

Democratic Republic of Congo

Response to Information Request Number:	DRC99002.ZNY
Date:	16 June 1999
Subject:	Democratic Republic of Congo: Information on whether members of the Baluba ethnic group are at risk of harm because of their ethnicity and support of Etienne Tshisekedi
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Democratic Republic of Congo / Armed conflicts / Baluba / Discrimination based on ethnic origin / DRC / Ethnic cleansing / Ethnic community organizations / Ethnic conflicts / Ethnic minorities / Etienne Tshisekedi / Freedom of association / Freedom of political opinion / Intellectuals / Intentional discrimination / Laurent Desire Kabila / Legislative power / Mobutists / Opposition leaders / Political opposition / Political participation / Political parties / Political representation / Public office / Public servants / Racial discrimination / Right to security of persons / Mobutu Sese Seko / Victims of abuse of power

Query:

Are members of the Baluba ethnic group at risk of harm because of their ethnicity and support of Etienne Tshisekedi?

Response:

Etienne Tshisekedi, a veteran opposition leader, is the most popular political figure in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and maintains strong support from his Baluba ethnic group (Congoese human rights attorney 3 May 1999). Laurent Desire Kabila, also an ethnic Baluba, has many Balubas (including former Mobutu officials) and family members that hold top posts in his government (*Africa Analysis* 18 Sept. 1998).

A Congoese human rights lawyer, who wishes to remain anonymous, states that it is more common for opposition activists, especially those who are "pro-Tshisekedi," to be harassed and/or detained by the Kabila government. Mistreatment would more likely be based more on their political opinion rather than just their ethnicity. There is no evidence that a Baluba would be persecuted based solely on his/her ethnicity (Congoese human rights attorney 3 May 1999).

This view is corroborated by two other sources. A Columbian University research scholar says that he is not aware of Baluba currently being persecuted. If such persecution were to occur it would not be "wholesale and automatic" for all Balubas, just those who are politically outspoken (Weiss 16 Apr. 1999).

A representative from the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch (HRW) corroborates this view saying HRW is not aware of any persecution of the Baluba currently taking place. If persecution were to occur, he does not believe it would be systematic among the Baluba ethnic group, but dependent on individual circumstances (HRW 15 Apr. 1999).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC 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.

References:

Africa Analysis. 18 September 1998. "Congo-K Comes Full Circle Kinshasa." (WESTLAW)

Baldo, Suliman. Senior researcher, Africa Division of Human Rights Watch (HRW), New York. 15 April 1999. Personal interview.

Congolese human rights lawyer. 28 April 1999. [Internet] *Questions on the DRC*. [Accessed on 3 May 1999].

Weiss, Herbert. Professor Emeritus of Political Science at City University of New York (CUNY) and research scholar at the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, New York. 16 April 1999. Telephone interview.

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