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Kenya: The Mungiki (Munguki) cult, including its organizational structure, its leaders, its criminal activities, and the state protection available to victims of this cult (June 2002-February 2005)

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This Response incorporates sections of KEN39227.E of 24 June 2002.

Description, purpose, structure, leadership and membership of the cult

In the Kikuyu language, the term *mungiki* means [translation] "multitude" (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; see also *The East African Standard* 6 Mar. 2002). According to a BBC article, the word means "a united people" (11 Feb. 2003). Various sources qualified the Mungiki cult as an "outlawed" religious sect (BBC 18 Aug. 2004; *People's Daily Online* 7 Jan. 2003; Episcopal News Service 22 Mar. 2004; *The Nation* 22 June 2004; *ibid.* 21 June 2004; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; see also BBC 11 Feb. 2003), a political and cultural organization (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; see also WEA RLC 24 June 2004), and a self-defence militia (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20).

Although the exact date that the Mungiki sect was founded varied depending on the source, it seems that it was established sometime between the 1980s and 1990s (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; BBC 11 Feb. 2003; *The East African Standard* 6 Mar. 2002; Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004). The purpose of the sect is reportedly "to unite the Kikuyu" (*Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004) by "calling [them] back to traditional tribal religious practice and lifestyle" (*ibid.*; see also WEA RLC 24 June 2004; Episcopal News Service 22 Mar. 2004; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20). The sect also supports the practice of female genital mutilation (*ibid.*; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003; BBC 11 Feb. 2003) and fights "foreign ideologies" (*ibid.*), particularly Western and Christian ones (*Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; see also WEA RLC 24 June 2004). Also, members of the sect "assault women they claim are dressed inappropriately" (WEA RLC 24 June 2004), that is, women who wear mini-skirts and pants, stripping them naked in public (BBC 11 Feb. 2003).

According a 6 March 2002 opinion article in *The East African Standard*,

The Mungiki symbol is the red, green, black and white flag. Red, they say,

symbolises blood which was shed in the fight for independence and will continue to be shed until the country is "liberated."

Green, they argue, symbolises what was once a beautiful country, while white stands for the peace they are fighting for. Black stands for the land of black people. Mungiki has a council of elders. Each province has six elders who are guided by "prophets" and are charged with the day-to-day counselling of preachers.

Each member pays a subscription fee of Sh3,000. The money symbolises the three blessings of the Kikuyu community, milk, meat and honey, or the three peaks of Mt Kenya (Kirinyaga), the seat of Ngai (God).

...

Its leaders meet every last Saturday of the month to evaluate the monthly performance and challenges. They also take part in public demonstrations, preaching sessions or baptismal rituals.

Anyone willing to join the movement must be vetted by priests and prophets, and then is subjected to Kirira (teaching) of Ngai.

The group conducts its baptismal sessions in secluded places and at odd hours, preferably at 3 am in a river. During this hour, the atmosphere is said to be serene and the water pure.

The sect is led by a chairman, (John) Maina Njenga (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; *The Nation* 29 Oct. 2004; *The East African Standard* 9 Apr. 2004); a national organizing secretary, Njoroge Kamunya; and the Nairobi and Nakuru coordinators, Kamau Mwatha and Kamondo Karuri respectively (*The Nation* 22 June 2004). Kimani Ruo coordinates the sect's activities in the Rift Valley region (*ibid.*; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 21).

The sect has approximately two million members (Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003; BBC 11 Feb. 2003; WEA RLC 24 June 2004) from the Kikuyu tribe (*ibid.*; *People's Daily Online* 7 Jan. 2003). Its Rift Valley coordinator claimed that approximately 40 per cent of Rift Valley inhabitants were Mungiki sympathizers (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 21). According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2004*, the exact number of cult members is unknown (15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). However, corroborating sources indicated that the sect "draws a significant following from the unemployed and other marginalized segments of society" (*ibid.*; see also *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004). In its January 2005 issue, *Le Monde diplomatique* reported that the Mungiki cult was one of the most powerful militias operating among the 143 shanty towns surrounding the city of Nairobi, which 60 per cent of the population has crammed into, and where the sect has [translation] "privatized the law" and is enforcing [translation] "street justice" (20).

Some sources indicated that the Mungiki sect also had members in the government (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 21), particularly among high government officials (BBC 11 Feb. 2003), as well as sympathizers (*ibid.* 18 Aug. 2004) and friends in "high places" (*Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004). Cult members take oaths (WEA RLC 24 June 2004), and defectors are

punished by death (*The Nation* 22 June 2004; *ibid.* 19 June 2004; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004).

The cult's criminal activities

Corroborating sources indicated that Mungiki cult members are involved in various criminal activities (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; *The Nation* 29 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 21 June 2004; *ibid.* 19 June 2004; BBC 11 Feb. 2003; WEA RLC 24 June 2004; *People's Daily Online* 7 Jan. 2003; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). According to several sources, members of the sect have been accused of crimes such as murder (WEA RLC 24 June 2004; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003; *The Nation* 19 June 2004; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20), fraud and extortion (*ibid.*; *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II), illegal drug sales (*ibid.*; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20), assaulting police officers (*ibid.*; Episcopal News Service 13 Feb. 2003) and attacking police stations (BBC 11 Feb. 2003). *Le Monde diplomatique* summarized the actions of Mungiki sect members as [translation] "a veritable secret army" (Jan. 2005, 20). Citing the statements of a British historian, this French monthly added that [translation] "this is the only commonly known ethnic organization that calls so strongly on its tribal past . . . and that has this ability to practise mass violence" (Jan. 2005, 20).

According to various sources, the principal targets for murder are defectors from the sect (WEA RLC 24 June 2004; Episcopal News Service 22 Mar. 2004; *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* 30 June 2004; *The Nation* 29 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 5 Apr. 2004). A report from the United States Department of State estimated that "as many as 14 killings or disappearances of former Mungiki in the period from February to June 2004 were meant to punish Mungiki defectors" (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; see also *The Nation* 19 June 2004).

Relations with the authorities and state protection available to victims

According to *Le Monde diplomatique* and *The Nation*, the Kenyan government has declared "total war" against the Mungiki sect (*The Nation* 22 June 2004; *ibid.* 21 June 2004; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20). Reports published in the last few years note the frequent arrest and detention of the cult's members and leaders (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II; *Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20; *The Nation* 29 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 5 Apr. 2004). In March 2004, the chairman of the Mungiki sect and approximately 30 of his "lieutenants" were arrested and detained by the Kenyan authorities on murder charges (*Le Monde diplomatique* Jan. 2005, 20).

Sources mentioned cases where cult members were taken into custody and brought before the courts (*The Nation* 29 Oct. 2004; *ibid.* 15 June 2004; *ibid.* 22 June 2004). The Rift Valley coordinator said that Mungiki members "have been remanded and jailed on trumped up charges by the former and present regimes" (*ibid.*). A 15 June 2004 article published in *The Nation* reported that three Mungiki sect members had been charged with the murder of George Waigwa in September 2000 and sentenced to life in prison, while two other members had been released for lack of evidence.

With regard to the protection available to victims, a 29 October 2004 report published in *The Nation* indicated that a high court judge in Nairobi ordered police

to provide adequate security to witnesses in the Francis Njoroge Maina murder case against the chairman and 36 members of the Mungiki sect. In June 2004, the same Kenyan daily reported that Mungiki deserters had been forced to leave their homes, and that some had also taken their families to lodgings where a special crack squad was protecting them (*The Nation* 19 June 2004). In a 5 April 2004 article, *The Nation* noted that a special squad of 100 police officers had been set up to wipe out the Mungiki cult. In a 24 June 2004 article, the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty News and Analysis indicated that, earlier that year, "police placed Mungiki defectors on a 24-hour guard following the brutal murder of three members and the kidnapping of several who had openly denounced the sect" (see also Episcopal News Service 22 Mar. 2004)

However, another article published in *The Nation* reported that, "with all the security machinery at its disposal, [the Kenyan government could not] stamp out the Mungiki menace" (21 June 2004). Moreover, the opposition Kenyan African National Union (KANU) [which was in power before the December 2002 elections] stated that "Mungiki has supporters . . . in the high and the mighty," which would explain its members' impunity (BBC 18 Aug. 2004).

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.

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