

The Gambia: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 13 March 2009

Situation of the Mandinka ethnic group in The Gambia, in particular treatment by the government/government agents

Information on the treatment of the Mandinka ethnic group by the Gambian government was scarce among sources available to the RDC.

In a section titled "Denial" an *IRIN News* report states:

"Sam Sarr, a representative of the New Alliance for Democracy and Development (NADD) party, has accused President Jammeh party of handing out voter cards to members of his own Jolla ethnic group, even if they are not Gambian nationals. Ousainu Darboe, leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP), the main opposition party has previously echoed these complaints in interviews with IRIN. They say that Jammeh needs to bring in support from outside because the Jolla are a minority in Mandinka-dominated Gambia." (*IRIN News* (12 September 2006) *Gambia: Murky voter registration mars election run-up*)

An article published online by the Banjul-based newspaper *The Gambia Journal* states:

"President Jammeh's scheme of creating a 'new majority' essentially involved the forging of a coalition of minority cultural, ethnic and religious groups into an alliance to prevent the 'restoration of Mandinka domination.' Ex-President Dawda Jawara was of Mandinka-speaking stock, so in Jammeh's 'tribal' thinking it was the whole Mandinka-speaking community in The Gambia that was in power or enjoying the fruits of power. It did not matter to holders of such perception that Sheriff Dibba, Jawara's arch-rival is also Mandinka, and that what mattered was not tribal affinity but political policy. It also did not matter that under Jawara's rule, the average Mandinka-speaker did not fare any better than members of any other linguistic group. What Jammeh and his co-thinkers feared in reality was the numbers that the Mandinkas constitute as voters now that the military junta was being forced to the polls. In his Jola-conditioned mind the Mandinkas posed a serious threat through their numerical strength." (*Gambia Journal, The* (Banjul) (24 January 2007) *Gambia: Foni And the Threat of National Disintegration Part 3 of 5* Sarr, Mbaye B. & Sillah, Mohammed L.)

An article published on the *AllGambian.net* website states:

"The past twelve years have witnessed this regime planting seeds of tribalism in ways that had been alien to our people. For many of us who grew up in a multi-tribal environment, where the very nature of our society sheltered us from tribal bigotry, Jammeh's Gambia has made us sit up and take notice of the shifting social paradigm that he is engineering through his open tribalism. We only have to look at the very high and middle level positions in our government where Jammeh has conveniently placed his Jola, Manjagos, Balantas and Karoninka

tribesmen, all of who are closely related to the Jolas, but who together constitute less than fifteen percent of our nation's population. This effectively means that Jammeh is willfully marginalizing eighty-five percent of our population, since more than ninety percent of our top senior government officials originate from Banjul, Kombo North and the Fonis. There is not a single Fula in any senior government position, not even as a cabinet secretary, and there is only Kaba Bajo to represent the Mandinkas in our government, and he is from the military.” (AllGambian.net (28 August 2006) *Gambia: Is Civil War in the Gambia Inevitable?* Jallow, Matthew K.)

An article published by the online newspaper *The Gambia Echo* states:

“Virtually every sector of Gambian society is now riddled with tribalism, with the Jolas assuming the dominant positions. Almost all the senior positions in the security forces in particular are now virtually occupied by Jolas. With the removal of Musa Mboob as Inspector General of Police, it now means that only the NIA and the Immigration Department are still headed by non-Jolas. However, even in those places, the second in command is a Jola, and he usually wields more power than the head of the institution. Indeed, it is quite obvious that they are being groomed to eventually take over pretty soon. A good case in point is the appointment of Benedict Jammeh as IGP, when we are told that he has just returned from overseas studies, and prior to that he was a teacher. It is hard to imagine any justification why Yahya Jammeh would leave all the experienced police officers and appoint someone who hardly has any police experience to such an important position. The answer, quite obviously is that his most important qualification is because he is a Jola. Therefore, in Jammeh's regime, it is not one's knowledge or experience that seems to matter, but being Jola is the most important qualification for anyone to stand the chance of being appointed to a senior position, particularly when it has anything to do with security. There is quite an obvious attempt by the regime to ensure that the Jolas occupy most of the important positions in the public services. While they are less than 10 per cent of the population, yet they now occupy more than 60 per cent of the senior positions in the public services. How can anyone justify that?” (Gambia Echo, The (27 April 2007) *Gambia: The Looming Dangers of Tribalism* Hawa, Adama)

An article from the US-based *Freedom Newspaper* states:

“Officers of the Immigration Department belonging to the Mandinka tribe are speaking out for the first time about the daily discrimination, marginalization and harassment they suffered in the hands of their Deputy Director Buba Sanyang, who happens to be a Jolla. The aggrieved officers charged that Sanyang is using his office to sideline and undermine the hard working officers of the Force. Mr. Sanyang who was an ASP at the Airport, was promoted to the position of Deputy Director General of the Immigration Department without any formal leadership training. The aggrieved officers said despite Sanyang's inefficiency, he was hired by the President alongside with other Jolla Immigration Commissioners to man key Immigration Posts across the country. According to the protesting officers, the Immigration Department has been ‘Jollarnized’ and Mandinka officers were being openly denied promotion and overseas studies. The officers who wished not to be identified for fear of reprisal from the

authorities said what is happening at the Immigration Department was 'unacceptable' and was a clear case of discrimination against a majority tribe in the country." (Freedom Newspaper (Raleigh, North Carolina) (20 December 2007) *Gambia: Immigration Department Tearing Apart* Ceesay, MBA)

In a section titled "Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples" a *Minority Rights Group International* report states:

"Jammeh's opponents have noted his reliance on Jola support in the 2001 and 2006 elections, including at least the perception (if not reality) of cheating through enlistment of Diola kinsmen in Senegal. While Jola immigration from the Casamance is welcome, it has been made clear that further Wolof immigration from northern Senegal is not desired. Moreover, it is widely believed that Jolas have been favoured in recruitment into the army. This enhanced politicization of ethnicity in The Gambia could pose a risk to Jammeh's own ethnic group, which comprises a mere ten per cent of the population. Moreover, there are some indications that particular Jola sub-groups, notably the Karoninka from the Karone islands in the Casamance, are starting to assert a separate identity." (Minority Rights Group International (May 2008) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous People – Gambia Overview*)

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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