

# The Banyamulenge in the African Great Lakes Region

*Between the Rock and Hard Place?*

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## Banyamulenge Persecution

- **Banyamulenge not “real Congolese” versus “native”**
  - Citizenship stripped 1981
  - Decision to expel Banyamulenge 1995-96
- **Targeted massacres (1990S)**
  - Across DRC: 1996-1998
  - Gatumba/Burundi: 2004
- **Rebellions & Insurgencies**
- **2017 to the present**
  - 1500 people killed (LNGOs report: 06/2020)
  - ≈ 400 villages destroyed
  - ≈ 400,000 cattle looted
  - ≈ 35 health facilities
  - ≈ 131 schools facilities destroyed
  - **Regular attacks & State of besiegement** in *Hauts Plateaux/South Kivu*
- **Victims of hate speech**

# Banyamulenge in Burundi

- Aug 2004 Gatumba Massacre: Banyamulenge were deliberately targeted by militias;
- Current regime has limited information - knowledge on the Banyamulenge history
- Rwanda – Burundi confrontation: Banyamulenge are likely perceived by Burundi security services as Tutsi (sign of mistrust)
- President Evariste Ndayishimiye contemptibly linked the Banyamulenge to Rwanda (Aug 2022). He claimed *“We never heard of the Banyamulenge before 1996. We even know that they don’t have a traditional chiefdom. They just come together to form an ethnic group...”*
- There have been many incidents of Banyamulenge arrested across Burundi territory (Before 2021).

# Banyamulenge in Rwanda

- [Gen James Kabarebe \(2002\)](#) compared the Banyamulenge as people of “Mont Kigali”
- [Attack on Congolese refugees in Rwanda \(Feb 2018\)](#)
- “Kagame Hails Tshisekedi...” over stabilizing Eastern DRC ([KTPress, 30 Jan 2020](#))
- During #SaveMulenge campaign (dec 2019), Kagame argued “Minembwe problems involve different groups from different countries, so each country should raise its concerns...” as a path to stop the killings.
- 2017-2021, Rwanda government kept silent when Banyamulenge being destroyed.
- 2019-2021: Excellent relations between Tshisekedi & Kagame
- [Rwema Gendarme](#), a traditional & customary chief was kidnaped Uganda-Rwanda border (08/04/2015)
- Sam Gahungu, a closer friend to Rwema Gendarme was kidnapped in Kampala (15/05/2015)
- [Assassination of Danny in Rwanda, hanged on crossbar at a local pitch \(08/03/2021\)](#)
- Assassination of the prominent Banyamulenge Human Rights activist, [Me Bukuru Ntwari](#) in Kigali (02/06/2021);
- Museveni found dead on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022; his dead body thrown near Lake Kivu;
- Pressure (targeting youth) asked to adhere to M23

## Banyamulenge in Kenya & Uganda

- Both countries shelter a large number of Banyamulenge refugees.
- Their decisions motivated by skepticism to flee to Rwanda or Burundi
- Ordinary Ugandans and Kenyans had limited information about the Banyamulenge;
- Many wish to relocate to safe countries (US, Canada, Europe, Australia...)
- Tensions between resettlement and community protection (back in DRC);
- Some young people (men) have decided to go back in Minembwe to protect their relatives (2019-2021);
- Pee-pressure influences decisions to return;
- There is a growing propaganda and pressure to convince the youth to join M23 (out of despair)

## What to learn?

- The Banyamulenge are likely unwanted (discriminated against) across the African Great Lakes region;
- Some contexts do offer the possibility to speak up, until one has an opportunity to move;
- In a such complex situation, one tries every option which is available to him or her;
- Tensions between community safety and individual development.
- Parents impoverished and its implications on children (youth) education and schooling;
- The future of the community is somehow UNCERTAIN!