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COI QUERY

Country of Origin

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Title

The Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) movement, including recruitment practices and prevalence of pressure to join the BDK movement; treatment by BDK members and consequences for individuals refusing to join; availability of state protection

Reference period

January 2019 to 13 March 2024

Topic(s)

1. [Overview of the Bundu dia Kongo](#)
2. [Recruitment practices and treatment upon refusal to join](#)
3. [State protection](#)

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) movement, including recruitment practices and prevalence of pressure to join the BDK movement; treatment by BDK members and consequences for individuals refusing to join; availability of state protection

1. Overview of the Bundu dia Kongo

The Bundu dia Kongo (BDK), which in Kikongo means “The Church or Assembly of the Kongo”,¹ was founded by Zacharie Badienglis, also known as Ne Muanda Nsemi (‘the creative spirit’), in 1969¹ and became official in 1986.² The BDK is a separatist and politico-religious movement, also known as Bundu dia Mayala.³ Nsemi claims to have received a revelation from the “Archangel of the Kongo”.⁴ Nsemi is considered a ‘thorn in the side’ of DRC’s political establishment.⁵

The BDK ‘advocates a return to African authenticity and bases its teachings on visions revealed to Nsemi by the spirits of his people’.⁶ BBC reported that BDK seeks to ‘revive the ancient Kongo kingdom’⁷ and campaign to restore a ‘monarchy’ in parts of DR Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola and Gabon.⁸ The BDK also advocates for greater autonomy for Kongo Central and, according to Nsemi, the Bakongo people are ‘oppressed’ and have limited access to high-level positions, even in their home province [Kongo Central].⁹ The BDK also calls for the expelling of non-Bakongo people from Kongo Central province.¹⁰

BDK followers worship in a temple known as “zikua”,¹¹ with the first established in Kinshasa and is the ‘original center’ for recruiting disciples known as “makesa”.¹¹

¹ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

² BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#); Jeune Afrique, RDC : dix choses à savoir sur Ne Muanda Nsemi, le chef de la secte Bundu dia Kongo, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Crisis24, DRC: Religious followers clash with security forces in Boma (Kongo-Central) April 15, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴ BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵ BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#); Reuters, DR Congo police arrest leader of separatist cult after deadly clashes, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷ BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#); HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸ BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#); Jeune Afrique, RDC : dix choses à savoir sur Ne Muanda Nsemi, le chef de la secte Bundu dia Kongo, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰ BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#); HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

The provincial government classified the BDK as a “terrorist organization” in 2008.¹² BDK members carry sticks and wooden weapons, and to a limited extent, locally-made rifles.¹³

According to BDK, it has ‘thousands’ of supporters, although these numbers have not been independently verified.¹⁴

2. Recruitment practices and treatment upon refusal to join

Information on recruitment practices and treatment upon refusal to join could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

3. State protection

Information on state protection for individuals fearing reprisals by BDK members for refusing to join could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query. However, the following could be of interest.

Between 13 and 24 April 2020, security forces carried out a crackdown on the BDK in several towns of Kongo Central province and Kinshasa.¹⁵ The police raid on 22 April 2020 in Songololo, Kongo Central, resulted in 15 deaths, and the raid on Nsemi’s residence in Kinshasa on 24 April 2020, left 33 people killed,¹⁶ and Nsemi’s arrest.¹⁷ Nsemi was taken to a psychological centre¹⁸ and diagnosed with ‘a mental health disorder caused by “repeated stress”’.¹⁹ Sources reported in October 2023 that Nsemi died from an unnamed illness.²⁰

The raids took place after Nsemi published on 12 April 2020 a newsletter called ‘Kongo Dieto’, or ‘Our Kongo’, urging his supporters to “stand up and chase every Muluba, every Mungala, and every Muswahili [people from other ethnic groups]” out of the Kongo Central province and to be “ruthless” against them’.²¹ He also declared himself ‘president’ of the “Federal Republic of Kongo Central”.²² Between 13 and 15 April, ‘hundreds’ of BDK members set up roadblocks

¹² HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#); BBC, DR Congo's 'prophet' leader of Bundu Dia Kongo arrested, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Reuters, DR Congo police arrest leader of separatist cult after deadly clashes, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#); AFP, Le chef de BDK arrêté à Kinshasa transféré dans un centre psychiatrique, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰ Digital Congo, DRC: Ne Mwanda Nsemi will be buried in Sukumalongo, his native village in Luozi., 10 November 2023, [url](#); Jeune Afrique, En RDC, décès du leader politico-religieux Ne Muanda Nsemi, 18 October 2023, [url](#)

²¹ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²² HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

in Boma, Kisantu, Sona-Bata, Lemba, and Songololo, ‘chanting anti-ethnic slogans and threatening “foreign ethnic groups”’.²³ The police reportedly fired indiscriminately at the demonstrators and detained around 200 BDK members, including children; 47 of the detainees were kept in prison and charged with “insurrection, rebellion, illegal possession of weapons of war, and incitement to tribal hatred”.²⁴

Previous crackdowns took place in Kongo Central in 2007 and 2008, leaving around 300 BDK members and bystanders killed and their bodies dumped into the Congo River or mass graves²⁵, and in Kinshasa in 2017.²⁶ Between January and March and during August 2017, as part of a crackdown against BDK members, ‘at least 90 people’ were killed by state security forces in Kinshasa and Kongo Central.²⁷ According to Human Rights Watch, no ‘independent and transparent judicial investigation has been conducted into the abuses committed by state security forces’ in Kinshasa and Kongo Central in 2007, 2008 and 2017.²⁸ According to NGO Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l’Homme (ASADHO), cited by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 33 BDK members who had been detained in 2017 continued in detention in 2022, with some of them ‘sentenced to death or to life imprisonment or to imprisonment for several years’.²⁹ Digital Congo, a local news source, reported on 1 November 2023 that seven followers of BDK had been released after 15 years imprisonment.³⁰ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

²³ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵ Reuters, DR Congo police arrest leader of separatist cult after deadly clashes, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸ HRW, DR Congo: Bloody Crackdown on Political Religious Group, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary: Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration Democratic Republic of the Congo – July to December 2022, 01 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁰ Digital Congo, RDC: Followers of Ne Mwanda Nsemi released after 15 years in prison for “insurrection”, 1 November 2023, [url](#)

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