

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Senegal: The forgotten rights of Casamance women**

*"Women in Casamance have paid a particularly heavy price throughout this conflict; some have been taken hostage, others have been kidnapped, raped or threatened with rape by the two parties to the conflict,"* Amnesty International said in a report entitled *Senegal: Casamance women speak out* launched at a press conference today in Dakar.

When her husband "disappeared" in August 1999 after being arrested by the Senegalese security forces in Casamance, Khady Bassène was refused the right to her husband's retirement pension because she was unable to produce his death certificate. Since then, her financial situation and that of her children has steadily deteriorated. Anna Malack was the victim of sexual violence committed in 1999 by armed elements of the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (Casamance Movement of Democratic Forces - MFDC), an armed opposition group claiming independence for this southern Senegalese region. Four years on, she still suffers the physical and psychological after-effects.

These are just two examples of the daily struggles of seven cases of Casamance women that Amnesty International has been following for the past two years. Two of them were victims of sexual violence committed by armed elements claiming to represent the MFDC, four more are the wives of civilians who "disappeared" after being arrested by the security forces, and the seventh has had no news of her husband since he was abducted by elements of the MFDC a year ago for the simple reason that he did not have a Casamance surname.

*"Dozens of wives of « disappeared » civilians or others kidnapped during this conflict have, with no psychological support and often no material aid, had to face the brutal reality of the uncertain fate of their husbands, the economic difficulties created by his absence, and the questioning of their children with regard to their father's whereabouts,"* Amnesty International today said.

Through the cases of the seven women examined in this document, Amnesty International wishes to draw the attention of the two parties to the conflict, along with that of Senegalese and international public opinion, to the extent of the suffering and denial of justice inflicted on dozens of Casamance women, the direct or indirect victims of this conflict.

The impunity enjoyed for years by those responsible for these atrocities in Casamance has deprived these women of the right to truth, justice and financial compensation that would have enabled them to provide for their families by ensuring them a decent standard of living.

*"The denial of justice and the absence of redress has deprived these women of certain essential rights provided by the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, such as the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, the right of everyone to*

*the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the right of everyone to education,"* the organization said.

The courage and dignity of these women is inversely proportional to the silence and apathy of the politicians on both sides, who have done nothing to relieve the suffering of these victims. Those responsible for these atrocities have not been identified and continue to benefit from complete impunity. The truth has not been acknowledged, particularly with regard to the cases of the « disappeared », making it impossible for the families to mourn, and no compensation has been granted them.

*"By enabling these seven women to speak out, we hope their voices will reach the political leaders of the two parties to the conflict and break through the apathy and indifference that form the invisible enemy against which these women have to struggle, in almost total isolation, every day,"* Amnesty International today stated.

### **Background**

An Amnesty International delegation first met most of these women in Ziguinchor, the commercial capital of Casamance, in June 2001. With the help of a Senegalese organization, *Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'homme* (RADDHO - the African Conference for the Defence of Human Rights), a meeting was organised in November 2001 between Senegalese lawyers and these women in order to explain to them their rights to justice and redress. Finally, Amnesty International met with each of these women in January and October 2003 in order to monitor changes in their economic and psychological situation and to ascertain their position in terms of their struggle to obtain justice and redress.

***This report is available on our website at:***

***<http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf490022003>***

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