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Senegal: Dozens of civilians killed in Casamance in the last two months

An Amnesty International delegation has just returned from an eight-day visit to Casamance with alarming information about extrajudicial killings and "disappearances" perpetrated by the Senegalese security forces since July 1997.

The *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC), Democratic Forces of Casamance Movement, which has since 1982 been using force in its demand for independence for this region of southern Senegal, has also been responsible for deliberate and arbitrary killings during the same period.

"Since July 1997 at least 30 civilians have been arrested by the Senegalese security forces and have since been reported missing. The majority are said to have been victims of extrajudicial killings and to have been buried in communal graves not far from some military camps" reports Amnesty International on the basis of its delegation's investigations.

At 10.45pm on 25 August 1997 Edmond Sékou Sadio, a barman in Tilène, a district of Ziguinchor, was arrested by Senegalese soldiers at his place of work in the presence of a number of witnesses. Nothing has been heard of him since.

On 24 August 1997, Edgar Diédhiou was at a party in his village at Siganar Bouloup in the Department of Oussouye when he was arrested and tortured by soldiers, who broke his leg. He was then taken in a military vehicle in the direction of the National Training Centre for Agricultural Technicians in Ziguinchor and has not been seen since. Information obtained by Amnesty International delegation tells of communal graves around this training centre and in other places, including military camps such as those at Nyassia and near the airport at Ziguinchor.

The Amnesty International delegation also investigated the "disappearance" of one of the four members of the MFDC executive committee, Sarani Manga Badian, who was arrested at his home at approximately 9.30pm on Sunday, 24 August 1997. "*Sarani Badian was thrown to the ground and the soldiers stamped on him, he was howling like a child and covered in blood*", recounted one of the witnesses to this arrest. His wife, who tried to intervene, was struck and verbally threatened. Four days later, on 28 August, soldiers claimed that they had found Sarani Badian's body with his throat cut. However, the body has still not been returned to the family and no investigation or post-mortem examination has been ordered by the Senegalese authorities.

"Many civilians have also been victims of torture and ill-treatment by the Senegalese security forces" reports Amnesty International, citing the case of a number of people who were burned with petrol-filled plastic bottles. One of the victims, whom the delegates met in September 1997, still bore the marks of the burns received as a result of this ill-treatment. Other brutal treatments have been inflicted on civilians: one was forced to drink the blood of one of his friends who had been killed by soldiers and another, before being killed himself, was forced to eat his own lips after they had been cut off by a soldier.

The Amnesty International delegation also investigated atrocities perpetrated by the MFDC. During the night of 7 to 8 September 1997, armed militants burst into the youth hostel in the village of Djinabar in the Department of Sédhiou, killing nine civilians. Injured survivors of the attack told the

Amnesty International delegation that the MFDC militants had reproached them for dancing while they themselves were fighting for Casamance independence. Among those killed were four children, including two young girls, Timinadya Diatta, aged six and Nakéba Diatta, aged nine.

Amnesty International is still also concerned that more than 125 civilians arrested since April 1995 are still being held without trial in Dakar and Ziguinchor prisons. After an in-depth investigation in the field by an Amnesty International mission in January 1997, the human rights organization believes that all or almost all of these prisoners are being held hostage by the Senegalese Government in its negotiations with the MFDC although there is no evidence that they were personally involved in any criminal act.

Amnesty International has obtained strong evidence which shows that the majority of these civilians were tortured during the first 10 days of their detention. The organization considers that most of these civilians are prisoners of conscience and demands their immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International is calling on the two parties to immediately put a stop to the murder and torture of civilians caught up in a military conflict of which they are the principal victims. The organization is urging the Senegalese authorities and the MFDC to respect the basic humanitarian principles enshrined in common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and, in particular, to treat civilians and people taking no active part in the hostilities humanely and to prevent any recourse to illegal executions and torture.

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