



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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23 February 2007

### COG102448.FE

Republic of the Congo: Whether there are visible differences between members of the Mbochi ethnic group and other ethnic groups in terms of appearance, practices and lifestyles; whether a person's name can identify that person as a member of the Mbochi ethnic group

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Mbochi represent 12 percent of the population of the Republic of the Congo (US 23 Jan. 2007; Refugees International 21 May 2003) and are the country's third largest ethnic group (Les Dépêches de Brazzaville n.d.) The following information was taken from the Web site of *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*:

[translation]

Comprising the third largest ethnic group in the Congo, the Mbochi is made up of ten ethnic groups: the Likouaka, Mbochi, Likouba, Kouyou, Makoua, Bonga, Boubangui, Moye, Ngaré and Mboko. They live in the north of Plateaux region (Ongoni, Ollombo, Abala), in the Cuvette and Cuvette Ouest regions, around Owando, Mbono, Etoumbi, Mbana, Mossaka, Ovo, Makoua, and along numerous fishing and navigable rivers, such as the Likouala, the Kouyou, the Alima and the Sangha. The Mbochi raise livestock (poultry, sheep and goats), fish in the rivers and grow crops (coffee, cacao, tobacco, rice...). (ibid.)

The information in the following two paragraphs primarily comes from correspondence from a sociology professor at the Marien Ngouabi University in Brazzaville who is a researcher with the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Contemporary Africa (Interdisciplinaire groupe de recherche sur l'Afrique contemporaine, IGRAC), in Brazzaville (IGRAC 13 Feb. 2007).

With the exception of the Pygmies, who are recognizable by their short stature, it is impossible to distinguish the Mbochi from the Koongo or the Teke (ibid.). In addition, according to the Web site of the Minorities at Risk Project, "there are few noticeable difference[s] between the M'Boshi and the other large ethnic groups in the country (such as the Lari in the south) ... [and t]he only distinguishable characteristic is their language" (31 Dec. 2003). In addition, [translation] "all Congolese...all Bantus resemble each other" (IGRAC 13 Feb. 2007). However, [translation] "a person's placement of phonetic stress may give him or her away, to the extent that, when a Mbochi, a Kongo-Lari or a Bembe, for example, speaks French or one of the other two national languages, the strong influence of their mother tongue is readily detected" (ibid.).

Each Congolese ethnic group has [translation] "characteristic names" (IGRAC 13 Feb. 2007). Mbochi names generally begin with a vowel (ibid.). There are exceptions, such as the name of the Congolese president, Sassou-Nguesso, who is Mbochi, and the Mbochi names Koumou and Peya, which are [translation] "the names of twins" (ibid.). Nevertheless, [translation] "as a result of urbanization, which has fostered mixing through interethnic marriages, these considerations should be treated as relative" (ibid.).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

United States (US). 23 January 2007. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). *The World Factbook*. "Republic of the Congo." <<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cf.html>> [Accessed 1 Feb. 2007]

Les Dépêches de Brazzaville. N.d. "Données géographiques" <[http://www.brazzaville-adiac.com/index.php?action=donnees&page=geo\\_0](http://www.brazzaville-adiac.com/index.php?action=donnees&page=geo_0)>. [Accessed 12 Feb. 2007]

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Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project. 31 December 2003. "Assessment for M'boshi in the Republic of the Congo." <<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=48402>> [Accessed 31 Jan. 2007]

Refugees International. 21 mai 2003. "Forgotten People: Republic of Congo (ROC)." <<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/867/?PHPSESSID=3fc64258eda9d44c2>> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2007].

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** Ethnonet-Database, Freedom House, United States Department of State.

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