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Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): The Banyamulenge (Munyamulenge) ethnic group; whether members of this group are targeted by government authorities

With regard to the words “Banyamulenge” and “Munyamulenge,” it should be noted that the prefix “mu” refers to the singular and the prefix “ba” refers to the plural (Delmas 1950).

The sources consulted by the Research Directorate indicate that the Banyamulenge are Congolese Tutsis who live in the South Kivu [a province located in eastern RDC] (Willame Feb. 1997; Turner Nov. 1997; ICG 17 Nov. 1998, Part 1, 2.1.1). Originally from Rwanda, they settled in the South Kivu region one or two centuries ago (Refugees International 30 Mar. 2000; Willame Feb. 1997; Lemarchand 6 Nov. 1997).

In *Zaire : état de crise et perspectives futures*, a document published for WRITENET, Jean-Claude Willame writes the following concerning the Banyamulenge:

[translation]

The Banyamulenge (literally, the people of Mulenge, a small community located near Uvira at the foot of the Itombwe mountains in South Kivu) were originally Tutsi animal breeders who arrived in Zaire one or two centuries ago. For a long time they have been considered to be fully Zairian; however, they tend to live self-sufficiently and have a sometimes difficult relationship with certain local ethnic groups. Since the late 1960s, Tutsi refugees from Rwanda have tended to gather under the name Banyamulenge so that they can be registered as full Zairian citizens (Feb. 1997).

In its 30 March 2000 bulletin, Refugees International reveals that "hate speech and communal violence have increased alarmingly in the provinces of North and South Kivu," and that this violence is directed at an estimated 150,000 Banyamulenge, who are at risk of violent attack by Mayi-Mayi militia [pro-Kabila tribal militia from North and South Kivu, see RDC33309.F of 14 December 1999]. According to the same source of information, Congolese authorities have questioned the Banyamulenge's right to citizenship despite the fact that they have made the Congo their home for two hundred years (Refugees International 30 Mar. 2000). This was a key issue in the 1996 war that brought President Kabila to power [in May 1997] (ibid.).

In a statement made on 15 September 1998, before the Sub-Committee on Africa, House International Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress, Susan E. Rice, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, explained that

The Congolese Government has failed to resolve the crucial issue of the Banyamulenge citizenship, to ensure that ethnic Tutsis who have lived in the Congo for generations enjoy national rights and privileges. These failures have undermined regional security and contributed to the current perilous situation (United States 15 Sept. 1998).

An article published in *Peace Magazine*, a publication of the Canadian Disarmament Information Service (CANDIS), explains that the attempt by the Congolese authorities to strip the Banyamulenge of their Congolese nationality was the cause of the first rebellion that ousted the late president Mobutu in May 1997, and that the current rebellion began after President Kabila set out to isolate the Banyamulenge (Sept. 2000). The author of the article also states that "it is logical to argue that had the Congolese leaders treated the Banyamulenge as fellow citizens, much of the bloodshed in the [RDC] could have been avoided" (*Peace Magazine* Sept. 2000).

In its 2000 annual report, Amnesty International writes that "the [RDC] government and its supporters continued persecuting members of the Tutsi ethnic group and others who had family or other links with them."

For more information on the treatment of Congolese Tutsis by government authorities and by the population in general, please see RDC35624.F of 11 October 2000.

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 to refugee status or asylum.

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