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Strengthening Resilience, Social Cohesion and Democracy in the DRC: Balobaki Check's Commitment to Information Integrity



«LE DISCOURS DE HAINE» EST UNE ATTITUDE QUI MENACE LA PAIX SOCIALE ET QUI VISE UN GROUPE OU UNE PERSONNE EN FONCTION DE SES CARACTÉRISTIQUES INTRINSÈQUES (RACE , RÉLIGION, TRIBU, GENRE)

Between September 2025 and June 2026, Balobaki Check documented and analysed the **accuracy of 631 dubious claims** and published 40 editions of the newsletter *DRC: Together for Peace - Pamoja Kwa Ajili Ya Amani* to **counter rumours and false information about the security situation and hate speech** in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Distributed in over 220 WhatsApp groups, on social media, and via partnerships with 12 community radio stations, **Balobaki Check's content reached over 2 million people**, helping raise awareness among audiences about disinformation in conflict-affected areas.

Community Conflicts: A Young Community Leader Raises Awareness of the Dangers of Hate Speech and Promotes Peaceful Coexistence

The distinction between hateful rhetoric that fuels tensions within communities and statements that reflect a claimed community identity without undermining peaceful coexistence can sometimes appear blurred. It certainly did for Cherify, a young community leader in her twenties. Originally from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Cherify grew up in the volcanic city of Goma, on the border with Rwanda. There, certain narratives about ethnic identity had become commonplace for her, until she came across a publication in a WhatsApp group that presented itself as a newsletter for peace.

The security situation and the many armed groups operating in eastern DRC have driven significant population movements on both sides of the border with Rwanda. **According to figures published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in July 2025, 196,289 Rwandan refugees and asylum seekers live in the DRC, while Rwanda hosts 84,456 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers.** In border regions, tensions between communities often revive nationalist sentiments, allowing hate-filled and tribalistic rhetoric to spread rapidly. In border regions, tensions between communities often revive nationalist sentiments, allowing hate-filled and tribalistic rhetoric to spread rapidly. This rhetoric explicitly targets certain Congolese citizens whose mother tongue is Kinyarwanda.

Cherify believes she encountered stigmatising narratives targeting different communities and neighbouring countries from an early age:

"At first, I was indifferent to discriminatory remarks and did not know how to recognise hate speech. I thought it was normal and believed it was a difficult, if not impossible, situation to change in our environment. But when I read the article in Balobaki Check's newsletter, I realised that I too could raise awareness among others and no longer remain indifferent," she explains.

The article in question appeared in issue 16 of *DRC: Together for Peace – Pamoja Kwa Ajili Ya Amani* during the week of 9 January 2026. It covered the suspension of Sylvain Ekenge, General and spokesperson for the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in December 2025, following the publication of a video in which he made negative remarks about women from the Tutsi community. The video, which circulated widely on the Congolese public broadcaster RTNC and across social media, prompted condemnation from the international community.

This became a turning point in Cherify's understanding of discriminatory speech, its role in fuelling community tensions, and the part every citizen can play in preventing it:

"I used to think that even the authorities tolerated this kind of rhetoric, but this [the suspension of Sylvain Ekenge] helped me understand that I also have a role to play in combating hate speech."

According to a survey conducted by Balobaki Check among 138 readers of *DRC: Together for Peace – Pamoja Kwa Ajili Ya Amani* in June 2026, **90.6% regarded hate speech as a serious threat to society, while 4.3% considered it moderately concerning**. These findings demonstrate a high level of awareness of the potential consequences of hate speech, particularly in eastern DRC, where it can intensify tensions, violence and divisions within communities.

Today, Cherify says she has developed a more critical perspective on both the information she receives and the discriminatory rhetoric circulating around her. She has also begun raising awareness among people close to her, including the 22 members of her choir, all aged between 20 and 25. By making use of the trusted space they share, she now encourages open conversations about prejudice, discrimination and peaceful coexistence. In her view, these discussions make it possible to address subjects that often generate tension without taboo and to promote greater understanding among group members. She now believes that every citizen can help promote peace, mutual respect and social cohesion within their community:

"I continue to read Balobaki Check's newsletters regularly, especially those dealing with hate speech. Learning that the Constitution of the DRC prohibits this kind of rhetoric also struck a chord with me and gave me new arguments when engaging with those who continue to promote it."

Cherify's testimony shows that verified information delivered by actors perceived as credible and non-partisan, such as Balobaki Check, can help dismantle deeply rooted prejudices and encourage behaviours that strengthen social cohesion. Her change in attitude is significant because it reduces the risk of hate speech spreading within her immediate circle and encourages dialogue and mutual respect. For the predominantly young Congolese population, this story also demonstrates that young community leaders can become effective awareness-raisers and peacebuilders when they have the knowledge and tools needed to understand the dangers of disinformation and hate speech.

In a context marked by persistent community tensions in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, hate messages and false information fuel prejudice, stigmatisation and mistrust between communities. Founded in Kinshasa in 2022, Balobaki Check works to safeguard information integrity through journalist training, media literacy initiatives and the production of high-quality content.