

## Ngbandi

### Profile

Ngbandi are less of a traditional ethnic group than they are people from the north-west of the country who are or have become predominantly Lingala-speaking, or use the dialect Bangala (population estimated by Ethnologue to be 250,000 in 2000). Their predominance in Mobutu's army was symbolized by the widespread use of Lingala as a military language.

### Historical context

Ngbandi and other north-western Lingala speakers became strongly identified with the Mobutu regime in the eyes of many people, many of whom also look down on such 'forest people'. After 1997, Ngbandi lost their privileged positions in government and faced discrimination. Laurent Kabila removed many north-westerners in the military in favour of loyalists from his home province of Katanga. With Mobutu's defeat and departure, many Ngbandi soldiers fled across the river to the Republic of Congo. In March 2004, an attack on military facilities and the government broadcasting centre in Kinshasa was blamed on former members of Mobutu's Special Presidential Guards Division. While the government claimed that 100 people were arrested in the wake of the attacks, a local human rights organization said that at least 200 Ngbandi had been rounded up.

### Current issues

In November 2005 a group of 300 former soldiers in Mobutu's Zairian army returned to the DRC from the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and were welcomed in a ceremony by the defence minister in DRC's transitional government. With the new arrivals, over 550 former soldiers, many of them Ngbandi, had returned home.