



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	Senegal
Question(s)	Information on forced recruitment by secessionist rebel group(s), including the “Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance” (MFDC), in 2013, in the Casamance region <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- modus operandi</li><li>- profile of recruited persons, if any</li><li>- uniforms/distinctive physical features of secessionist rebel group(s)</li></ul>
Date of completion	26 April 2018
Query Code	Q68
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

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*The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 26 April 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.*



## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### Information on forced recruitment by secessionist rebel group(s), including the 'Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance'<sup>1</sup> (MFDC), in 2013, in the Casamance region

#### Background information

The Casamance region is situated in southern Senegal; in the eastern part, it is connected to Senegal but is separated from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia. The region is mainly inhabited by the Diola (Jola) ethnic group amongst whom many are Christians, unlike the majority of Senegalese who are Muslims<sup>2</sup>.

The conflict in Casamance, between the rebels from the MFDC, an armed opposition group seeking independence for the region in southern Senegal since 1982<sup>3</sup>, and the government in Dakar, has been described as the 'region's longest-running war'<sup>4</sup>. According to Martin Evans, an expert on Senegal and Casamance<sup>5</sup>: 'The conflict has been characterised for much of its duration by low-level insecurity, punctuated by occasional upsurges of violence and ceasefires or peace accords, but never quite resolved – leading to it recently being described (again) as lying 'between war and peace'<sup>6</sup>.

The MFDC is 'overwhelmingly Diola<sup>7</sup> in composition<sup>8</sup>, representing approximately 5 % of the population in Senegal and concentrated in the Casamance region<sup>9</sup>, although members of other ethnic groups are involved as well<sup>10</sup>. According to Jean-Claude Marut, a specialist on the conflict, 'all Diola are far from being separatists, but most of the separatists are Diolas'.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that there are also significant Diola populations in neighbouring countries: Gambia and Guinea-Bissau<sup>12</sup>.

In August 1992, the MFDC split into two groups: *Front Sud*, which became primarily a Diola organisation demanding independence, and *Front Nord*, which was composed as an alliance of both Diolas and non-Diola groups, calling for further negotiations with the government rather than independence<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In French: *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance*.

<sup>2</sup> US BCIS, *Senegal: Questions about the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques (MFDC) in Senegal*, 1 October 1998, ([url](#)), accessed 26 April 2018.

<sup>3</sup> AI, *Senegal: Failing to Live up to its Promises, Recommendations on the eve of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights' review of Senegal*, 28 April 2015, ([url](#)), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> IRIN, *Between war and peace*, 3 August 2015, ([url](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Evans is a senior lecturer in international development at the University of Chester. He has wide experience of Senegal, including the conflict in Casamance. See: <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/departments/geography-and-international-development/staff/martin-evans> and <https://www.peaceinsight.org/blog/authors/martin-evans/>

<sup>6</sup> Evans, Martin, *Youth, opportunity and conflict in Casamance, 25 August 2015, published by Peace Insight*, ([url](#)).

<sup>7</sup> Also referred as Jola.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, Martin, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)*, December 2004, ([url](#)).

<sup>9</sup> MRG, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Senegal*, November 2017, ([url](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Evans, Martin, *Senegal: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC)*, December 2004, ([url](#)).

<sup>11</sup> Guardian (The), *Boundaries of Casamance remain blurred after 30 years of conflict*, 19 June 2012, ([url](#)).

<sup>12</sup> MRG, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Senegal*, November 2017, ([url](#)).

<sup>13</sup> Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Diolas in Casamance in Senegal*, 2004, ([url](#)).



According to the Landinfo (Norwegian COI unit), the MFDC has developed a guerilla force known as the 'maquis' or 'attika', which, in **2014**, had an estimated 2 000 members<sup>14</sup>. Members of this force are also known as 'maquisards'<sup>15</sup>. The group has armed itself with guns from Guinea-Bissau, Gambia and Guinea<sup>16</sup> and generated income through 'low-level war economy', dealing with cashew nuts and illegal cannabis<sup>17</sup>.

According to the Landinfo (Norwegian COI unit), in **2014**, the MFDC was divided into four wings:

- a military wing (*Attika*),
- a political wing,
- a civilian wing and
- an external wing<sup>18</sup>.

The same report states that major decisions should, in principle, take place in meetings (so-called *assises*). However, divisions within the movement have often left the leadership unable to make decisions<sup>19</sup>.

Over the years, the group has split into several rival factions, 'at least five with representation in Casamance'<sup>20</sup>. Leaders of three different faction formed an MFDC 'contact group' in Ziguinchor<sup>21</sup>.

### **Modus operandi of the secessionist rebel group(s) in the Casamance region**

Consulted and listed sources also indicate that, with time, the group has limited its insurgent activities and has been involved in armed robberies, thefts and abductions, as mentioned below.

In **2006**, local residents in Casamance described the activities of the MFDC as follows: 'Rebels only show themselves to fight, recruit unemployed youths from villages in the dirt-poor region, or to commit highway robbery before ducking back into the thick forest'<sup>22</sup>.

In February and March **2012**, armed attackers, claiming to be members of the MFDC, assaulted and robbed civilians to prevent them from voting in the Presidential election<sup>23</sup>. In **2012**, rebels and bandits reported to be present close to Ziguinchor, were involved in armed hold-ups on the roads<sup>24</sup>.

Assessing the security situation in Casamance in **2013**, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) notes that 'Casamance remained relatively calm, but people continued to report mine-related incidents and abuse, including sexual violence' while a few people reported missing relatives during the armed conflict in Casamance. The ICRC also reports that safe access to the Casamance region

<sup>14</sup> Landinfo, *Senegal: Konflikten i Casamance*, 6 May 2014, ([url](#)), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> US AID, *IPS Final Report*, 21 September 2009, ([url](#)).

<sup>16</sup> KAS, *Senegal-Ein Voelkermosaik, Historische und Aktuelle Grundlage eines Afrikanischen Integrationslandes*, 2012, ([url](#)), p.27.

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, *Casamance conflict is unhealed sore for Senegal*, 25 February 2012, ([url](#)).

<sup>18</sup> Landinfo, *Senegal: Konflikten i Casamance*, 6 May 2014, ([url](#)), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Landinfo, *Senegal: Konflikten i Casamance*, 6 May 2014, ([url](#)), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> IRIN, *Senegal: No end in sight to Casamance conflict*, 17 February 2012, ([url](#)).

<sup>21</sup> IRIN, *Senegal: No end in sight to Casamance conflict*, 17 February 2012, ([url](#)).

<sup>22</sup> IRIN, *No end to region's longest-running war*, 16 October 2006, ([url](#)).

<sup>23</sup> AI, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Senegal*, 23 May 2013, ([url](#)).

<sup>24</sup> Reuters, *Casamance conflict is unhealed sore for Senegal*, 25 February 2012, ([url](#)).



remained difficult for government officials and humanitarian workers<sup>25</sup>. According to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), a political foundation based in Berlin, the overall level of violence in the Casamance fell in **2013**<sup>26</sup>. In May **2013**, there were reports of the abduction, by the MFDC, of 12 civilian mine-clearance workers who were released unharmed in July the same year<sup>27</sup>.

In April **2014**, a MFDC rebel leader declared a unilateral ceasefire<sup>28</sup>.

Low-level insecurity continued in Casamance in **2015**, in the form of armed robberies<sup>29</sup>.

In **2016**, local sources reported that, at least on two occasions, individuals believed to be MFDC rebels, took hostages in connection with banditry. MFDC banditry, and the risks associated to landmines, were seen as an impediment to freedom of movement in some parts of the Casamance, as reported by the US Department of State for the year 2016<sup>30</sup>.

In a query response dated May **2016**, the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) quotes Martin Evans, an expert on MFDC, who comments on the use of alcohol and drugs by MFDC during their attacks:

“Various accounts that I have heard or read of MFDC attacks and robberies point towards the perpetrators being drunk and/or high (on cannabis). Whether they were forced to take narcotics is another matter; again, the impression that I have is that this is just the way things are done but some element of coercion, at least in the sense that the young men being given such substances don't know any better and so do what they are told, may be possible. My own field experience of *maquisards*, either individually or in the milieu I mention above, is that they are often drunk or do not hesitate to drink to excess; but whether that is choice or enforced habit is harder to determine”<sup>31</sup>.

On 6 January **2018**, 13 persons were killed and 7 injured in the Bayotte forest (Casamance), by an unidentified group of armed men<sup>32</sup>. The leader of the MFDC denied his movement's responsibility in this incident<sup>33</sup>, whereas Senegalese authorities claimed that the massacre was carried out by villagers with rebel support<sup>34</sup>. According to a source, the attack came a day after the army released two MFDC fighters following negotiations led Rome's Sant Egidio's community<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> ICRC, *Annual Report 2013 - Dakar (regional)*, 14 May 2014, ([url](#)).

<sup>26</sup> KAS, *Lokale Wahlen, nationale Konsequenzen*, 10 Juli 2014, ([url](#)).

<sup>27</sup> US DoS, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Senegal*, 27 February 2014, ([url](#)).

<sup>28</sup> BBC, *Senegal's Casamance MFDC rebels declare a ceasefire*, 30 April 2014, ([url](#)); Deutsche Welle (DW), *Senegal: Gunmen kill 13 in restive Casamance region*, 6 January 2018, ([url](#)).

<sup>29</sup> ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zum Senegal: Informationen zur Sicherheits- und Menschenrechtslage, insbesondere im Gebiet Ziguinchor, Casamance (Rebellenübergriffe, Vertreibung, staatlicher Schutz) [a-9160-1]*, 4 May 2015, ([url](#)).

<sup>30</sup> US DoS, *2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Senegal*, 3 March 2017, ([url](#)).

<sup>31</sup> ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zum Senegal: Casamance: Zwangsrekrutierungen zur Teilnahme an Einsätzen der Rebellengruppe Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) zwischen 1995 und 2001 (Möglichkeiten, sich der Teilnahme zu Entziehen; Ausmaß des Zwangs; Einsatz von Drogen) [a-9678]*, 30 May 2016, ([url](#)).

<sup>32</sup> Deutsche Welle (DW), *Senegal: Gunmen kill 13 in restive Casamance region*, 6 January 2018, ([url](#)).

<sup>33</sup> Point (The)/Gambia, *MFDC leader denies involvement in Casamance massacre*, 25 January 2018, ([url](#)).

<sup>34</sup> AFP, *Three Gambians arrested over Senegalese forest guard murder*, 10 April 2018, ([url](#)).

<sup>35</sup> AFP, *Gunmen kill at least 13 in Senegal's Casamance region*, 7 January 2018, ([url](#)).



### Forced recruitment by secessionist rebel group(s) in the Casamance region

Amongst the sources consulted and listed, no information could be found on forced recruitment by secessionist rebel group(s), **in the year of 2013**.

On the question of forced recruitment by the MFDC, in the period of **1995 – 2001**, Martin Evans, expert of the MFDC, states:

“The interviews that I have conducted and other materials strongly indicate that, during the 1990s, forced recruitment or recruitment involving at least some coercion was fairly common, either in villages that came under MFDC control or in more individual cases via friends and family members. I have also heard various accounts to the effect that if young male fighters left MFDC, they risked being killed by their former comrades unless they had good reason for quitting (such as chronic illness)” [H]owever, this was not the only form of recruitment: there was also a strong element of voluntarism, at least in the 1980s and early 1990s. Many young men joined freely from some areas, particularly with majority Diola populations where popular support for the separatist cause (or resentment against repression and other mistreatment by the 'Senegalese' authorities and forces) was strong. The other process via which new 'recruits' came into the Mouvement was [...] more demographic in character: boys growing up in 'refugee' villages in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia would naturally join when they were of a suitable age. They did so because they grew up in a milieu where it was a 'normal' thing to do (however sociologically dysfunctional such environments appear to us). [T]herefore, the exact nature of and distinctions between coercion and voluntarism are somewhat problematic. [...]”<sup>36</sup>.

According to a **2009** report by US AID on 'Illicit power structures' (IPS):

'Recruitment [by the MFDC] has been mostly voluntary, with perhaps some use of persuasion but no reports of forced abductions. Most of the violence has been directed towards the Senegalese army, but villagers have also been punished or executed as collaborators. The worldview and behavior of the movement appear full of contradictions. [...]

There does not appear to be active recruitment into the MFDC at this time, though disenfranchised youth still join<sup>37</sup>.

According to Nouah Cissé, an historian of the MFDC interviewed by the Guardian in **2012**, the group recruits only in the villages and has no support in Ziguinchor, the regional capital. This could explain the dominance of the Diola in the movement<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zum Senegal: Casamance: Zwangsrekrutierungen zur Teilnahme an Einsätzen der Rebellengruppe Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) zwischen 1995 und 2001 (Möglichkeiten, sich der Teilnahme zu Entziehen; Ausmaß des Zwangs; Einsatz von Drogen)* [a-9678], 30 May 2016, ([url](#)).

<sup>37</sup> US AID, *IPS Final Report*, 21 September 2009, ([url](#)), accessed 17 April 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Guardian (The), *Boundaries of Casamance remain blurred after 30 years of conflict*, 19 June 2012, ([url](#))



It should be noted that, some sources dated **2004**, indicate that the MFDC has been accused of recruiting child soldiers, although MFDC leaders have denied the accusation<sup>39</sup>. On the topic of child soldiers recruitment, Martin Evans writes, in 2015, “... it [the Casamance conflict] has certainly not suffered the recruitment of child soldiers seen elsewhere: minors (young teenagers in this case) have probably only been involved in support roles in the MFDC, not directly in combat”<sup>40</sup>.

### **Uniforms/ distinctive physical features of secessionist rebel group(s) in Casamance**

Amongst the sources consulted and listed, no information could be found on any uniform or distinctive physical features of the secessionist rebel group(s) in Casamance.

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<sup>39</sup> IRB, *Senegal: Forced recruitment of adult Dioula living in Ziguinchor by the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance, MFDC); the consequences of refusing recruitment and the protection offered by police forces; the MFDC's geographical area of operation and influence (2003 - Aug. 2005)*, 30 August 2005, ([url](#))

<sup>40</sup> Peaceinsight, *Youth, opportunity and conflict in Casamance*, 25 August 2015, ([url](#)).



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