# THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION OF THE BANYAMULENGE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present document seeks to draw attention to the situation of insecurity and violence in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands of the south Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with a particular emphasis on the ongoing systematic victimization of the Banyamulenge community, whom some of their attackers such as the various Mai Mai groups, wrongly considers as "immigrants or invaders of their land."[1] Other militias from Burundi and Rwanda are also alleged to be involved in these systematic attacks which are directed against members of the Banyamulenge community living in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands since August 2018.[2] The attacks follow a pattern: they target and kill people, burn houses and destroy food crops and cattle in order to starve any survivor to death.

These attacks take place in a region where the regular Congolese army and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) are deployed but are unwilling to prevent or stop the ongoing atrocities. The situation has triggered an extreme humanitarian crisis in this remote corner of the DRC which remains largely unreported. Credible sources have pointed to around 200 villages burnt at ashes from Bijombo to Minembwe via Itombwe and Kamombo. Consequently, internally displaced local population can be estimated around hundred thousand. School and health facilities are being totally decimated (despite few in Minembwe centre); local population, mainly cattle herders are being impoverished in this region to the extent that from March 2019 up to now, roughly 40,000 cows have been killed or looted by the attackers. Banyamulenge community as cattle herders but mostly seen as 'invaders' are extremely targeted and currently are concentrated in few villages of Minembwe Centre.

Over the last three decades the DRC has witnessed many episodes of conflict that have resulted in high numbers of deaths and widespread victimization of the country's civilian population. Such victimisation is possible because of the prevailing lawlessness in the country and the inability of the government to project power across the country and protect its citizens. However, in some areas of the country such as the eastern provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri, members of some communities like the Banyamulenge are also targeted because of their ethnicity. It has been widely reported that some atrocities are

[1] STEARNS, J et al, Mai Mai Yakutumba: Resistance and Racketeering in Fizi South Kivu, Rift Valley Institute, Usalamawetu project, London/UK and Nairobi/ Kenya 2013, p.28.
[2] UN SC, *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2019/469, 7 June 2019.

committed by members of local armed groups, (militias or regular armed forces); while others are committed by foreign armed groups from neighbouring countries of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.[3]

The reason for reporting these events is twofold: to document current dynamics of a destructive conflict that is hardly reported on and to warn the international community of the potential spill-over of the conflict across the whole great lakes' region with serious destabilizing consequences. The regional situation is merged with local grievances in which the Banyamulenge are considered 'non-native' by many Congolese and thus placed at the center of the crisis in Intombwe-Minembwe highlands. In order to better understand the current security situation of the Banyamulenge, it is important to look back at their identity in relation to different conflicts that have plagued the DRC over the years.

## *2. BACKGROUND ON THE BANYAMULENGE IN DRC CYCLES OF CONFLICTS*

### 2.1. The Banyamulenge in a Nutshell

The name "Banyamulenge" refers to a Tutsi community mainly living in the "Itombwe - Minembwe" highlands of the South Kivu province in eastern DRC. The community settled in the DRC prior to the establishment of the country's boundaries by colonial powers. Similar to all ethnic communities living the Eastern Congo region, the eponym Banyamulenge comes from a place called "Mulenge" in the Uvira territory of South Kivu.[4] Mulenge was one of the earliest recorded settlements in the area before Belgian takeover of the territory. Although some Banyamulenge officials live in the capital Kinshasa and others have fled from the successive episodes of violence which took place in the DRC and settled in neighbouring countries (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania) and beyond, the Mulenge-Itombwe-Minembwe geographic area is the Banyamulenge territorial homeland. The Banyamulenge speak Kinyamulenge, a language closely related to Kinyarwanda and Kirundi, with influences from local Congolese languages.

Between 1967 and 1998, around 40.000 Banyamulenge were settled in Vyura, Moba and Kalemie areas of the then Shaba/Katanga region/province. However, during the second Congo war that started in 1998, DRC military under Laurent Kabila in collaboration with local population and diverse militias launched systematically armed attacks against them.

[3] As documented since 2004 by the successive reports of the UN Group of Expert established by the Security Council through S/RES/1533 (2004) and subsequent resolutions listed at https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1533/panel-of-experts/expert-reports (accessed on 2 September 2019) .

[4] Ubuntu, Security Situation of the Banyamulenge in the DRC, July 2015, pp.2-5.

Around 600 individuals were killed, their villages burnt down, cattle looted, and the survivors were forcibly expelled from the Katanga province. They settled back in South Kivu, their province of origin. The expulsion of Banyamulenge in Katanga has constituted a bad precedent reinforcing the notion of 'invaders' in South-Kivu. Local militias in South-Kivu have been vowed and dream to achieve the same goal.

### 2.2. The Colonial Roots of Banyamulenge Exclusion in Governance

The exclusion of the Banyamulenge from governance in DRC started during the colonial era when Belgian authorities abolished their previously recognized traditional authority that carried a recognition of land rights. Writing towards the end of the colonial era, Weis also confirmed that during Belgian colonization, the Banyamulenge faced severe discrimination because "they were threatening to reduce the influence of the Europeans over the Congo/ DRC and to rule over other Congolese communities."[5] As noted by Turner, the Banyamulenge were reputed to be uncooperative with the colonial administration and therefore were excluded from local administration.[6] The importance of this colonial legacy cannot be understated in a context where colonial recognition of traditional authority carried with it entitlement to communal land rights over ethnically defined territories. People from other ethnic communities living within an ethnically defined "chieftaincy" became considered foreigners in their own country. Accordingly, the Banyamulenge mainly living in the Uvira, Fizi and Mwenga territories live in territories that were ethnically conferred to the Bafulero, Bavira and Babembe. Though mingled with other dynamics and political manoeuvres, this is of great relevance today, since the narratives of those militias targeting the Banyamulenge revolve around the felt necessity to expel them from usurped lands.

### 2.3. The Banyamulenge in Post-Colonial Zaire/DRC

#### *(i) The Mulele-Simba insurrection in South Kivu*

Six months following the Congo's independence in 1960, its first premier Minister Lumumba was assassinated. His former Education Minister Pierre Mulele launched an uprising against the putsch that overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister Lumumba. This insurgency reached the areas of Fizi, Uvira and Mwenga territories where the Banyamulenge lived, under the name of the Simba-Mulele Rebellion. Laurent Desire Kabila, who eventually became DRC's president in 1996, was among Simba's rebel leaders. At that time, he commanded the rebellion from the '' Hewabora'' mountains in Fizi. At the beginning, some

[5] Ibid.
[6] T. TURNER, *The Congo War, conflict, myth and reality*, London & New York, Zed Books, 2007, pp.81-82.

Banyamulenge joined the Mulele-Simba rebellion, but soon after, they withdrew their support because this rebellion started looting their cattle. The Banyamulenge were also specifically targeted by the rebels due to their ethnicity as that rebellion considered them as 'capitalists' and citizens of a second zone or foreigners. Consequently, this war quickly turned into an inter-ethnic conflict in the Itombwe -Minembwe highlands, with numerous casualties.[7]

***(ii) The Banyamulenge & Successive Post-Independence DRC Administrations***

Successive DRC administrations since independence have either taken measures to target the Banyamulenge or have remained inactive bystanders as members of this community were victimized. During the Mobutu era, between 70-80s, the nationality laws were changed to accommodate demands from extremist forces seeking to depict the Banyamulenge and other Kinyarwanda speaking Congolese as foreigners. During the national consultation known as *Conférence nationale souveraine (CNS)* held between 1992 and 1994, these communities were excluded from deliberations and a resolution passed later in 1995 by the Zairian Parliament formalized that exclusion on grounds of "dubious nationality."

Through the Vangu Mambweni's commission instigated by an influential Fizi native Anzuluni Bembe, these decisions taken in Kinshasa were followed up on the ground where local authorities such as the administrator of the Uvira territory, Shweka Mutabazi, or Ngabo Lwabanji, a former vice governor in South Kivu called for the mass expulsion of the Banyamulenge to Rwanda and the confiscation of their property by December 1995. There followed mass killing in the region inhabited by Banyamulenge; but also, it partly instigated 1996 wars. Manipulated by local politics, local militias are yet dreaming to achieve this 'dream.' It is worth noting that that Mr. Ngabo Lwabanji is currently the interior Minister at the Provincial level in South Kivu, a position of influence that revives memories of the past for the Banyamulenge.

During Kabila's rule, several massacres of Banyamulenge and other Congolese Tutsi were carried out, particularly during the second Congo war that started in August 1998. Killings were often fuelled by hate speeches delivered by high-ranking authorities like Kabila himself and his former Private Secretary and Chief of Cabinet Yerodia Ndombasi.[8] The Kabila administration further actively collaborated with the Mai Mai local militias in South Kivu in

[7] STEARNS, J., et al., Mai Mia Yakutumba, Resistance and racketeering in Fizi, South Kivu, Rift Valley Institute, London and Nairobi, 2013, p.16.
[8] ZUPPI, A. L., Immunity v. Universal jurisdiction: The Yerodia Ndombasi decision of the International Court of Justice, Louisiana Law Review, Volume 63, number 2, 2003, p.211-312.

order to expel the Banyamulenge and generally Congolese Tutsi from the DRC. Retaliation of violence or atrocities committed by rebel groups in the Kivus are widely interpreted as committed by Banyamulenge on the local Mai Mai's perspective; widening trust among local communities. These accusations have been widely grounded mobilization of local militias to sustain their stance against 'invaders.'

During After the Kabila's assassination in 2001, victimization of the Banyamulenge continued under the rule of his son Joseph Kabila Kabange. For instance, in 2004, government soldiers, then commanded by General Mbudja Mabe, killed many Banyamulenge in Bukavu, and survivors were forced to flee to neighbouring countries to the East. During the same period, Banyamulenge soldiers were also killed in several parts in the South Kivu Province. Examples are those who were deployed in Walungu, Shabunda, areas who were killed by their fellow soldiers from other Communities. A few months later, more than 166 Banyamulenge who had fled violence in Bukavu and other parts of the South Kivu province and had sought protection in Burundi, were killed in Gatumba in August 2004. While this massacre took place on Burundian territory, several reports, including UN investigations, corroborated that the attackers originated from the DRC and involved a mix of Burundian, Rwandan and Congolese militias and possibly members of the DRC military and intelligence.[9] At different times, several sources have also alleged the continuous support of the Kabila Kabange administration to various Mai-Mai militias in multiple attacks against the Banyamulenge in South Kivu province. Consequently, the continuous victimization of the Banyamulenge during the Kabila father and son's administrations led many members of the Banyamulenge community to abandon their villages. Some became internally displaced and other forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries and beyond.

The Tshisekedi administration has only been installed but it is clear now that attempts to cleanse the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands of Banyamulenge are in full gear with the resumption of violence in the area that more or less coincided with Tshisekedi's accession to power after a period of simmering tensions. The current systematic killings and destructions of Banyamulenge villages present all signs of ethnic cleansing while the government seems unwilling to counter these attacks. There are even witness accounts of a possible involvement of government troops in these attacks because the Mai Mai are killing the Banyamulenge, burning their villages and looting their properties in their presence. Sources on ground also

[9] Burundi: Le Massacre de Gatumba Crimes de Guerre et Agendas Politiques Document d'information de Human Rights Watch, septembre 2004.

allege the provision of the munitions by the FARDC to the Mai Mai involved in these attacks. While Mai Mai are being supported by Burundian and Rwandan armed groups, Congolese security services are suspected to have colluded during the establishment of these groups since 2015.

## *3. RENEWED VIOLENCE IN EASTERN CONGO AND ACTORS INVOLVED*

### 3.1. Resumption of Violence in Eastern Congo: Ituri, North-Kivu and South Kivu

Eastern DRC is currently witnessing a resumption of armed violence led by wide range of national and foreign armed groups. In Ituri province, several people have been killed and hundreds of thousands of others fled an explosion of 'ethnic violence' in Mahagi and Djugu areas since early June 2019. In North Kivu province, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan Islamist armed rebellion which has established its operational base in the Beni Territory, has become one of the most active, and violent armed groups in the area.[10] ADF has successfully established a vast stronghold and extended its recruitment network across the region.[11] Although the activities of different armed groups in Ituri and North Kivu are widely reported and have attracted much attention from the international community, those taking place in Intombwe- Minembwe highlands in the South Kivu are not.

In South Kivu province, a national coalition of Mai Mai militias supported by local ethnic groups, including those led by General Amuri William Yakutumba, Mupekanya, Ebuela, Aochi and Mulumba has emerged in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands, homeland of the Banyamulenge. Based on a rhetoric of ethnic cleansing directed against the Banyamulenge, these armed groups are conducting violent attacks against innocent civilians generally and the Banyamulenge specifically. This continuing violence spreads physical and economic insecurity across the region. The attacks described take place in the context of a weak state authority, a complex and unstable political transition, the inaction and complicity[12] of the FARDC as well as the apparent indifference of the world's largest international peacekeeping deployment (MONUSCO). Besides the Mai Mai militias, the area was already also affected by other security issues including activities of a self-defence armed group known as "Gumino" that is linked to the Banyamulenge. As per the United Nations, Gumino could has

[10] Beevor, E. (2019) The Allied Democratic Forces: The DRC's most deadly jihadist group? https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/01/adf-jihadist-group-drc.
[11] United Nations Security Council (2018) Midterm report of the group of experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/01/adf-jihadist-group-drc.
[12] Stearns, J. (2019) La rebellion de la CNPSC: Marginalisation sociale et complicité de l'Etat au Sud Kivu, Groupe d'Etude sur le Congo, http://congoresearchgroup.org/cnpsc-rapport-fr-2/?lang=fr.

had links with other foreign militias though that lasted for a short while. The term "Gumino" literally means stay here. This militia group differs from other militias operating in that area by its ideology. According to different sources on ground, the purpose of this armed group is to defend the Banyamulenge when they are attacked but not to expel any other community from the South Kivu province.

The foreign armed groups include Burundian rebel groups : (1) the National Forces of Liberation (FNL) formally Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (FNL-PALIPEHUTU), (2) the *Résistance pour un Etat de Droit* (RED-Tabara) and (3) the *Forces Républicaines du Burundi* (FOREBU) which is currently known as Forces Populaires du Burundi (FPB) and two Rwandan armed groups: (1) the *Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération de Rwanda* (FDLR) - a rebel group led by remnants of those who carried out the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and (2) elements of the Rwandan National Congress (RNC). However, various local sources confirm that members of this last group have recently moved from the South Kivu to North Kivu province.

All these groups continue to perpetrate horrible crimes, looting natural resources, using sexual violence as a weapon of war, conducting selective massacres, inflicting inhumane and degrading treatments and causing forced mass displacement. Following this wide humanitarian crisis prevailing in eastern DRC provinces, the UNHCR has estimated the number of internally displaced up to June 2019 at 4,5 million.[13] This means that the crisis in the highlands of Itombwe and Minimwe worsens the situation.

### 3.2. Domestic and Regional Dimension of the Conflicts

The ongoing insecurity and humanitarian crisis in Itombwe-Minembwe highlands has local and regional implications. The renewed belligerency of local Mai Mai armed militias continues to launch violent attacks against civilian population, with the Banyamulenge as the main target in South Kivu. Their killings add further dimensions to a deepening security crisis between Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, weakness of the president Tshisekedi's administration, which could violently ripple across the Great Lakes region if appropriate action is not taken to curb violence. The Itombwe-Minembwe high lands and Ruzizi areas are of strategic importance and have a strong presence of national and foreign armed groups.

[13] UNHCR, Massive displacement reported in north-eastern DRC amid new violence, https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2019/6/5d089ee54/massive-displacement-reported-north-eastern-drc-amid-new-violence.html.

This has represented a dreamed opportunity for some DRC political elites who continue to manipulate ethnicity for their political gains by fuelling narratives about the Banyamulenge as 'non-indigenous' or 'foreigners' in their own country.

Since the area borders both Burundi and Rwanda, the conflict should be read against the backdrop of dynamics in those countries as well. In 2015 political crisis in Burundi triggered attacks on many villages in the Ruzizi plain, with looting and the arbitrary arrests of members of local Banyamulenge cattle herding communities. Local herders were targeted by Burundian forces accusing them of supporting Burundi-armed opposition groups and for purported links with Rwanda's intelligence services. The violence and insecurity in South Kivu are therefore intricately linked to regional security.

Over the last three years, Rwanda's relationship with Uganda and Burundi has deteriorated due to, among others, activities of foreign armed groups including those operating in South Kivu. It is recorded that foreign armed groups have created coalitions with the local Mai Mai groups against the Banyamulenge. These regional security dynamics have enabled proliferation of small arms in South Kivu and created conditions for the emergence of multiple armed militia constantly targeting innocent civilians. Current dynamics of insecurity, violence and specific threats facing the Banyamulenge follow a pattern. They are caught between local militias and foreign armed groups in a security crisis which can only be resolved if the international community uses all levels to pressure regional governments to resolve the issue of armed groups operating in South Kivu and beyond. The failure of MONUSCO to work with all relevant actors in stopping violence is a manifestation of yet another failure of the international community to live up to its 'Responsibility to Protect' pledges.

## 4. *ETHNIC CLEANSING TARGETTING THE BANYAMULENGE IN SOUTH KIVU*

### 4.1. Systematic Attacks against the Banyamulenge since February 2019

The dynamics of violence in Itombwe-Minembwe high lands are complex. They are rooted in a coalescence of several factors and involve participation of multiple actors with different, and at times intersecting agendas. At first glance, they have all appearances of inter-community confrontations. However, a closer look at the actors involved, the dynamics of violence and the context of the clashes shows that the Banyamulenge are the main target of violence and that ethnic cleansing is the goal of the militias. Recent violence targets and kills Banyamulenge and lootings of their property. It involves systematic burning of entire

Banyamulenge villages, the rhetoric now used by Mai Mai Militia reveals a concerted plan to cleanse the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands of the Banyamulenge presence. Illustrations of some cases revel by how this plan has wider implications to cleanse this community.

On 26th February 2019, Banyamulenge cattle herders were killed and their cattle looted in the region known as Matanganika distant of 30-40 Kms westward of Minembwe. 22 Banyamulenge cattle herders were murdered, some decapitated. While confrontation between Banyamulenge local defence who were yet trying to save theirs in Matanganika, Mai Mai groups supported by foreign militias dodged and launched attacks around Minembwe villages. As per local sources and public declaration of key Babembe and Bafuliro influential figures, Mai Mai have been aiming to destroy Minembwe because it has been enacted as Rural Municipality. The discourse around destroying Minembwe builds on how Banyamulenge living the Rural Municipality do not deserve this privilege. Hence, launching violence in Matanganika stood as an opportunity to find a room to attack Banyamulenge's homeland Minembwe.

Kawaza Nyakwana, a village chief from the Banyindu community was killed by armed men on 4 May 2019. This killing was linked to a commandant, who belongs to the Banyamulenge community, who was also later killed in non-elucidated circumstances yet. Kawaza was suspected to have killed one of the escort men of the commandant in question. As the death of Kawaza was linked to a commandant belonging to the Banyamulenge community, this led to an escalation of violence.

Though the incident took place in Kamombo's neighborhood, attacks that followed Kawaza's death led to more generalised attacks against Banyamulenge in Kamombo, Mibunda and Minembwe; Mai Mai militias operated in a seemingly coordinated move. Some armed mem supported by foreign groups could come from far away as 100-150 Kms presumably to revenge Kawaza. Consequent to these attacks, 40 people were killed, and 50 villages of Banyamulenge burnt down and estimated 35,000 villagers fled for their lives after losing everything. The way attacks targeted even villages distant of 50 Kms from where the incident took place shows that the plan was to wipe out Banyamulenge community in this region. Besides gun attacks, public discourses and mobilization keep referring to vacate 'invaders' and expel them from the DRC. These attacks and killings involved a large coalition of Mai Mai militia from across the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands supported by foreign armed groups from Burundi and Rwanda.

From May to early October 2019, Minembwe centre where Monusco's deployment is based and the Headquarter of Rural Municipality has been attacked more than 6 times (dates of incidents are recorded). Some of these attacks have lasted for a week of intense fighting while local militias are claiming to occupy or destroy the office of the Rural Municipality. Far of 40-50 Kms North-West of Minembwe, localities of Itombwe-Mibunda have been attacked by Mai Mai in coalition with Burundian groups for more than 8 times (dates of incidents are recorded). The region of Kamombo-Kabara eastward of Itombwe-Mibunda has been attacked for more than 5 times.

All these attacks have pushed Banyamulenge deprived of their cattle and all belongings and have no other choice of fleeing if not Minembwe and Mikenke. Banyamulenge are currently concentrated in these two localities comprising almost less than 10 villages. Consequent to these similar events of those that took place in Bijombo (Uvira territory and likely destroyed) due to contestation of Banyamulenge leading a customary chieftaincy known as *groupement*, the ongoing crisis has squeezed Banyamulenge and reveals to their rivals that expelling them is yet possible.

Systematic attacks against the Banyamulenge have killed more than 200 people and many others have gone missing in this region since 2019. In the same incidents, roughly 40.000 cows have been looted or killed by the attackers; more than 200,000 people became internally displaced and are without shelters as their villages estimated around 200 have been burnt to ashes, 60 schools and 20 health centres have been destroyed. Besides depriving the victims of their main sources of livelihood, the looted cows are used to buy guns and ammunition and reward fighters, thus serving to perpetuate conflict. Thousands of individuals, particularly ethnic Banyamulenge, have been forced out their homes and live in precarious conditions with limited humanitarian assistance. While the region has witnessed episodes of cattle raiding over the time, the accompanying killings and systematic nature of the attacks in recent years, particularly since last year, have been unprecedented.

### 4.2. The security situation of Banyamulenge across the Great Lakes region

According to UNHCR reports of 2018, around 85,000 Congolese refugees live in different refugee camps in Rwanda.[14] The Banyamulenge from South Kivu and other members of the

[14] The UNHCR, UN Refugees Angency, Congolese situation: Responding to the needs of displaced Congolese and refugees, Annex –Rwanda, Supplementary Appeal, January –December 2018, pp.2-3. Available at http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2018%20Congolese%20Situation%20SB%20-%20Rwanda.pdf, Last accessed on July 2nd, 2019.

Tutsi community from the North Kivu province form the majority of the Congolese occupants of these camps. In Rwanda these refugees are dispatched in the Gihembe, Gicumbi as well as Ngarama refugee camps in the Western and Northern provinces. Another UNHCR report on the Congolese refugee camps in Burundi estimated numbers around 81,000 in December 2018,[15]among which the Banyamulenge from the South Kivu province are the majority. These refugees live in the refugee camps of Muyinga and Musasa in the Northern and Western provinces of Burundi. It is also important to mention that other countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania host several thousands of the Banyamulenge refugees. These displacements of the Banyamulenge to neighbouring countries were triggered by waves of conflicts that threatened their security and wellbeing.

It is worth recalling that Banyamulenge refugees in Burundi were targeted and killed in Gatumba as far back as 2004. Given the current configurations of conflict in Burundi where those opposed to President Nkurunziza,[16] particularly the Tutsi are targeted and killed and, current involvement of Burundians in the DRC, the security of Banyamulenge refugees in Burundi is not guaranteed. There are other precedents such as the conflict that broke out in Burundi following the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye where, in addition to other local victims, the Banyamulenge were targeted by Hutu extremist for their Tutsi identity, thus establishing no difference between Burundian and Congolese Tutsi. Their dire situation of refuge, characterized by chronic shortages in humanitarian assistance, [17]is even more precarious.

The situation for Banyamulenge refugees living in camps in Rwanda is far from stable. In February 2018 those in the Kiziba camps in Karongi district protested against a decrease in their humanitarian assistance, some even asking the UNHCR to repatriate them to the DRC or relocate them to any other countries. During the same occasion, these refuges, some of whom have been living in the camp for 22 years, presented their grievances to the UNHCR over the worsening of their treatment. After two days of protest the police tried to disperse these protesters and 11 protesting refuges were killed and 54 injured including 8 police

[15] The UNHCR, UN Refugees Angency, Congolese situation: Responding to the needs of displaced Congolese and refugees, Annex - Burundi, Supplementary Appeal, January –December 2018. Available at http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2018%20congolese%20Situation%20SB%20-%20Burundi.pdf, Last accessed on July 2nd, 2019.
[16] On this, see: UN, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi*, A/HRC/42/49, 6 August 2019
[17] UNHCR, the situation in Burundi, Available at https://www.unhcr.org/burundi-situation.html, Last accessed on 04 July 2019.

officers.[18] It was claimed that the police opened fire after the demonstrators had turned violent, threatening security officers. However no police officer was indeed reported to be killed by the protesters during that incident.[19] In relation to that incident, 63 refugees leaders were arrested and prosecuted in court for various charges including: illegal demonstration and public gathering, disobeying enforcement of laws, spreading false information with intent to create an hostile international opinion against the host government, throwing stones at the police officers and public authorities etc… and where one among of those arrested was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment.[20] Those who are in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania face the usual hardships of being refugees but also other challenges, including those linked to cohabitation with hostile with other Congolese refugees in the same camps.

### 4.3. Social Media: Resurgence of hate speeches and tribalism against Banyamulenge in DRC

In parallel with the current attacks and killings of the Banyamulenge in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands, the use of social media by the supporters of those who commit these despicable acts, has multiplied. These new channels are now used to carry hate speech targeting the Banyamulenge.[21] Videos, speeches, written pamphlets and messages are frequently circulated on platforms like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp and call for the extermination of Banyamulenge. Demonstrations are being organized in Washington, Brussels, Manchester, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Bukavu, Goma… calling the Congolese society worldwide to stand against Banyamulenge 'invaders' and specifically to abolish the decree conferring Minembwe the status of Rural Municipality. While Minembwe Rural Municipality has been instituted among many others, mobilization refers to the annexation of this region to Rwanda; recalling the status of 'invaders'. Hate speech and narratives that originated by past extremists like Anzuluni Bembe, Abdoulay Ndombasi and Honoré Ngbanda are reproduced or re-enacted today by a new generation of extremists from the DRC or from diasporas across the world. Interestingly, similar hate speech (vermin, snakes, cockroaches) was used in Rwanda during the genocide against the country's Tutsi population.

[18] Summary of the UNHR report of the Kiziba Camp incident, Available at http://www.cndp.org.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/SUMMARY_OF_THE_NCHR_REPORT_ON_KIZIBA_REFUGEE_CAMP_INCIDENT.pdf, last accessed on the 7th October 2019.

[19] Amnesty international, Rwanda investigates killing of refugees, Published in January 2019, PP 7-8. Available athttps://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Rwanda%20Investigate%20Refugee%20Killings%20Feb%202019%20FINAL.pdf, Last accessed on 4 July 2019.

[20] Ibid, p.11.

[21] For instance, Bishop Elisee call for killing "Tutsi" following the 1998 killings (See here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q83rwqPKiq4). There is also Kwebe Kimpele, a prominent journalist calling for extermination of Banyamulenge (See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nEbFIjQNLY&t=2s).

There is a need to pay more attention to these new approaches of mobilizing via social medias.

## 5. *CONCLUSION*

The present paper has retraced the history of discrimination against the Banyamulenge and explained the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands. It aims to alert the international community about ongoing human rights abuses and persecution against the Banyamulenge and call for interventions to stop violence and promote peace between communities and across the region. There is a resurgence of hatred and ethically driven killings carried out by members of a regional alliance of armed groups from the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda. There clearly appears to be a plan to cleanse the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands of Banyamulenge presence and deprive them of any basis of territorial governance that can connect them to the Congolese land. Violence in recent months has claimed hundreds of lives, thousands of the Banyamulenge community have lost their homes, livestock and are still constantly victimized and subjected to daily forms of humiliation, including from state agents. The current situation follows a pattern of attempts to exclude the Banyamulenge from political participation in the DRC across history, highlighted in this document. However, the danger is that unless they are defended, attacks might produce the desired effect of eradicating this community from the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands.

In view of the documented ongoing atrocities, we call on the FARDC and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) to enforce the rule of law and assure the safety of defenseless civilians across the whole DRC territory. Otherwise, the FARDC involvement alongside groups which have an ideology of ethnic cleansing of the Banyamulenge, constitutes a serious and permanent threat to security of the eastern Congo region in general. The international community invests heavily in the DRC and concerted collaborations between these two key actors may alleviate current suffering and lay the foundation of peace. But to achieve this, they should work together, in good faith, to stop violence from any belligerent and act forcefully against militia and propagators of hate ideologies targeting the Banyamulenge in the Itombwe – Minembwe highlands.

We urge the international community, including regional countries to work together to solve the problem of foreign armed groups operating in eastern Congo. Their presence on Congolese territory has been a constant source of instability that fuels violence and negatively inspires local belligerence. Their alliances with local Mai Mai groups are also a

constant source of instability. Concerted action to fight, defeat and demobilize them should be a priority if lasting peace is a goal to be pursued in short and long-term. The AU and development partners of the DRC and other regional countries such as Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda should make this a priority in their short-term policies.

We remind the International Community especially the governments of USA, EU member states, Canada, Norway, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand that, without peace in the DRC, security in the Great Lakes region will remain fragile. Peace across the region significantly depends on stability in eastern Congo. Continued belligerency in the Itombwe-Minembwe highlands by local and foreign armed groups has an effect on peace in South Kivu, the DRC and the wider region. Addressing the ideologies of hate, exclusion and ethnic cleansing is key to lasting peace and stability across the region. The time to act is long overdue.

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