



Q09818. Congo Brazzaville – Researched and compiled by the refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 28 April 2009

Treatment of the Lari ethnic group in Congo Brazzaville.

A *Minority Rights Group International* report under the heading 'State of the World's Minorities 2008' subheading 'Congo-Brazzaville (Republic of Congo)' (pg5) states:

"One of the legacies of Congo's violent modern history is a tension between the increasingly personalized government of President Denis Sassou Nguesso and the Lari ethno-linguistic group of the Pool region, around the capital Brazzaville. This tension, which has taken an increasingly ethnic character since Congo's two civil wars after 1993, is largely modern in nature, and shows how identity boundaries can harden as a direct consequence of the struggle for political and economic power." (Minority Rights Group International (11 March 2008) - *State of the World's Minorities 2008 - Congo-Brazzaville Republic of Congo*)

It also states:

"While the first round of violence, after the defeat of the previous single-party military ruler Sassou at the polls in 1992, was largely dominated by political and military allegiance (with much of the army loyal to Sassou), a resurgence of conflict from 1997 saw three major political figures – Sassou, head of state Pascal Lissouba and Lari figurehead Bernard Kolelas – recruit militias on consciously ethnicist grounds, often from villages away from the major centres in one of francophone Africa's most urbanized societies. The result has been the hardening of ethnic prejudices between Sassou's north-central Mbochi ethnic group, which dominates government, and the southern Lari." (ibid, p.5)

And,

"Within the Lari population in and around southern Brazzaville, tensions have remained high in recent months between the 'Nsiloulou' militias loyal to the neo-millennarian Pasteur Ntoumi, and 'Ninjas' still loyal to Kolelas. French and Congolese human rights campaigners are concerned that the continuing potential for conflict will be instrumentalized by Sassou as a means to further centralization of his control over the oil and infrastructure sectors." (ibid, p.5)

A report by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* under the heading 'Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville): Update to COG40974 of 12 March 2003 regarding the situation of people of the Lari ethnic group and whether they have been targeted by government forces' states:

"No information on the specific situation of members of the Lari ethnic group during the time period March 2003 to May 2004, including their treatment by the government in power in May 2004, could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (18th May 2004) - *Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville): Update to COG40974 of 12 March 2003 regarding the situation of people of the Lari ethnic group and whether they have been targeted by government forces*)

It also states:

"Previous reports (COG42571 of 6 May 2004, COG40974 of 12 March 2003, COG40661 of 28 November 2002 and COG39054 of 13 May 2002) have indicated that the Lari, an ethnic group concentrated in the Pool region of the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) have been targeted by government forces since 1997 (CIDCM 5 Dec. 2002) because of their support of exiled leader Bernard Kolélas, a former Prime Minister of the country (Africa Confidential. 22 Nov. 2002). The "Ninjas" are a militia created by Kolélas and drawn largely from ethnic Laris of the Pool region (CIDCM 5 Dec. 2002; Afrique-Express. 18 Apr. 2002). According to Africa Confidential, "Justice Minister Jean-Martin Mbemba [has admitted] both government forces and Ninjas committed atrocities in Pool, heartland of Lari support for exiled politician Bernard Kolélas" (ibid)

And,

"Amnesty International reported that in 2002, "[r]epresentatives of the CNR (Conseil national de résistance) alleged that Congolese government forces continued to violate the human rights of unarmed civilians in the Pool region despite the existence of a peace accord signed in December 1999" (09 April 2003, 26)." (ibid)

A report by the *US Department of State* under the heading 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2000' subheading 'National/Racial/Ethnic minorities' states:

"Four major ethnic groups make up about 95 percent of the country's population; these groups speak distinct primary languages and are concentrated regionally outside of urban areas. The largest ethnic group is the Kongo, who constitute the main ethnic group in the southern part of the country and about half the country's population. Within the Kongo group are various subgroups, including the Lari and the Vili. Other major ethnic groups include the Teke of the central region, with approximately 13 percent of the population, and the Mbochi of the northern region, with approximately 12 percent of the population." (US Department of State (23 February 2001) - *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2000*)

It also states:

"Societal ethnic discrimination is practiced widely among virtually all ethnic groups, and is evident in private sector hiring and buying patterns and de facto segregation of urban neighborhoods. Ethnic overtones were apparent in the 1997 civil war and the 1998-99 conflict. These conflicts sometimes were oversimplified as pitting northerners, who support President Sassou-

Nguesso, against southerners, who support former president Lissouba and former prime minister Kolelas. There does tend to be heavy representation from each leader's ethnic group in his immediate entourage: Mbochi for Sassou-Nguesso, Lari for Kolelas, and the groups of the Niari, Bouenza, and Lekoumou regions for Lissouba; however, the correspondence between ethnic-regional and political cleavages is approximate, and supporters of the Government include persons from a broad range of ethnic and regional backgrounds." (ibid)

A report by the *Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)* under the heading 'Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville): 5th UNHCR Country of Origin Information Workshop, Bratislava, 13-14 December 1999, Final Report' subheading 'Recent developments' (pg3) states:

"Since then, the civil war has concentrated in and around Brazzaville. Most of the fighting has taken place in the so-called Pool region south of Brazzaville, the fiefdom of Bernard Kolélas and his Ninjas. Its members are recruited mainly from the Lari, the Bakongo and the Bateke ethnic groups."(Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (01 May 2000) - *Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville): 5th UNHCR Country of Origin Information Workshop, Bratislava, 13-14 December 1999, Final Report subheading Recent developments*)

It also states under the heading 'Specific Groups at Risk' subheading 'Ethnic groups' (pg5):

"In the South, the Bakongo, Bateke and Lari ethnic groups are the most likely to be persecuted as they constitute the majority of the Ninja militia. It is very easy to victimise a person: it suffices to accuse an individual of belonging to or supporting one or the other militia. For a while government forces conducted security screenings of people returning from the DRC; young people were picked as militia members just because they had a mark on their shoulders which the government alleged to come from carrying a gun, or because their heads were shaved, another imputed sign for being a Ninja member. When UNHCR threatened to stop participating in the return process, the security screenings ceased at least for the monitored returns. UNHCR, however, does not have information on what happened to the unmonitored returns. A number of reports allege extrajudicial executions and detention of people in military barracks; one of the places very often referred to is the Camp du 15 août in Brazzaville."(ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre 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. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (01 May 2000) - *Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville): 5th UNHCR Country of Origin Information Workshop, Bratislava, 13-14 December 1999, Final Report subheading Recent developments*
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