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LEGAL AID BOARD

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Information on heavy fighting in Casamance area of Senegal from December 2010 to present. Information on MFDC rebels and government soldiers fighting in Bignona which is close to Gambian border.

An *Agence France Presse* report on clashes in the Casamance region of Senegal in December 2010 states:

“Suspected separatist rebels on Monday killed five soldiers during clashes in southern Senegal's troubled Casamance region, the army's public relations wing said. This is the heaviest toll suffered by Senegalese troops since six soldiers were killed in October 2009 by suspected rebels waging one of Africa's longest running insurgencies in a bid for independence. ‘There were indeed losses. Five soldiers died following clashes this morning’ in the Bignona area, near the border with Gambia, an official at the military's public relations department told AFP.” (Agence France Presse (27 December 2010) *Suspected rebels kill five Senegalese troops: military*)

See also *Agence France Presse* report which states:

“The Senegalese army pressed on with search operations in the southern Casamance region Tuesday, a day after losing seven soldiers in clashes with suspected separatist rebels. ‘We are continuing our search operations on the ground,’ said an officer in Bignona, in northern Casamance, where firefights took place Sunday and Monday between the Senegalese army and suspected members of the MFDC (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance). Monday, military sources said the soldiers were ambushed by the rebels. But the army's public relations wing said Tuesday four of those killed were involved in a car accident, without giving further details. In a statement the Senegalese army communications department, Dirpa, said soldiers had faced ‘one hundred rebels who wanted to enter’ Bignona, a town about 30 km (20 miles) from Ziguinchor, the Casamance main city. ‘These clashes resulted in the deaths of seven soldiers, including four by accident. The rebels suffered heavy losses, with many wounded,’ said Dirpa.” (Agence France Presse (28 December 2010) *Senegal army hunting suspected rebels in Casamance*)

Also from *Agence France Presse* is a report which states:

“Violence flared again in Senegal's troubled south as seven soldiers were killed this week, prompting criticism over a stalled peace process in the three decade-long separatist rebellion. The losses, in an ambush on Senegalese troops by suspected separatist rebels, were the heaviest since six soldiers were killed in October 2009 in the sporadic clashes that characterise one of Africa's longest running conflicts. ‘The month of December always brings tensions in the Casamance,’ said journalist Ibrahima Gassama, a specialist on the Casamance conflict which broke out in 1982. ‘It is the anniversary of the outbreak of the rebellion, which uses this to mark its presence,’ he told AFP.” (Agence France Presse (30 December 2010) *Violence surges in Casamance as peace process stays blocked*)

A *Radio France Internationale* report on military operations in the Casamance region states:

"The Senegalese army launched an operation Tuesday in Casamance a day after seven soldiers were killed in a firefight with suspected separatists. The army also said that the rebels are more heavily armed than previously thought. 'We are continuing our sweeping operations on the ground,' said an officer in Bignona, about 30 kilometres Ziguinchor, the main city in Casamance. On Monday, firefights broke out there between the army and suspected members of the MFDC (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance), the independence movement in the southern region. The army's communications department, Dirpa, said in a statement that soldiers had faced 'one hundred rebels who wanted to enter' Bignona." (Radio France Internationale (28 December 2010) *Senegal: Army Sweeps Casamance After Fight With Separatists*)

A *Voice of America News* report states:

"Senegalese army spokesman, Colonel Abdourahim Kebe, said Monday that rebel fighters from the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance launched an attack Sunday on a village near the Gambian border. Sources say an army patrol engaged the rebels, leading to violent clashes that led to casualties on both sides, though the rebels have not released any information. An army spokesman said the soldiers were killed in fighting on Sunday and an ambush on Monday. Witnesses says hundreds of residents are fleeing to towns across the border in the Gambia, which juts into the center of Senegal and separates the Casamance from the rest of the country." (Voice of America News (28 December 2010) *Rebels Attack Southern Senegal Village*)

An *Agence France Presse* report on an incident in January 2011 states:

"Two Senegalese soldiers were killed and one wounded on Tuesday in a clash with suspected separatist rebels in Senegal's troubled southern Casamance region, a military official said." (Agence France Presse (11 January 2011) *Two Senegalese soldiers killed in troubled Casamance*)

An *Agence France Presse* report on a second incident in January 2011 states:

"Three Senegalese soldiers were killed during a clash with suspected separatist rebels in the troubled southern Casamance region, a local official told AFP on Thursday. "Three soldiers were killed," said the official from the Middle Casamance village of Bounkiling, 600 kilometres (370 miles) south of the capital Dakar. A military source in the Casamance town of Kolda confirmed the report and added that two military vehicles were burned by the rebel Movement for Democratic Forces in Casamance (MFDC). He said the clashes took place when troops intervened after "heavily armed rebels" attacked three vehicles, seeking to rob passengers of valuables. The deaths come after two soldiers were killed and one wounded on Tuesday in similar circumstances. The Senegalese army lost seven troops in fighting with the MDRC rebels on December 27." (Agence France Presse (13 January 2011) *Three Senegalese soldiers killed by suspected rebels*)

A report published by the Gambian newspaper *FOROYAA* states:

"The recent upsurge in violence involving the Senegalese Armed Forces and MFDC fighters in Cassamance has forced scores of people to seek sanctuary in The

Gambia, Foroyaa can tell. According to the information, the fighting took place in the area of Basada on Thursday 13 January 2011. Eye witnesses, who spoke to this reporter during his visit to the border area between the Gambia and Senegal, said a Senegalese media reported that 3 soldiers have lost their lives in the fighting. However there were no reports of any deaths on the rebel side." (FOROYAA Newspaper (19 January 2011) *Senegal: People Flee From Gun Battle in Casamance*)

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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