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24 January 2005

SEN43299.FE

Senegal: Situation of the Diola in Dakar; their treatment by the authorities and by the population, specifically in the case of a Muslim Diola woman born in Kaolack to Casamance parents (update to SEN29180.E of 30 April 1998) (2003-2004)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Diola, who represent nine per cent of the population of Senegal, live in the Casamance region in the south of the country (Leclerc 8 June 2003). They are predominantly Christian and animist, whereas the rest of Senegal is predominantly Muslim (IRIN 26 Nov. 2004; MAR 31 Dec. 2000).

According to a recent report, historically, the bulk of the Senegalese government's financial support has gone to cities, especially to Dakar (Hammerstad 2004, 64). This has led to massive internal migrations to urban centres (ibid.). The Diola's participation in government is limited because they have their own language and because French is the official language of the government (ibid., 65). However, Wolof-the language of Senegal's main ethnic group, the Wolofs-has become the government's lingua franca (ibid.; see also *Sunday Times* 31 Dec. 2004).

Some sources indicate that the Diola in the Casamance region feel that they have been "neglected by the national government by political under-representation and economic underdevelopment" (Project Ploughshares Sept. 2004; see also MAR 31 Dec. 2000). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003* states that resentment of the government on the part of the Diola as a result of domination by northerners has contributed to the rebellion in the south (25 Feb. 2004).

The conflict between the Diola and the Wolofs dates back to 1982 (*Sunday Times* 31 Dec. 2004). On 30 December 2004, Senegal's government and "[Diola] separatist rebels" signed a peace pact (ibid.; see also AFP 30 Dec. 2004). The rebel group pledged to demobilize and disarm its fighters (ibid.; *Sunday Times* 31 Dec. 2004). In return, former rebel fighters could be integrated into the Senegalese army (AFP 30 Dec. 2004). The government also committed to [translation] "taking every measure necessary to return refugees and displaced persons to their homes and to help them reintegrate socially" (ibid.).

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 12 January 2005, a research associate from the University of Leicester who worked on the conflict in the Casamance region provided the following information:

There is, to my knowledge, very little history of persecution of Diola in Dakar: there was (I understand) some that occurred earlier in the conflict, but still small-scale, and I have read or heard no accounts of it happening now nor in all the time (six years) that I have been researching the conflict. Diola do continue to suffer from economic marginalisation, sometimes due to prejudice among northern Senegalese; but they have carved their own communities and economic niches in the urban economy in what are often more low-paid occupations, notably domestic work.... But ... the conflict is really a distant problem from Dakar, and the ethnic pluralism and tolerance (which are not, of course, the same as equality) characteristic of Senegal have been surprisingly little battered by the conflict. ... [M]assive Diola migration from the Casamance to Dakar, ... has continued unabated during the conflict....

Outwith the socio-economic marginalisation indicated above, I find it very unlikely that the Diola woman in question would suffer at the hands of the authorities or the population on the basis of her ethnicity. There is no official discrimination against them and Diola migration is just too large and long-standing. ... [T]here are large numbers of Diola there, clustered in specific quarters but working all over the city. Most Diola migrants use kin or ethnic networks in the city to find accommodation, work, etc. ... The conflict has had relatively little impact in Dakar so I doubt whether the peace accord [signed recently] will make much difference [for the Diola woman living in Dakar].

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.

References

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Research associate, University of Leicester, Department of Geography. 12 January 2005. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.

Sunday Times [Johannesburg]. 31 December 2004. "Senegal Signs Peace Pact in Casamance." <<http://www.suntimes.co.za/zones/sundaytimesNEW/basket6st/basket6st1104470383.aspx>> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites including: AllAfrica.com, Chatham House, *Ethnologue*, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group (ICG).

Publications: *Africa Confidential*, *Africa Research Bulletin*, *Africa Today*, *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent*.

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