



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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8 August 2007

### NGA102579.E

Nigeria: Whether the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) issues certain documents to its members; if so, the type of documents issued (2005 - July 2007)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), formed in 1999 (*Political Handbook of the World 2007* 2007, 921), is a group that advocates an independent state of Biafra for the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 360; BBC 30 May 2007). Cited in the January 2005 report of a joint British-Danish fact-finding mission to Nigeria, lawyer and former director of the civil rights group Constitutional Rights Project Clement Nwankwo indicated that he did not know whether MASSOB registers its members or issues membership cards to them, but doubted that they would (Denmark Jan. 2005, 12). Nwankwo noted, though, that the MASSOB has produced its own Biafra State flag and issued its own currency (*ibid.*; see also Norway Aug. 2006, 16; BBC 30 May 2007). These items are considered illegal in Nigeria and persons found in possession of them could face arrest or be accused of treason (Norway Aug. 2006; Denmark Jan. 2005, 12), an offence punishable by death (*ibid.*).

Reporting on arrests of alleged MASSOB members by the Nigerian authorities, several news sources consulted by the Research Directorate mention MASSOB membership or identity cards found in possession of the detainees (*Daily Champion* 17 Aug. 2005; *Daily Trust* 8 Nov. 2005; UN 4 Sept. 2006; *This Day* 23 June 2005; *Vanguard* 26 May 2005). Two other news articles, also reporting on crackdowns on suspected MASSOB members, refer to "card-carrying members" of the organization (*Daily Champion* 8 Sept. 2006; *ibid.* 7 Dec. 2005). Details on the format of the cards and issuance procedures could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Several news sources also make reference to other items found in the possession of suspected MASSOB members, including the following: MASSOB membership forms (*Daily Trust* 8 Nov. 2005); MASSOB "appraisal forms" (*ibid.*); MASSOB income tax receipts (*ibid.*); "Commitment receipts" (*ibid.*); registered letter-headed papers (*ibid.*); rubber stamps (*ibid.*); stickers (*This Day* 25 June 2005); Biafran posters, literature, and pamphlets (*Daily Trust* 8 Nov. 2005); Biafran flags (*Vanguard* 26 May 2005; *This Day* 23 June 2005; UN 4 Sept. 2006), which depict a rising sun (*ibid.*); shirts and hats with a MASSOB insignia, including the Republic of Biafra symbol (*Vanguard* 26 May 2005; see also *Vanguard* 26 May 2005; *This Day* 23 June 2005); a Biafran tie (*Vanguard* 26 May 2005); a Biafran cap (*ibid.*); and a map (*Daily Champion* 17 Aug. 2005).

During its March 2006 fact-finding trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos and Benin City), Norway's Landinfo - Country of Origin Information Centre interviewed MASSOB lawyer

Festus Keyamo (Norway Aug. 2006, 16). On behalf of MASSOB's leader, Keyamo made the following statement regarding letters issued to MASSOB members:

The MASSOB leadership has decided that members should stay in Nigeria and fight for self-determination within the country. No decision has been taken to send MASSOB activists abroad to continue the struggle from outside. ... When people contact MASSOB for support and substantiations of their asylum claims (either while still in Nigeria or from abroad), MASSOB turns them down. This is also the case when (potential) asylum seekers offer MASSOB money for such letters of support. (ibid.)

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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Denmark. January 2005. Danish Immigration Service. *Report on Human Rights Issues in Nigeria: Joint British-Danish Fact-Finding Mission to Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria. 19 October to 2 November 2004.* <[http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/A12BB34C-56F3-4745-9977-E6332D1DAAC0/0/Nigeria2005\\_web2.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/A12BB34C-56F3-4745-9977-E6332D1DAAC0/0/Nigeria2005_web2.pdf)> [Accessed 24 July 2007]

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*Vanguard* [Lagos]. 26 May 2005. Austin Ogwuda. "Man Jailed for Hoisting Biafran Flag." (AllAfrica Web site) <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200505270422.html>> [Accessed 24 July 2007]

### **Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** Attempts were made to contact the Biafra Foundation in Washington D.C. A representative of Ireland's Legal Aid Board and the Igbo Youth Association in Canada did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), Biafraland.com, BiafraNet.com, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Kingdom Home Office, United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United States Department of State.

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