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Kenya: The *Mungiki* sect; leadership, membership and recruitment, organizational structure, activities and state protection available to its victims (2006 - October 2007)

Background

The *Mungiki* are a politico-religious sect in Kenya (*Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Jan. 2006, 16507; *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 268-269). Established in the late 1980s (NPR 17 July 2007; VOA 29 May 2007), the group's members are mainly from the Kikuyu, Kenya's largest ethnic group (ibid.; Reuters 5 June 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 May 2007, 17088). In the Kikuyu language, the term "Mungiki" means "multitude" (VOA 29 May 2007; NPR 17 July 2007; Safer Access July 2007) or "united people" (ibid.; *The First Post* 9 July 2007; *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements* 2004, 268). The origins of the group are said to be inspired by the 1950s Mau Mau rebellion against the British colonial administration (ibid.; VOA 29 May 2007; Safer Access July 2007); however, surviving members of the independence struggle do not support this association (ibid.).

The Mungiki are said to reject "Western" values and support the return to traditional tribal customs and beliefs (Reuters 5 June 2007; *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 268; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 May 2007, 17088). For example, the sect advocates female circumcision (ibid., 17087; *The First Post* 9 July 2007; Reuters 5 June 2007). There have also been reports of members of the sect attacking women for wearing pants or miniskirts (UN Oct. 2007; Safer Access July 2007).

The Mungiki are known for their "extreme" violence and are one of the most feared criminal organizations in Kenya (UN Oct. 2007; see also NPR 17 July 2007; VOA 29 May 2007). In 2002,

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the Kenyan government outlawed the sect after it was linked to a series of killings in the capital city of Nairobi (Safer Access July 2007; VOA 29 May 2007).

Leadership

Cited in a 2 July 2007 *Washington Post* article, the coordinator of the Kenya Human Rights Network, an umbrella organization of more than 50 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (KNCHR 10 July 2007), indicated that few of the Mungiki's leaders are known. Several sources consulted by the Research Directorate identify John Kamunya [also known as Maina Njenga (BBC 21 June 2007; Safer Access July 2007)] as one of the sect's leaders (*ibid.*; *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements* 2004, 269). However, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) describes him as a former leader of the group (BBC 21 June 2007; *ibid.* 22 June 2007; *ibid.* 24 May 2007b). In June 2007, John Kamunya was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for drug and firearm possession (*ibid.* 22 June 2007; *ibid.* 21 June 2007; Safer Access July 2007).

Njoroge Kamunya, another alleged Mungiki leader and the brother of John Kamunya, was arrested in August 2007 (BBC 23 Aug. 2007; AFP 24 Aug. 2007). He was arrested on drug charges (*ibid.*; *Birmingham Post* 25 Aug. 2007), but was also questioned by police in relation to several murders (AFP 24 Aug. 2007). Information on whether he has received a jail sentence could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Sources consulted identify Ndure Waruinge as a founding leader of the Mungiki (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 268; NPR 17 July 2007); however, he is no longer part of the group (*ibid.*; *Washington Post* 2 July 2007).

One article also identifies Robertson Buili (also known as Joe or Ndegwa) as a leader of the group (*ibid.*). Further information on Buili could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Cited in a 17 July 2007 article of the Washington-based National Public Radio (NPR), the Dean of the Kenya Human Rights Institute (KHRI), a "think tank for the generation and dissemination of high quality research in the area of human rights" (CROP 11 Apr. 2007), indicated that the Mungiki have fewer than 10 leaders (NPR 17 July 2007). However, another source consulted by the Research Directorate indicates that in 2000, the sect had at least 13 leaders (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements*, 269).

In addition to having several leaders, the Mungiki are thought to receive direction "from afar" from political backers, including members of Kenya's parliament (Safer Access July 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-30 June 2007, 17125; see also *The First Post* 9 July 2007; AI 11 June 2007).

Membership and recruitment

It is not known how widespread the Mungiki are in Kenya (*Washington Post* 2 July 2007; Reuters 5 June 2007). However, the group claims to have a membership of up to two million people (Safer Access July 2007; BBC 24 May 2007a; *Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 268). Members are generally unemployed youths of the Kikuyu ethnic group (*ibid.*; Reuters 5 June 2007), although the group apparently has some non-Kikuyu members (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 268). It is estimated that 80 percent of Mungiki members are male (*ibid.*). Many wear dreadlocks (Safer Access July 2007; *Washington Post* 2 July 2007).

Upon initiation into the group, Mungiki members must swear an oath of secrecy (*Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 May 2007, 17088; BBC 9 Oct. 2007; Reuters 5 June 2007). Members who desert the Mungiki or who reveal its secrets may be killed by the group (*ibid.*; *The First Post* 9 July 2007). Initiation rituals reportedly also include bathing in a concoction of goat blood, urine

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and tripe (Safer Access July 2007; see also *The First Post* 9 July 2007; UN 7 June 2007).

Although recruitment into the Mungiki is generally voluntary, some forced recruitment reportedly takes place (UN 7 June 2007). Poverty and unemployment in Kenya are thought to make youths susceptible to the group's pressures (ibid.; NPR 17 July 2007).

Organizational structure

The Mungiki operate in secrecy (NPR 17 July 2007; BBC 24 May 2007a). The sect is described as "amorphous" (*Washington Post* 2 July 2007), with its members largely unrecognizable to outsiders (ibid.; NPR 17 July 2007). The group reportedly has a system of informants; members often change their appearance in order to avoid detection by the police (UN 7 June 2007).

According to a July 2007 report by Safer Access, a "network" of humanitarian safety experts headquartered in the United Kingdom (UK) (Safer Access n.d.), the Mungiki do not have a highly centralized organizational structure (ibid. July 2007). The report indicates that the group may have sub-organizations that are in competition with each other (ibid.). Another source consulted by the Research Directorate similarly indicates that the Mungiki may be divided into sub-organizations, or a "cell structure," with each cell composed of 50 members who are further subdivided into 5 platoons (*The First Post* 9 July 2007). The organization reportedly has "tens of thousands" of foot soldiers (ibid.).

The Mungiki Defence Council (MDC) is an armed faction of the sect that is thought to be involved in "revenge" killings of the group's former members (Safer Access July 2007). The group is said to be "heavily armed" and may carry such weapons as swords, machetes, knives, AK-47s and other types of guns (ibid.).

The Kenya National Youth Alliance (KNYA) is reportedly a front organization of the Mungiki (ibid.). Further information on front organizations of the Mungiki could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Activities

Despite its ban by the Kenyan government in 2002, the Mungiki have remained active in the country (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 269; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 May 2007, 17088; Safer Access July 2007). The group mainly operates in Kenya's central province, the Rift Valley and Nairobi (NPR 17 July 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Jan. 2007, 16507; BBC 24 May 2007a).

The Mungiki are involved in a number of violent criminal activities, including extortion and execution-style killings (*The First Post* 9 July 2007; Safer Access July 2007). Members of the sect have targeted *matatu* (minibus) operators, in particular, for extortion (ibid.; BBC 9 Oct. 2007; NPR 17 July 2007; UN Oct. 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Jan. 2006, 16507). The Mungiki also charge "protection fees" to slum residents and demand money for basic services such as water, electricity (Reuters 5 June 2007; Safer Access July 2007; BBC 24 May 2007a; UN 7 June 2007), and access to public toilets (ibid.; Safer Access July 2007). The sect has targeted businesses for extortion as well (BBC 22 June 2007; NPR 17 July 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-30 June 2007, 17125). Those who refuse to pay may be killed (ibid.; BBC 9 Oct. 2007; ibid. 17 Sept. 2007). The Mungiki are known for beheading and dismembering their victims (ibid. 22 May 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-30 June 2007, 17125; ibid. 1-31 May 2007, 17087).

According to Amnesty International (AI), between April 2007 and mid-June 2007, the Mungiki killed "tens of people," including police officers, in Nairobi and Central Kenya (11 June 2007). Some of the victims were beheaded (ibid.). The violence reportedly started after several *Matatu* drivers refused to pay the fees demanded by the Mungiki (BBC 9 Oct. 2007; ibid. 22 May 2007; NPR 17 July 2007).

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Other activities of the Mungiki include fraud, robbery (BBC 24 May 2007a) and kidnappings (ibid.; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 May 2007, 17088; Reuters 5 June 2007). It is also believed that members of the Mungiki have been hired by politicians as "political muscle" (Reuters 5 June 2007; BBC 9 Oct. 2007; Safer Access July 2007; VOA 29 May 2007), to intimidate voters and critics (ibid.).

State protection

Sources from 2006 and 2007 indicate that the police in Kenya have been cracking down on the Mungiki (*Africa Research Bulletin* 1-31 Jan. 2006, 16507; ibid. 1-31 May 2007, 17087; BBC 8 June 2007a; ibid. 17 Sept. 2007). A special police unit and a "shoot to kill" policy have reportedly been established in order to deal with the banned organization (Safer Access July 2007). In June 2007, following the beheadings of six alleged Mungiki "defectors," the police arrested over 2,400 suspected members of the sect (ibid.; see also BBC 22 May 2007). During the same month, the police reportedly killed more than 30 suspected members of the sect over a one-week period (BBC 8 June 2007b).

Despite police crackdowns on the Mungiki, killings by its members continue to occur (Reuters 5 June 2007; BBC 22 June 2007; *Africa Research Bulletin* 1-30 June 2007, 17125). Cited in a 2 July 2007 *Washington Post* article, the Coordinator of the Kenya Human Rights Network stated that the "government doesn't have a clue how to stop [the Mungiki] because they are dealing with an amorphous group with few known leaders."

A Kenyan police spokesman, cited in a June 2007 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article, stated that residents of a Nairobi slum were fleeing their homes because they feared the police would be unable to protect them from the Mungiki (8 June 2007b). The BBC also reports that some of the slum's residents fear the police as much as they do the Mungiki (8 June 2007a).

The Kenyan police have been accused of complicity with the Mungiki and of allowing the sect to "operate with impunity" (*Africa Research Bulletin* 1-30 June 2007, 17125). It has been suggested that the recent police crackdown on the Mungiki may instead be a "power struggle" between the two groups (*The First Post* 9 July 2007).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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