



## **Nigeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 16 September 2011**

### **Basic Information about MASSOB.**

An *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response to a request for information on MASSOB, in a paragraph headed “Leadership and structure of MASSOB”, states:

“Formed in 1999 the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) campaigns for the independence of the Igbo people, who are predominant in southeastern Nigeria (BBC 30 May 2007). Sources consulted by the Research Directorate name Ralph Uwazuruike as the leader of MASSOB. One media outlet names Uchenna Madu as MASSOB's Director of Information, and another names David MacDavid as Deputy Director of Information.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (14 August 2009) *NGA103197.FE – Nigeria: Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), including its leaders and the recruitment of its members, whether cards or other documents are issued to members (July 2005 - August 2009)*)

In a paragraph headed “Recruitment of members” this response states:

“A Biafra independence leader, quoted by Radio France internationale (RFI) in reference to MASSOB, stated that [translation] ‘no one knows their number, their methods of recruitment or training’. Further information on the recruitment of MASSOB members could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.” (ibid)

A *Danish Immigration Service* fact-finding mission report, in a section titled “Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)” (paragraph 3.1.13), states:

“According to a senior representative of the IGP, the NPF and political opposition parties, including the separatist movement MASSOB, are not regarded as a ‘serious threat or problem’ and there has never been any violence involved in their activities. The BHC confirmed that political opposition groups such as MASSOB are in general free to express their views, although those that take part in demonstrations may face detention.” (Danish Immigration Service (18 March 2005) *Report on human rights issues in Nigeria: Joint British-Danish fact-finding mission to Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria 19 October to 2 November 2004*, p.11)

Paragraph 3.1.15 of this report states:

“Muhammad Sani Usman, Chief Administration Officer (Research), NHRC, confirmed that MASSOB is a non-violent political faction, whose struggle for independence of Biafra is entirely political. However, the leader of MASSOB, Ralph Uwazuruike raised the Biafra-flag at his house in October 2004 and the

NPF searched his house and confiscated 110,000 Naira<sup>24</sup> in cash and six cell phones. Uwazurike escaped but between 10 and 15 members of MASSOB were arrested. Usman was unaware of whether or not these members are still detained. He emphasized that they may face being charged for treason, as it is unconstitutional to raise the flag of Biafra and thus institute a state within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Uwazurike is still in hiding but he communicates with the Nigerian press and he insists that MASSOB is a non-violent political movement.” (ibid, p.11)

Paragraph 3.1.22 refers to information provided by Clement Nwankwo, Attorney-at-Law and former Director of the civil rights group Constitutional Rights Project, as follows:

“Nwankwo portrayed MASSOB as an ‘entirely political movement’ demanding total independence for Biafra and he could not accept that MASSOB is regarded as a ‘militant movement’. MASSOB is unarmed and Nwankwo found it hard to believe that persons associated with MASSOB would be armed or that such persons would have been engaged in smuggling arms. Nwankwo believed that if someone were charged with such activities it would most likely be a result of the NPF ‘setting-up’ the individual in order to detain the person. He added that on several occasions MASSOB has claimed that the NPF have killed sympathisers of MASSOB. Momoh confirmed that members of MASSOB and others have claimed to have been falsely accused of carrying arms.” (ibid, p.12)

Regarding risks to MASSOB members, Paragraph 3.1.25 states:

“Normally anonymous sympathisers of MASSOB do not draw the attention of NPF. More prominent leaders of MASSOB are at risk of persecution and also persons affiliated with those leaders could be at risk of persecution and detention. Less prominent persons who are affiliated with MASSOB could be targeted as well in order to intimidate others.” (ibid, p.13)

Paragraph 3.1.27 states:

“Nwankwo repeated that he definitely does not consider MASSOB as violent and it is groundless to label the movement as a ‘rebel movement’. MASSOB has not undertaken violent activities and any allegation is most likely orchestrated by the police.” (ibid, p.13)

A *BBC News* Report states:

“Nearly four decades after Nigeria's bloody civil war ended, some young men calling themselves ‘freedom fighters’ are trying to re-open old wounds. They want to revive Biafra's crushed secession bid, launched on 30 May 1967, because, they say, they can no longer tolerate being marginalised by the Nigerian state. But federal authorities have dismissed members of the separatist Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (Massob) as ‘common criminals’ and ‘armed robbers’. Massob wants a separate country for the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria.” (BBC News (30 May 2007) *Reopening Nigeria's civil war wounds*)

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.

### **References:**

BBC News (30 May 2007) *Reopening Nigeria's civil war wounds*  
<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6657259.stm>

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[http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR\\_RDI/RIR\\_RDI.aspx?id=452510&l=e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=452510&l=e)

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### **Sources Consulted:**

All Africa

BBC

Danish Immigration Service

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UK Home Office

UNHCR Refworld

US Department of State