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Nigeria: Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); date formed; leadership; location of offices; recruitment of members; whether membership cards or other documents are issued; and whether claims to membership can be verified (2000-2005)

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Founded in 1999 (IRIN 10 May 2005; BAF Nov. 2001), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) seeks to create an independent state of Biafra in the Igbo-dominated southeastern region of Nigeria (ibid.; IRIN 10 May 2005). MASSOB claims that since the failed Biafran independence war (1967-1970), successive governments have continued to oppress and discriminate against the Igbo people, justifying a renewed call for the creation of a Biafran nation (ibid.; BAF Nov. 2001; *Daily Champion* 13 Dec. 2004). Headed by founder Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, MASSOB is determined to bring about the state of Biafra through a non-violent 25-stage campaign culminating in a UN-supervised referendum (BAF Nov. 2001; IRIN 10 May 2005; *Vanguard* 22 June 2002; BNW 8 Sept. 2002).

Leadership and Organization

Various individuals have held key posts within the organization, but Ralph Uwazuruike, who was born in the late 1950s and studied law in India and Nigeria (BNW 8 Sept. 2002), has been the leader of MASSOB since its inception (BAF Nov. 2001; *Daily Champion* 13 Dec. 2004; ibid. 19 Mar. 2005; ibid. 5 Oct. 2004; ibid. 21 Apr. 2005). Longenious Orjiakor and Uche Okwukwu, a legal advisor, are referred to, by the Biafra Actualization Forum (BAF) Web site, as being key leaders within MASSOB (Nov. 2001, see also BNW 8 Sept. 2002); however, Uwazuruike revealed in an interview with *Biafra Nigeria World* (BNW) that these two men were no longer with the organization (8 Sept. 2002). The *Daily Champion*, an independent newspaper based in Lagos, cites Nonye Obidike as president of the women's wing (*Daily Champion* 13 Dec. 2004), Patricia Okwareke as director of women's affairs (ibid. 5 Oct. 2004), Sam Ike as MASSOB's director of mobilization (ibid. 19 Mar. 2005), and Uchenna Madu as the organization's director of information (ibid. 21 Apr. 2005).

Uwazuruike describes MASSOB's leadership structure as hierarchical, and claims, for security reasons, that he is reluctant to name officers (BNW 8 Sept. 2002). Uwazuruike explained that MASSOB's organizational structure includes ministers, for example, of education and welfare, who serve as directors (ibid.), and that its system of governance for the "Republic of Biafra" includes provincial and district administrators and ward officers (ibid.).

According to *This Day*, one of Nigeria's national daily newspapers, MASSOB's Central Working Committee (CWC) and Board of National Coordinators (BNC) suspended Chief Uwazuruike for a 30 day investigation period, for "allegedly embarking on moves contrary to the beliefs of the group" (19 Dec. 2001).

The *Daily Champion* reported that a women's wing of MASSOB extends into 19 northern states, including Zamfara, Kebbi, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Gombe, Yobe and Adamawa (13 Dec. 2004) and has mentioned the women's wing in reports on at least two other occasions (*Daily Champion* 19 Mar. 2005; *ibid.* 5 Oct. 2004).

Location of Offices and Biafran Affiliations

The MASSOB national headquarters is located at 153 Owerri Road in Okigwe, Imo State (BAF Nov. 2001; see also *P.M. News* 5 Nov. 2004).

MASSOB is affiliated with an international Biafran campaign extending to countries such as Germany, Canada, Ghana, Mali and the United States (ARB 1-31 Aug. 2004). The campaign has created various Websites that report on the activities of MASSOB and express their support for the organization (*ibid.*; BAF Nov. 2001). The BAF Website lists five pro-Biafran organizations, specifically, the Biafra Foundation, Voice of Biafra International, Biafra Liberation Movement (BLM), Biafra Committee for Immediate Action (BCIA), and the Ekwe Nche Organization, which, according to BAF, shares the same objectives and "fully support[s]" MASSOB (*ibid.*).

On 29 September 2001 MASSOB leaders attended the opening of Biafra House in Washington D.C. (BAF Nov. 2001; see also ARB 1-31 Aug. 2004). The Biafra House will become the main base for coordinating pro-Biafran activities in North America (BAF Nov. 2001; see also ARB 1-31 Aug. 2004). According to the *Africa Research Bulletin* (ARB), MASSOB is in the final stages of establishing a government in exile (1-31 Aug. 2004).

Membership

A BAF November 2001 slide presentation entitled "Biafra: The Case for Self Determination" maintains that membership in the MASSOB totals 7.5 million within and outside Nigeria's borders. More recently, the ARB reported that a "renewed agitation for Biafra, spearheaded by MASSOB, is reverberating like an earthquake in the entire old Eastern region. ...[c]onsequently, the membership of the body has spread rapidly in virtually all parts of the country and abroad" (1-31 Aug. 2004).

Although references to MASSOB membership cards were found among the sources consulted (*Vanguard* 26 May 2005; *ibid.* 16 July 2004; *This Day* 2 July 2004), specific information on the cards and whether they can be verified could not be found among the sources consulted.

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.

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Attempts to reach MASSOB headquarters and the Biafra Foundation were unsuccessful.

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