PROFILE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT : SENEGAL

Compilation of the information available in the Global IDP Database of the Norwegian Refugee Council

(as of 17 February, 2005)
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PROFILE SUMMARY

Senegal: Peace accord brings new hope for Casamance IDPs

For thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Senegal, 2004 ended with a note of optimism after the signing on 30 December of a peace accord between the Senegalese government and the Casamance separatist rebel group Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC). Ending West Africa’s longest civil war, the deal provides for the parties “once and for all to give up armed struggle and the use of violence”, paving the way for future IDP return. Hope started rising a year ago as the security situation improved considerably in the Casamance region although sporadic attacks by the rebels were still reported.

Information on both numbers and the humanitarian needs of IDPs has been scarce. However, since the conflict started in 1982, it is estimated that up to 64,000 persons have been internally displaced, several thousand killed and others injured by landmines. Since Casamance province, in the south, is virtually cut off from the rest of the country by the Gambia, many other people fleeing the violence have sought refuge in Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The peace agreement signed on 30 December 2004 provides for the reconstruction and de-mining of Casamance and support for the return of IDPs and refugees. It is now crucial that these provisions be implemented in order to ensure the full and durable reintegration of the displaced population and sustainable peace in the country.

Background and causes of displacement

The separatist movement has been alive in Casamance province since before Senegal's independence from France in 1960. However, the first large demonstration for provincial independence did not occur until late 1982 when the MFDC organised a march on the provincial capital, Ziguinchor. At the root of the rebellion is the complaint by the MFDC that the Wolofs, Senegal’s dominant ethnic group, had economically and politically marginalised the Diola, the ethnic majority group in Casamance. The southern province is almost separated from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia. 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 organised attacks on military and civilian targets in the region (Manley, November 1998). From then on, rebel incursions and government counter-measures have established a cycle of sporadic violence that has continued to plague the southern province. The region became increasingly unsafe and isolated from the rest of the country.

Civilians have fled their homes as a result of both rebel incursions and mop-up operations by the Senegalese army. 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 département of Bignona. The army shelled parts of the 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 leader Augustin 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 broke out between May and June 2002 when a government military offensive uprooted between 10,000 and 20,000 people – with about half fleeing to the Gambia and the other half becoming internally displaced (IRIN-WA, 10 May 2002; USCRI, 2003). Further fighting was reported in July 2002, and again in January 2003.

In 2003, intermittent rebel attacks and Senegalese military reprisals caused the internal displacement of an estimated 17,000 people, mostly in Ziguinchor, the largest town in the Casamance, in Bignona, and the
Oussouye area near the border with Guinea-Bissau. Many of the displaced took refuge with relatives and quickly returned home during lulls in fighting (USCR, May 2004). During 2004, the level of violence fell off sharply, and although sporadic clashes between the Senegalese army and the MFDC were reported, some people started returning home (IRIN, 22 November 2004). 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 (AI, 17 February 1998).

The death of the leader of the hard-line wing of the MFDC, Sidi Badji in May 2003 raised hopes for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Badji, who was 83, had consistently held out against any compromise with the government in Dakar. His death paved the way for further negotiations between the Senegalese government and the MFDC’s veteran president, Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, a Roman Catholic priest, known for his softer stance. Indeed, on 30 December 2004, the Senegalese government and the Casamance rebel group signed a peace accord to end the conflict. The accord provides for the parties “once and for all to give up armed struggle and the use of violence” (AFP, 30 December 2004).

**Scarce statistics**

With both the peace agreement signed on 30 December 2004 and the continuous improvement of the security situation in Casamance, many displaced are expected to return home during the next few months. The number of people currently displaced within Senegal is unknown. There has never been a comprehensive survey on the scope of the displacement situation and the needs of the IDPs. In addition, most of the displaced appear to stay with relatives, thus making it difficult to identify them (IRIN, 6 March 2003). The temporary nature of displacement further complicates the compilation of reliable statistics. However, according to a study done in 2003, there were in total 64,000 internally displaced persons in Senegal; 47,000 were in the district of Ziguinchor and 17,000 in the district of Kolda (WFP, 27 August 2004). Other sources cite the number of 50,000 people who had fled their homes since the conflict broke out in 1982 (IRIN, 31 December 2004).

**Humanitarian concerns**

While there has been little information available about the humanitarian situation of the internally displaced population, it is clear that the region’s population as a whole is particularly vulnerable. The conflict has led to displacement, destruction of infrastructures, damages to the economy and increased poverty. There are reports of increased risk of exposure to sexually-transmitted infections and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and of a deterioration of the nutritional status of children (UNICEF, 4 August 2003).

Civil insecurity in the west and increased poverty in the east of the region have also reduced the ability of inhabitants to cope with natural, economic or social traumas (WFP, 27 August 2004, p.5; WB, 13 August 2004, p.9).

**Obstacles to IDP return**

The need for house and social infrastructure reconstruction and the threat posed by landmines are the main obstacles to IDP return. The conflict has been the cause of the abandonment or destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of the agriculture-based economy and disintegration of social infrastructure such as health centres and schools. It is therefore urgent to implement as soon as possible the provision of the agreement calling for aid and reconstruction for returnees in Casamance.

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). Landmines claimed more than 500 victims between 1988 and mid-2003, 55 per cent of them in the district of Ziguinchor and 23 per cent in
Sedhiou. Some 125 villages have been abandoned in Ziguinchor district because of landmines. Many IDPs are prevented from resuming their life in their area of origin because they cannot access infested lands to restart agricultural activities safely (WFP, 27 August 2004, p.5).

**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. In June 2001, the government launched with the support of donors and other humanitarian agencies the Programme for Revival of Economic and Social Activities (PRAESC) in Casamance. The programme consists of the short-term activities of de-mining, demobilisation, reconstruction and community development linked to reintegration, and longer-term sustainable development activities. The PRAESC is implemented in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and other implementing partners, as well as national and international non-governmental organisations. WFP carries out, among other activities, community-based programmes involving agricultural assets and is providing special support to highly vulnerable groups such as handicapped people and orphans (WFP, 27 August 2004, pp.6-9).

Since the beginning of its Casamance conflict resolution programme in 1999, USAID has been funding peace-building activities in the north of Casamance such as those aiming at creating income-generation jobs for IDPs and rehabilitation of local infrastructure to help increase local capacity. USAID is also funding grassroots conflict resolution and mitigation activities that seek to address the causes of conflict and increase popular support for peace (USAID, 14 June 2004).

At the local level, the human rights organisation *Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme* benefiting from USAID funds is providing humanitarian assistance as well as human rights advocacy for IDPs and refugees in Senegal. This includes rebuilding homes destroyed by the fighting in the Casamance, and providing counselling and legal services.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the peace accord, donors and humanitarian actors should increase their support for government efforts aimed reconstructing and rehabilitating the conflict-affected region and promoting the return or resettlement of IDPs.
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