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Burundi: Treatment of the Baganwa [singular Ganwa or Umganwa], members of the former royal family, by the authorities (2014-November 2015)

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1. Background

Sources indicate that the Baganwa [or Ganwa] are one of the four ubwoko [categories] or "ethnic communities" that make up the society of Burundi (Researcher 10 Nov. 2015; PMP 6 Nov. 2015). According to sources, the Baganwa exist alongside the Hutu [Bahutu], Tutsi [Batutsi] and Twa [Batwa] (ibid.; Professor 28 Oct. 2015).

Sources describe the Baganwa as descendants of the princes under the Burundian Monarchy (Researcher 10 Nov. 2015; UN 22 Sept. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of history at the University of Burundi, in Bujumbura, noted that the Baganwa were [translation] "a leading dynasty of aristocrats" under the monarchy (28 Oct. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Parliamentary Monarchist Party (PMP), a Burundian political party created in 2005 by a member of a branch of the royal family (IMC June 2013), specified that the king selected the majority of chiefdom leaders among the Baganwa (PMP 6 Nov. 2015). A researcher specializing in the Great Lakes region, who is affiliated with the France-based Institute of Research for Development [1] and provided information to the Research Directorate based on her personal experience, stated that the Baganwa occupied leading positions in the administration and army during the colonial period (10 Nov. 2015).

According to the Professor, Baganwa have been confused with Tutsi [Batutsi] (Professor 28 Oct. 2015; UN 22 Sept. 2015; Researcher 10 Nov. 2015). The President of the PMP, who identifies as a member of the Baganwa, stated that he was [translation] "obligated" to identify as a Batutsi to register his party (PMP 6 Nov. 2015).

For further information on the Baganwa see Response to Information Request BDI103150.

1.1. Situation of the Baganwa Since 1966

The researcher notes that the Baganwa dynasty fell, along with the monarchy, after the establishment of the Republic in 1966 (10 Nov. 2015). According to the Professor, [translation] "the Baganwa were progressively excluded from power positions" and [translation] "even marginalized," following the end of the Burundian Monarchy in 1966 (28 Oct. 2015). A letter drafted in August 2015 by Ildephonse Rugema, representing the Burundian Constitutional Monarchist League, which is available on Bujumbura News' website, an European-based news agency providing information on Burundi (Bujumbura News n.d.), calls on the UN Secretary General to pay attention to the [translation] "exclusion of the [Ba]ganwa" (Burundian Constitutional Monarchist League 18 Aug. 2015). This letter states that [translation]

With the emergence of the Republic in 1966, the Ganwa ethnic group was brutally suppressed from the spoken or written language and official speech. ...Progressively, the Ganwa ethnic group was systematically excluded from the sociopolitical life of the country and constrained to non-existence... (ibid.)

Further information on the Burundian Constitutional Monarchist League could not been found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Professor indicated that the Baganwa have been striving to have their identity recognized by the Burundian state through associations that they have created (28 Oct. 2015). Sources report that in November 2013, the Association Fraternité Ishaka, called for "political and social inclusion" of the Baganwa in the Constitution (Burundi-Agnews 24 Nov. 2013; Iwacu-Burundi.org 20 Nov. 2013). In its letter to the UN, the Burundian Constitutional Monarchist League asks, among other requests, for the [translation] "rehabilitation of the Ganwa ethnic group" (18 Aug. 2015). According to the Researcher, [translation] "today, the PMP is still the only party that openly represents the interests of those who are considered to be monarchists" (10 Nov. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Secretary General of the International Monarchist Conference (IMC), which comprises 80 monarchist organizations across 38 countries, including the PMP of Burundi (IMC 13 Sept. 2011), stated that the current President of the PMP [translation] "serves as the spokesperson and defender of the [Baganwa's] cause" (ibid. 4 Nov. 2015). He also added that between 2010 and 2015, monarchists were first allied with the government of Burundi; however, because they did not obtain recognition as Baganwas, the PMP later allied with a minor party (ibid.). An article by the Burundian Media Group Iwacu-burundi.org [2] quotes the President of the PMP as stating that the decision of the PMP to join the COPA coalition [Coalition for participative and pacified elections -Coalition pour les élections participatives et apaisées] was [translation] "motivated by the fact that the [COPA] is non-discriminatory" against the Baganwa (Iwacu-Burundi.org 16 March 2015).

2. Perception and Treatment of the Baganwa by Burundian Authorities

According to the President of the PMP, the Burundian authorities deny the existence of the Baganwa community (PMP 6 Nov. 2015). However, according to the Burundian delegation to the UN Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Baganwa are [translation] "recognized by the Burundian society"(UN 22 Sept. 2015). According to the same source, although the Baganwa are not recognized as a minority group in the Constitution, they are [translation] "not a disadvantaged group" (ibid.).

The Professor provided the following information regarding the perception and treatment of the Baganwa by Burundian authorities: [translation]

The Baganwa are perceived by the Burundian authorities the same as the other Burundians. No hostile treatment or preferential treatment is reserved to the Baganwa

as a group. ... On the political scene, they do not have a distinct identity. (20 Oct. 2015)

The Secretary General of the IMC stated that [translation]

[it] is currently difficult to say that [Ba]ganwa are victims of persecution as no statistics exist, but there is no doubt that they are excluded from key [political] positions, due to an old rivalry between the former monarchy and the current Republic. (4 Nov. 2015)

Further information on the political exclusion of the Baganwa could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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.

Notes

[1] The Institut de recherche pour le développement [Institute of Research for Development] is "a public science and technology establishment (EPST) under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs" (IRD n.d.)

[2] Iwacu-Burundi.org is an online media group in Burundi, providing information on local politics, economics, society, culture and sports in English, French and Kurundi, as well as a weekly and monthly paper edition within Burundi (Iwacu-Burundi.org n.d.).

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Researcher, Institut de recherche pour le développement - [Institute of Research for Development]. 10 November 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

United Nations (UN). 22 September 2015. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. "Le Comité des droits économiques, sociaux et culturels examine le rapport initial du Burundi." [Accessed 12 Nov. 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Associate Professor of Human Geography at Oxford; The Burudian Ligue of Human Rights - Iteka; Centre indépendant de recherches et d'initiative pour le dialogue.

Internet sites, including: Actions des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT-Burundi); Africanarguments.org; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; Association de reflexion et d'information sur le Burundi; Eastern Africa Centre for Constitutional Development; ecoi.net; Encyclopedia Britannica; Factiva; Freedom House; Jeune Afrique; Human Rights Watch; Insight On Conflict; Integrated Regional Information Networks; Minority Rights Group International; Norwegian Council for Africa; Panapress; United Nations - Refworld, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United States - Department of State, University of Pennsylvania.

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