



PROFILE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT : SENEGAL

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CONTENTS

<u>CONTENTS</u>	1
<u>PROFILE SUMMARY</u>	2
SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT	2
<u>LIST OF SOURCES USED</u>	5

PROFILE SUMMARY

Summary of the situation of internal displacement

[It should be noted that very little information about internal displacement in Senegal is currently available. The objective of the present summary is, therefore, to highlight the on-going situation of generalized violence in the southern Senegalese province of Casamance and to encourage governments, international organizations and individuals to look more closely at the question of internal displacement in the country.]

Despite being hailed as a relatively peaceful and stable country in the African context, Senegal has been the scene of intermittent clashes between government forces and rebels of the separatist *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC) since the early 1980s. Due to the fact that the southern Casamance province is virtually cut off from the rest of the country by the Gambia, most people fleeing the violence have sought refuge in neighbouring Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. According to the US Committee for Refugees, the insurgency forced as many as 40,000 Senegalese to flee their homes during the height of fighting in the 1990s – both inside Senegal and across borders to neighbouring countries. By mid-2001 a total of 18,000 Senegalese were estimated to still be uprooted – some 3,000 of whom had been forced to flee their homes in the first few months of 2001. Approximately one third of the 18,000 were internally displaced (USCR, August 2001). Specific figures on internal displacement in the Casamance context have often been lacking, however, and estimates have differed widely. (1)

Background and causes of displacement

Although the separatist movement has been alive in the Casamance province since before Senegal's independence from France in 1960, the first large demonstration for provincial independence did not occur until late 1982 when the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC) organized a march on the provincial capital, Ziguinchor. Violent demonstrations continued throughout the 1980s until the MFDC officially declared its armed struggle for Casamance independence in 1990. At this time, it initiated its first organized attacks on military and civilian targets in the region (Manley, November 1998). In response to the separatist attacks, the Senegalese military arrested and tortured hundreds of people, as documented by Amnesty International in February 1998 (AI, 17 February 1998). From that time on, rebel incursions and government counter-measures have established a cycle of sporadic violence that has continued to plague the southern province.

In mid-May 2001, another round of violence broke out in the region. The Senegalese army and MFDC forces engaged in heavy fighting, particularly in the department of Bignona. The army shelled certain parts of the southern province and burned houses in pursuit of rebel forces. This intensification of fighting came only two months after a peace agreement was signed between the newly-elected President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and MFDC Secretary-General Diamacoune Senghor, calling for inter alia the return of refugees and IDPs. The peace agreement was the third of its kind since the early 1990s.

Renewed fighting in Casamance broke out in May 2002, and while at least 9,000 refugees reportedly crossed the border into the Gambia in the first five days, there was no information regarding the possible extent of internal displacement (IRIN-WA, 10 May 2002). Many of the refugees started returning home following a lull in the fighting just a few days later (IRIN, 14 May 2002).

Conditions of displacement

During the successive waves of violence in Casamance, large numbers of people from the countryside have fled to the provincial centres of Ziguinchor and Kolda. While there has been little information available

about the conditions in which the IDPs have been living, it is clear that inhabitants of the region on the whole are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity since Casamance province is virtually cut off from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia. Furthermore, as documented by WFP in its 2001 Country Strategy for Senegal, minimal transport infrastructure has limited the capacity of its inhabitants to cope with natural, economic or social traumas.

The humanitarian impact of the conflict is further described by Martin Evans, in his article 'The Casamance conflict: out of sight, out of mind?' (ODI/HPN, March 2002), where he writes, "Denied access to their land, the livelihood of many IDPs have been severely affected. Even for populations who have remained in place, the use of productive resources is restricted or prevented by fear of rebel attacks and landmines."

As a result of political unrest in Casamance, inhabitants of the region have found themselves subject to harassment and human rights abuses by both sides to the conflict. The Senegalese army and gendarmerie have arrested hundreds of people in its attempt to quell the insurgency. Amnesty International has reported that many of the persons arrested by the government have fallen victim to torture, extrajudicial execution and disappearance. Individuals of the Diola ethnic community have apparently been at particular risk because government authorities suspect them of being sympathetic to the independence movement (AI, 17 February 1998).

The MFDC is also guilty of human rights abuses in Casamance. As documented by Amnesty International, witnesses have reported that rebel soldiers often raid villages and force civilians to give them food and money to support the armed incursion. Those who refuse to make a financial contribution to the separatist movement have been beaten and have had their homes burned (Manley, November 1998). Amnesty International has further cited evidence that at least some of the acts perpetrated by the MFDC have been committed on the basis of ethnic criteria, with members of the Manjak, Mandingo, Balante and Mancagne ethnic groups disproportionately targeted. [*For Amnesty International's April 2002 report on Senegal, [click here](#)*].

Landmines have also posed a major threat to the security of inhabitants since the early 1990s. USCR claims that landmines have rendered 80 percent of farmland unusable in some areas of Casamance (USCR, 2001, p100). Roads and tracks around Ziguinchor as well as areas of Oussouye and Bignona have been riddled with mines during the course of the conflict (Manley, November 1998).

By July 2001, UNHCR reported that as many as 2,000 of the 3,500 refugees who had fled Casamance in May and June 2001 for the Gambia had returned voluntarily to their homes just across the border to farm their lands – the implication being that many of those people internally displaced at the same time may also have returned.

Humanitarian response

In response to the fighting in Casamance, the government of Senegal has provided punctual resettlement assistance to some families forced to flee their homes in the region (US DOS, February 2001). At the local level, UN IRIN reported in 2001 that the Ziguinchor chapter of the CONGAD, an NGO umbrella organisation, was actively managing aid efforts for refugees and IDPs affected by fighting in the region. The local unit, chaired by the governor of Ziguinchor, included representatives of humanitarian NGOs, security forces and other state bodies.

The ICRC and the Senegalese Red Cross Society have provided continual assistance to civilians affected by the conflict in Casamance over the years. According to ICRC in 2001, their activities included regular IDP registration, evaluating their needs and conducting ad hoc distributions of food aid as required.

In early 2001, WFP identified six departments in Casamance – Bignona, Oussouye, Ziguinchor, Sedhiou, Kolda and Vellingara – as highly vulnerable and targeted them as priority intervention areas.

Various NGOs have been active in the province – for example, as of 2001, Catholic Relief Services and World Vision, both of which were running multi–sectoral projects including agriculture, health and sanitation.

Donor commitment to Casamance has, however, been erratic. As documented by Martin Evans (ODI/HPN, March 2002), the widespread laying of landmines by the MFDC in 1997 led to the withdrawal of a number of key donors from Casamance – including the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the African Development Fund, and USAID – resulting in the abrupt end of various large projects. Donors did gradually return as the overall political and security situation improved: for example, in 2000 USAID began a three-year US\$10 million programme supporting peace and reconstruction. In March 2002, the World Bank approved US\$14.7 million for a community nutrition project in Senegal, and the following month the African Development Fund approved a US\$ 15 million loan for a community feeder roads project.

Endnote:

(1) Senegal has also suffered internal displacement as a result of extreme weather conditions. For example, in January 2002, UN OCHA reported that floods in the north of Senegal demolished close to 20,000 homes, affecting more than 179,000 people.

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