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Republic of the Congo: Treatment of the Lari and the Vili by the government; whether there are conflicts between them and any minorities and, if so, the nature and frequency of those conflicts (2005-2010)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Main ethnic groups in the Republic of the Congo

The website of the daily *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville* states the following:

[Translation]

Nearly all Congolese people are Bantu; the non-Bantu, including the Pygmies, represent only 3% of the population. The Bantu population comprises 64 ethnic groups with ties to 10 or so large groups, the biggest ones being the Kongo, the Teke, the M'Boshi and the Sangha.

The Bakongo is the largest group in the Congo and is present throughout the southern part of the country, from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire on the Atlantic coast. This group includes the Lari (or Balari), who live around Brazzaville; the Vili or Bavili, who live around Pointe-Noire; and the Yombe or Bayombé, who live in the Mayombe Massif, as well as the Babembe, the Basoundi, the Bakamba and, of course, the Bakongo. (*Les Dépêches de Brazzaville* n.d.; see also MRG n.d. and GlobalSecurity.org 27 Apr. 2005)

Treatment of the Lari and the Vili by the government

A report published by the research group Minorities at Risk (MAR) explains that the M'Boshi and the Teke have long been the political opponents of the Lari (MAR n.d.). According to that report, since Denis Sassou Nguesso, a M'Boshi, came to power in 1997, the Lari have faced "considerable political discrimination" (ibid.). They have also faced "repression (most recently in 2005) at the hands of the M'Boshi controlled government" (ibid.). There has allegedly been some indifference to the fact that the Lari school system has been damaged during the confrontations (ibid.). Nevertheless, the government has reportedly taken measures to increase the number of Lari in the armed forces, "although progress has been slow", and in 2007, a new process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was begun (ibid.). This information could not be corroborated, and no information on the government's treatment of the Vili could be found among

the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Conflicts between the ethnic groups

According to two sources consulted by the Research Directorate, the Lari and the Vili, who are part of the country's ethnic majority, are not involved in any conflicts, either with each other or with other ethnic groups in the country (professor of sociology 20 Oct. 2010; OCDH 20 Oct. 2010).

In a 20 October 2010 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of sociology at the Université Marien Ngouabi in Brazzaville, who is also a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Contemporary Africa (Interdisciplinaire groupe de recherche sur l'Afrique contemporaine, IGRAC) (IGRAC n.d.), stated that the country [translation] "has been very stable" since the government signed a peace agreement in 2003 with the "Ninja" rebels, who considered themselves to be representatives of the Lari. According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), this agreement led to "relative peace" (n.d.). The professor added that the conflicts that shook the country were political rather than ethnic and that [translation] "they are matters for the politicians" (professor of sociology 20 Oct. 2010). Similarly, in a 20 October 2010 telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights (Observatoire congolais des droits de l'homme, OCDH), which is affiliated with the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) (FIDH 7 June 2010), stated that the various civil wars that the media have presented as conflicts pitting the Lari and the Vili, who support former prime minister Bernard Kolélas, against the M'Boshi, who support President Denis Sassou Nguesso, and against the Nibolek, who support former president Pascal Lissouba, are merely [translation] "manipulations by Congolese politicians." According to the representative, various ethnic groups are represented in the militias of these politicians (OCDH 20 Oct. 2010). This is particularly true of the "Cobras," Sassou Nguesso's militia, which was made up of people of various ethnic backgrounds, including many Lari (ibid.). A report published by GlobalSecurity.org also points out that, despite the general trends, each politician has supporters from various ethnic groups (27 Apr. 2005).

Moreover, according to the OCDH representative, although there are cases of attacks in a settling of accounts on the basis of ethnic origin, these are generally considered to be isolated events (20 Oct. 2010). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Minority Rights Group International (MRG). N.d. "Congo Overview." *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous People*. <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4141&tmpl=printpage>> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2010]

Observatoire congolais des droits de l'homme (OCDH). 20 October 2010.
Telephone interview with a representative.

Professor of sociology at the Université Marien Ngouabi. 20 October 2010.
Telephone interview.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to reach representatives of the Association pour les droits de l'homme et l'univers carcéral (ADHUC) and the Mouvement congolais pour la démocratie et le développement intégral (MCDDI) in Brazzaville were unsuccessful.

Internet sites including: African Press Organization (APO), Afrik.com, Afrol News, AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *La Conscience* [Kinshasa], European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Grioo.com, InfoSud Belgique (InfoSud), Internationale de l'éducation (IE), Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF), Réseau des médias francophones (MEDIAP), Reuters, Sangonet, Trésor de la langue française au Québec (TLFQ), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), United States - Department of State, Voice of America (VOA), World Organization Against Torture (OMCT).

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