

Senegal

Response to Information Request Number:	SEN99001.RIC
Date:	01 October 1998
Subject:	Senegal: Questions about the <i>Mouvement des Forces Democratiques</i> (MFDC) in Senegal
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Senegal / Casamance / armed conflict / civil war / guerrilla warfare / separatist movement

Query:

What is the purpose, structure, and number of members of the MFDC? Who are their leaders? Do MFDC members have distinctive physical features, e.g., uniforms or body decorations? Are members recruited from other tribes than the Diola? Does the MFDC have divisions outside the Casamance region or operate outside the Casamance region? Which sanctions are the authorities using against members of the MFDC? Do they distinguish between privates and ranking members? Would authorities automatically suspect a person belonging to the Diola tribe to have sympathies for the MFDC and thus being a potential rebel? Is a current or former member of the MFDC or a person with, e.g., ethnic affiliation to the MFDC able to settle outside the region as an internal flight alternative? Can such a person receive adequate protection from the authorities? Does this also apply to members of the Diola tribe? Is it possible for a person wanted by the authorities to leave the country via the land border or the airport without any problems?

Response:

The MFDC (*Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de Casamance*) is a clandestine, armed separatist movement which has been operating since 1982. The movement advocates the secession of the Casamance region in southern Senegal. In 1991 a cease-fire agreement led to a split into the Northern and Southern Fronts. The *Front Nord* is led by Sidy Badji (MFDC's former chief of staff) and includes Diola and non-Diola members. This group renounced the armed conflict in 1991 and declared themselves willing to a solution short of full independence for Casamance (DIRB 26 September 1997; Amnesty International February 1998). However, the *Front Nord* does have an armed wing called *Attika* ("warrior" in Diola), currently led by Kamougue (Maurice) Diatta and Jean-Marie Tendency, which has clashed both with President Abdou Diouf's army and forces of the MFDC *Front Sud* (*Africa Confidential* 19 February 1993; AFP 10 March 1998; Political Handbook of the World, 1998).

The *Front Sud* is officially led by Father Augustine Diamacoune Senghor (a Roman Catholic priest turned guerrilla commander) and consists primarily of Diola tribesmen. Since 1991 this group has been more violent and militant in its demand for complete independence for Casamance and has committed numerous human rights violations (AI February 1998; DIRB 26 September 1997). The four members of the *Front Sud's* national bureau as of July 1997 were Edmond Bora, Sanoune Bodian, Mamadou Dieme and Manga Badiane (AI February 1998). Leaders of the *Front Sud's* military wing include Salif Salio and Ousmane Bu Djabi. Father Diamacoune Senghor signed a July 1993 cease-fire and called again for a cease fire in January 1998, even stating "that he is ready to give up the demand for Casamance's independence, but on condition that the government takes measures toward greater economic and social development of this southern Senegalese region." (*Libreville* 20 January 1998). It is unclear how much control Father Diamacoune

Senghor now has over the more radical elements in the *Front Sud*; despite his announcement, the rebels have been laying mines and upgrading their arsenals, which now include "canons and mortars as well as Czechoslovak or Russian-made machine guns" (*Sud Quotidien* 31 August 1998).

The region of Casamance is something of an anomaly when compared to the rest of Senegal in that Islam, the predominant religion in the remainder of the country, is virtually absent. "Culturally and religiously, there is little in common between the Casamance Province and the rest of the country." (*West Africa* 13-19 May 1996). It is probably reasonable to assume that non-Diola peoples comprise an extreme minority in the movement because of these cultural and religious differences. Given the reported human rights violations against both Diola and non-Diola peoples of which the MFDC has been accused by Amnesty International, especially in the recent past (AI February 1998), it may also be reasonable to assume that non-Diola members were coerced into joining the movement.

The violence appears to be concentrated in Casamance, although the *Front Sud* has bases inside Guinea Bissau (*Africa Confidential* 19 February 1993). In addition, the hard-line MFDC is supported from France by Mamadou Nkrumah Sane, who has "labeled the rebels who participated in the internal talks as false militants, and accused them of abandoning the struggle for self-determination for Casamance" (BBC 29 December 1997). The MFDC rebel bases in Guinea-Bissau have supplied the secessionist movement with munitions and supplies; they also served as safe houses for the separatists, who retreated across the border and were not pursued by government forces. A security accord, however, was "signed by the two governments in 1996, which seeks to reinforce mutual cooperation in defense and security at the borders. The main point of the accord is the right of Senegalese troops to pursue rebel forces across the border into Guinea-Bissau" (*West Africa* 13-19 May 1996).

The current size of the MFDC is unclear. In May 1991 negotiations with the government "supported observers' suspicions that the separatists encompassed a limited number (300-500) of ethnic Diolas." (*Political Handbook of the World: 1998* 1998, 805).

No mention was made in any of the available literature of any distinctive physical features, uniforms, or body decorations.

The authorities have used a wide variety of sanctions against members and suspected members of the MFDC. Father Diamacoune Senghor was under house arrest for at least several months from 22 April 1995 without any formal charges. The four members of the *Front Sud's* national bureau were arrested the following day and imprisoned until October 1995, when they were moved to house arrest. They were permitted to travel to France in April 1997, but have on occasion been denied passports to travel freely. Following renewed clashes in Casamance, "Sarani Manga Badiane was arrested by Senegalese soldiers on 24 August 1997 and has not been seen since...Edmond Bora has apparently fled." (AI February 1998) Authorities have rounded up suspected MFDC sympathizers and held them without trial or access to legal counsel for months on charges of threatening state security. Allegations of widespread torture and ill-treatment of suspected MFDC rebels by the army, including "disappearances" and extra-judicial executions, have not been investigated by Senegalese authorities. "Most of [the arrested] appeared to be prisoners of conscience, arrested because they were members of the Diola community, and held without any evidence of individual responsibility for acts of violence." (AI 1998)

According to Mr. Gaetan Mootoo of Amnesty International, relocation options within Senegal are extremely limited for suspected members of the MFDC; should they choose internal resettlement, they would probably be arrested and detained. This would appear to hold true for Diola tribespeople in general, as the government's presumption is that they are all current or former MFDC members, or active supporters of the movement. Mr. Mootoo also noted that since the religious orientation of the Diola tribe is Christian and animist; the Diola would not integrate well in the north of Senegal, which is principally

Muslim. The majority of displaced Diola and MFDC members have chosen to relocate in refugee camps in Guinea-Bissau or in Gambia, where sizable refugee communities reside (Mootoo 30 September 1998).

As noted above, it is possible for MFDC members to enter Guinea-Bissau via the land border without the consent of Senegalese authorities. Access to air transportation appears to be much more closely controlled, given that the authorities have prevented senior members of the MFDC from traveling by confiscating their passports, or by refusing issuance.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC 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.

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