PanARMENIAN.net 1 Nov. 2016). Sources indicate that the group was implicated in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007 (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018; FIDH and KHRC July 2017, 29; *The New York Times* 22 June 2016).

A book by London-based scholars entitled *Conflict, Violent Extremism and Development: New Challenges, New Responses* [2] provides the following information about the group's aims and objectives:

1. Defend rights and traditional culture of disadvantaged members of ethnic group (Kikuyu)—historical grievances from ill-balanced post-Mau Mau conflict settlement
2. Redistribute wealth and opportunities from elite Kikuyu in power
3. Ensure survival through organised crime. (Glazzard et al. 2018, 33)

## 2. Leadership, Structure and Membership

Sources state that Maina Njenga [Njengahad] was the former leader (*The New York Times* 22 June 2016; M&G Africa 15 July 2016). An article in *The New York Times*

states that in the early 2000s, the Mungiki had "up to two million members, according to reports" (*The New York Times* 22 June 2016). 2016 sources indicate Mungiki membership at around 500,000 (PanARMENIAN.net 1 Nov. 2016; M&G Africa 15 July 2016). According to the book by London-based scholars, the structure of the Mungiki is "[c]ellular and disaggregated," including "loose structures and roving independent bands" (Glazzard et al. 2018, 33, 41). According to the same source, reasons for membership include a "[s]ense of belonging," mobilization "by political leaders of [the] ethnic group (Kikuyu)," "[l]ack of socio-economic opportunities," and "[f]orced participation" (Glazzard et al. 2018, 33). Further and corroborating information on the current structure and leadership could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### **3. Activities and Areas of Operation**

The book by London-based scholars indicates that Mungiki tactics and methods include "[u]nsophisticated roving swarms of attackers more akin to gang violence, using light arms and machetes but inflicting brutal individual-level violence and willingness to use mass rape and forcible circumcision" and that targets include "other ethnic groups' civilians and own community's civilians as well as state representatives" (Glazzard et al. 2018, 33). The 2016 article by *The New York Times* similarly indicates that the Mungiki has committed murder, rape, and forcible circumcision (*The New York Times* 22 June 2016). Sources indicate that Mungiki have been known to carry out beheadings (PanARMENIAN.net 1 Nov. 2016; *The Standard* 19 Apr. 2016).

According to a June 2016 article by the *Daily Nation*, a Kenyan newspaper, the Mungiki is "known for extorting money" and "those who failed to comply in the past have been killed in brutal ritualistic murders" (*Daily Nation* 2 June 2016). Citing the Nakuru Town Service Matatu [mini-bus taxis] Association Chairman Ben Gathogo, who "used [Mungiki] members as his security personnel," the Mail & Guardian Africa (M&G Africa) [3] reports that

the group collects at least USD 8[,000 on a daily basis from Matatus' across the country, as each is supposed to pay the cash in order to operate the public service vans. In their control for markets in Nakuru, they demanded at least USD 3[,000 from traders before giving them a space from which to sell their wares. (M&G Africa 15 July 2016)

According to an April 2016 article published on the Foreign Policy Association's (FPA) Foreign Policy Blogs (FPB) [3] and written by Neil Thompson, a freelance international relations analyst, Mungiki members were "recently blamed for a series of arson attacks and beatings against Uber drivers in Nairobi" (FPA 14 Apr. 2016).

According to sources, Mungiki areas of operation include Nairobi, central Kenya, and the Rift Valley region (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018; *Daily Nation* 9 Jan. 2017). The June 2016 article in the *Daily Nation* states that according to security officials, the "Mungiki sect has resurfaced in parts of Nyeri County [in central Kenya]," and that the "group's activities have been in major towns" (*Daily Nation* 2 June 2016). According to the April 2016 FPA article, parts of major cities, such as Nairobi, are

"strongholds for groups like the Mungiki" (FPA 14 Apr. 2016).

### 3.1 Central Kenya

An April 2016 article by *The Standard*, a Kenyan newspaper, indicates that Nyeri county police "arrested 10 suspects in the middle of an oathing ceremony, sparking fears that the outlawed [Mungiki] sect could be regrouping," and that "[a]lthough police said they were treating the incident as an isolated case, some counties have witnessed crimes and murders similar to those associated with the gang" (*The Standard* 19 Apr. 2016).

The same source states that in Kirinyaga County, "a suspected Mungiki adherent was attacked and injured by villagers" (*The Standard* 19 Apr. 2016). Another article by the same source from January 2017 states that "[f]ormer adherents of the outlawed Mungiki sect are unwilling to register as voters, fearing it could be used as a ploy to arrest them" and that "the police could secretly obtain their fingerprints and intimidate them," although a County Commissioner in Kahuro stated that such information is gathered only "for electoral purposes" (*The Standard* 31 Jan. 2017).

The information in the following paragraph is taken from a January 2017 *Daily Nation* article:

Kirinyaga Governor Joseph Ndathi warned of the "re-emergence of Mungiki in parts of central Kenya, including his county," stating that "[t]hey have re-emerged through saccos [Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations] and boda boda [bicycle and motorcycle taxis] networks and they are supported by well-known people, including businessmen operating in Nairobi." The Mungiki have "begun to take control of businesses in the area to generate income that would be used to sustain its networks in central Kenya, the Rift Valley and Nairobi." Governor Ndathi indicated that "some of the gang members operating in Kirinyaga County have been recruited from Thika and Ruiru towns in Kiambu County" (*Daily Nation* 9 Jan. 2017).

### 3.2 Nairobi

A June 2017 article by the *Daily Nation* reports that residents in Embakasi, in Nairobi, "suspect a resurgent Mungiki sect is behind the killing of a butcher and the torching of dozens of houses and shops" (*Daily Nation* 30 June 2017).

Human Rights Watch indicates that a "presidential election was held on August 8, but the results were annulled by Kenya's Supreme Court and a second election was held on October 26 [2017]" (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018). The same source reports that "[p]olice and armed gangs killed at least 37 people in Nairobi between September and November 2017" (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018). *The Washington Post* also reports in a November 2017 article that the "[s]ome 70 people are estimated to have died in confrontations with police [during the extended election season]" (*The Washington Post* 28 Nov. 2017). An August 2017 article by *The Star*, a Kenyan newspaper, states that "[s]ome Mathare and Kibera residents have claimed Mungiki sect members have been attacking them following protests over [opposition leader] Raila Odinga's loss in the national election" (*The Star* 14 Aug. 2017). The same source reports the following information:

Residents interviewed by The Star said those attacking them may not be police or that officers are using the outlawed [Mungiki] sect members and other criminal gangs to kill and maim them in the pretext of quelling protests.

They said they [were] attacked on Sunday night by people in dreadlocks and police attire, who shot indiscriminately at them.

...

[A] resident said: "People were injured and some killed. My neighbour was shot dead by those people. Even as we speak, many people are nursing injuries in their houses. I don't think they are police...unless police are using Mungiki to kill us."

...

In the middle of Kibera slum, Miriam Akinyi [another resident], said she was shot by people who "resemble Mungiki". (*The Star* 14 Aug. 2017)

An August 2017 article by the *Daily Nation* states that according to the police, "[w]idespread reports of Mungiki attacks in Mathare, Lucky Summer and Dandora ... were a false alarm" (*Daily Nation* 14 Aug. 2017). The August 2017 article by *The Star* states that

[p]olice have denied using the military or criminal gangs to kill protesters and said only them engaging in illegal demonstrations are being pursued by police.

Earlier on Monday, Nairobi police boss Japheth Koome dismissed claims that the police, accused of using excessive force on protesters and residents, invited the help of other people. (*The Star* 14 Aug. 2017)

According to an October 2017 article by Ghetto Radio, a Nairobi-based radio station, police intervened when local residents in Nairobi's Lucky Summer estate disrupted a gathering of individuals they believed to be Mungiki "performing a ritual and taking oaths," while the "unknown group had set up tents" and were "holding what they claimed [were] prayers"; the article notes that "suspicion arose when the group compris[ed] of only men, some with dreadlocks, were seen slaughtering goats and allegedly taking raw blood, according to eye witnesses" (GhettoRadio 22 Oct. 2017).

Human Rights Watch provides the following information:

Eight witnesses of six incidents of gang killings said that on November 17 [2017], armed men around Muthurwa market and along Landhies road all the way to City Stadium, to the east of Nairobi's Central Business District, demanded to see national identity cards and singled out suspected opposition supporters by their ethnicity, beating and slashing the victims with machetes. Three witnesses said they saw gang members drag two corpses to Landhies road, 100 to 200 meters away, from where police later collected them.

Five witnesses said they saw the killings taking place in the full view of police officers and saw officers collect bodies without apprehending the killers. Witnesses alleged that the armed gangs were [M]ungiki. (Human Rights Watch 25 Feb. 2018)

The November 2017 article by *The Washington Post* states that Odinga supporters indicated that they were attacked by Mungiki, rather than police, during an opposition rally in the Jacaranda grounds neighbourhood [in Embakasi] (*The Washington Post* 28 Nov. 2017). In an article published on the same day, Nairobi News, a Kenyan news website, also reports that there was a "clash between police and N[ASA] [National Super Alliance, a political coalition of opposition parties] supporters" at Jacaranda grounds in which three people were shot (Nairobi News 28 Nov. 2017).

### 3.3 Other Parts of Kenya

In an October 2017 article on election protests in Nyanza, Kenya, IRIN reports that the reference to "militia" by Odinga in a rally speech "is a nod to a belief here [in western Kenya] that ... Mungiki has been revived and has infiltrated the police" and that "[w]hether [or not] Mungiki is in fact back in operation, the important point is that it is a widely held belief in Nyanza" (IRIN 26 Oct. 2017).

## 4. Relationship with Politicians

According to *The Washington Times*, the International Criminal Court (ICC) accused President Kenyatta of "organizing an ethnic Kikuyu gang known as the Mungiki sect to attack rival groups" (*The Washington Times* 11 May 2017). Similarly, a 2017 article by IRIN notes that Kenyatta, along with William Ruto, then Kenyatta's opponent and now Deputy President, "were indicted by the International Criminal Court for their alleged roles in the violence [in 2007-2008]" (IRIN 26 Oct. 2017). Sources indicate that charges were dropped due to insufficient evidence (IRIN 26 Oct. 2017; *The Washington Times* 11 May 2017). The ICC dropped the charges against Kenyatta in December 2014 (*The New York Times* 22 June 2016).

In a description of the group's structure, the book by London-based scholars mentions "past tenuous connections to local politicians" (Glazzard et al. 2018, 33). The 2016 *New York Times* article cites "Paul Muite, a member of Parliament [in the early 2000s] and now a lawyer who represents Njenga and other members of the Mungiki, which is still active," as saying that "almost every Kikuyu politician of consequence he knew during that era took the oath" (*The New York Times* 22 June 2016). Citing the Nakuru Town Service Matatu Association Chairman Ben Gathogo, a 2016 article by M&G Africa reports that "politicians are still trying to woo sect members to their side for political favours and revenge missions: 'Politicians will be tempted to use organized groups and the Mungiki is one of their favourites'" (M&G Africa 15 July 2016).

According to a September 2017 *Daily Nation* article, NASA MPs "have accused Gatandu South MP Moses Kuria [of the ruling Jubilee Party] of working with State machinery to revive the outlawed Mungiki sect" (*Daily Nation* 26 Sept. 2017). The same source cites Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Chairman John Mbadi as stating that "Mr Kuria wants to use the group to disrupt N[ASA] anti-IEBC [Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission] demonstration[s]" (*Daily Nation* 26 Sept. 2018).

## 5. State Protection for Victims of Sects

Information on state protection for victims of sects was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A March 2018 *Daily Nation* article states that "[c]entral regional coordinator Wilson Njenga has directed security officers to crack down on re-emerging organised criminal gangs in the region," including the Mungiki which has "re-emerged" and poses "a major security threat" (*Daily Nation* 16 Mar. 2018). Further and corroborating information 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 KHRC is a Kenyan NGO that campaigns "for the entrenchment of a human rights and democratic culture in Kenya through monitoring, documenting and publicising rights violations" (FIDH and KHRC July 2017, 62).

[2] The book includes a chapter on extremist groups in Kenya, including the Mungiki, and was written by four London-based scholars: Andrew Glazzard and Emily Winterbotham of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Thomas Maguire of Kings College London, and Sasha Jespersion of St. Mary's University (Glazzard et al. 2018).

[3] M&G Africa is a "digital [p]an-African news publicatio[n]" headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa (M&G Africa n.d.).

[4] The FPA's mission is to inform citizens on US foreign policy and global issues through its programs and publications (FPA n.d.). The FPB "tracks global developments" in various topics and is "[s]taffed by professional contributors from the worlds of journalism, academia, business, non-profits and think tanks" (FPB n.d.).

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Norwegian Centre for Human Rights; researchers who study the Mungiki sect.

**Internet sites, including:** Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; BBC; ecoi.net; EU – Election Observation Mission; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; *The Guardian*; International Criminal Court; International Crisis Group; Kenya – MyGov.go.ke, Presidency; Kenyans.co.ke; Norway – Landinfo; *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.