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SENEGAL: USE OF TORTURE PERSISTS WITH IMPUNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
ABUSES CONTINUE IN CASAMANCE

In spite of official denials, the use of torture is still widespread in Senegal, and in Casamance, in the south of the country, hundreds of people suspected of being supporters of the armed separatist movement, the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC), Movement of Casamance's Democratic Forces, have been tortured and held without trial. Others have "disappeared" or been extrajudicially executed by the Senegalese army.

In a report published today, Amnesty International refers to the use of torture with impunity in Senegal and to other human rights violations committed, in the context of the conflict in Casamance, both by the Senegalese security forces and by armed separatist members of the MFDC.

The organization highlights the reluctance of the Senegalese authorities to carry out prompt, impartial and thorough investigations, bring those responsible to justice, provide compensation for victims and their families or take effective steps to prevent further human rights violations.

Following the widespread raids carried out in Casamance by the Senegalese army in April 1995, witnesses at the gendarmerie headquarters in Nema (capital of the Casamance region) saw prisoners who were bleeding or unable to move without great difficulty. These allegations of torture and other equally serious allegations concerning cases of torture in Dakar and other regions of Senegal were to have been examined at the fifteenth session of the Committee against Torture held in Geneva in November 1995. Unfortunately, the day before it was due to be heard, the Senegalese Government announced that it was not able to send a delegation to Geneva. Amnesty International issued a statement saying that it regretted this absence, and that it was important that the Republic of Senegal should be present at the next session of the Committee against Torture in April 1996 to inform the Committee of the steps that it intends to take to end the use of torture in the country.

In the context of the conflict in Casamance, hundreds of people suspected of being MFDC sympathizers have been held for months without trial. From April to December 1995 the MFDC Secretary General, Father Diamacoune, was placed under house arrest without any legal basis. About 50 people were released during the last three months of 1995 thanks to the efforts of the National Commission for Peace in Casamance, which initiated a resumption of the dialogue between the government and the MFDC. However, over 150 people, mostly charged with threatening the security of the state, are still being held without trial in Dakar and there are about 40 other people in the *prison civile* in Ziguinchor.

In general, it appears that most of those who have been charged and held without trial were not in possession of arms when arrested. According to some sources, the authorities do not accuse them of any violent act, but only of carrying an MFDC membership card. However, this card has often been forced on farmers by the separatists. Amnesty International stated that all people held solely on account of their political opinions and against whom no evidence has been provided of their individual participation in acts of violence are prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

According to concurring reports that have reached Amnesty International, the Senegalese army has been responsible in Casamance for the "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution of unarmed villagers who were arrested at their homes or during security operations and who have not been seen since. For example, in January 1995, Youba Badji, reported to be a local leader of the MFDC, was arrested by soldiers in his village of Aniack. Molten plastic was reported to have been poured over his body, after which he was hanged and then buried by the soldiers.

Several sources have reported "disappearances" following arrests by soldiers. In July 1995, six young members of the entourage of Queen Anna Sambou of Djiwante, a traditional representative of the Casamance spiritual power, were arrested by soldiers at Edjoungo and "disappeared". In August 1995 soldiers arrested five people in the village of Essaoute. Nothing has been heard of them since. There have also been persistent reports about the existence of mass graves in Niaguis and at the Niambalang bridge, where a large number of victims of extrajudicial executions are reported to have been secretly buried.

In every case mentioned in Amnesty International's report, the Senegalese authorities have failed to initiate prompt and impartial investigations into the allegations, thereby allowing those responsible for the abuses to enjoy impunity.

On several occasions the Republic of Senegal has cited the fact that an amnesty law prohibits the pursuit of judicial investigation of past events in Casamance.

Amnesty International claimed that the Senegalese authorities' interpretation of these amnesty laws effectively grants immunity to those responsible for human rights violations. The organization further stated that a law which has the effect of concealing the truth and preventing those guilty of offences from being made accountable for their acts in the courts is unacceptable.

Both in relation to the widespread use of torture and to the human rights violations committed in the context of the armed conflict in Casamance, Amnesty International calls on the Senegalese authorities to take urgent steps, in accordance with international standards, to put a stop to these serious abuses of human rights. As long as such abuses continue to be carried out

with impunity and no action is taken to prevent further abuses, there are no grounds for expecting an improvement in the human rights situation.

The MFDC, for its part, has also committed serious abuses by killing villagers who refused to provide food or money and by killing civilians suspected of collaborating with the Senegalese authorities.

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