

**Information on the following: The current treatment of the Biafran minority by the Nigerian State. Specifically, attitude of the ruling Nigerian Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) towards Biafrans/MASSOB. If possible, details of exact number of people in Biafra detained by the Nigerian Authorities during 2005.**

In a section titled “Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)” (section 3.1.16) a *Danish Immigration Service* report refers to information provided by a Nigerian university professor as follows:

“Professor Utomi explained that there has been significant level of resentment in Igbo society about the treatment of Igbo people since the civil war. There was a philosophy of an Igbo renaissance amongst young Igbo men and women born since the civil war and they have found allies in the Igbo diaspora. This has been exploited by MASSOB. However, MASSOB is very much a fringe group but because of government over-reaction to it, it has gained support. The government is strongly opposed to MASSOB and several members and supporters have been arrested and detained for months even though MASSOB insists that it is a non-violent movement. Professor Utomi explained that the ghost of MASSOB has created concern within the SSS and now and then its forces have over-reacted.” (Danish Immigration Service (18 March 2005) *Report on human rights issues in Nigeria*, p.11)

Section 3.1.17 of this report states:

“It was added by Professor Utomi that the leadership of MASSOB, i.e. ‘those that energise and mobilise support for the movement’, are at risk of arrest and detention by the authorities.” (ibid, p.11)

Section 3.1.20 refers to the treatment of MASSOB sympathisers, stating:

“In the beginning of 2004 a large number of MASSOB sympathisers were arrested and Nwankwo stated that there is a massive hunt for persons affiliated with MASSOB. He was not aware whether MASSOB registers members and issues membership cards or not but he doubted this would be the case. Nevertheless MASSOB has produced an independent Biafra State flag and issued a currency. However, the flag and the currency are not legal and if a person is caught in possession of the currency or the flag the person will be arrested. Some may even be accused of sedition or treason, which according to the law is punishable by death.” (ibid, p.12)

In a section titled “Refuelling Biafran separatism” an *International Crisis Group* report states:

“A further fallout of the flawed elections is the possibility they will lend further fuel to the separatist agitation championed by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) since 1999. Perhaps more than in any other zone of the country, the elections were poorly conducted and mindlessly rigged in the south east. This was partly a result of the PDP’s determination to

retain its control of four states there and to prevent any further loss to Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu's APGA or Orji Kalu's Progressive People's Alliance (PPA), which enjoyed strong support. Although PPA won the governorships of Abia and Imo States, many in the zone believe it and APGA could have done better, especially in the federal legislative election, if not for PDP rigging. In reaction, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the pan-Ibo ethnic pressure organisation, called on all Ibos to 'totally condemn and dissociate themselves from the elections' and 'to deny legitimacy to the president and some governors, including state and federal legislators who have been declared winners by INEC'. This stand has already rekindled the separatist sentiments of MASSOB activists, whose leaders see the elections as vindication of their long-standing position that Ibos can never realise their political aspirations within the Nigerian federation." (International Crisis Group (30 May 2007) *Nigeria: Failed Elections, Failing State?* P.11)

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* Murray, Senan)

In a section titled "Igbo separatism: MASSOB" (section 3.2.1) a Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) fact-finding mission report states:

"MASSOB-affiliation is claimed in a number of asylum cases both in Norway and in other European countries. The separatist group is increasingly in conflict with Nigerian authorities, and is seen as a clear threat by the political elite." (Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) (August 2006) *Fact-finding trip to Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos and Benin City) 12-26 March 2006*, p.14)

A section of this report titled "Popular support for MASSOB" (section 3.2.1.3) states:

"None of our sources, including Festus Keyamo, backed claims that people are assumed to be MASSOB supporters just on the basis of being Igbos. Neither did anyone state that Igbos who support MASSOB's political aims and views, but who do not participate in political meetings, demonstrations, etc, are targets of harassment or persecution." (ibid, p.15)

In a section titled "Persecution of MASSOB supporters" (section 3.2.1.5) this report alleges that there were 100 MASSOB supporters in detention in March 2006, stating:

“According to Bukhari Bello (NHRC), some MASSOB supporters may fear state persecution, but not many. Festus Keyamo (lawyer of MASSOB) stated that MASSOB has no records of ordinary members being arrested, except if they participate in events organised by MASSOB. He added that being in possession of Biafra currency and/or the Biafra flag also can lead to arrest. According to Keyamo’s figures, more than one hundred MASSOB supporters were in detention as of March 2006.” (ibid, p.16)

A *Daily Champion* report alleging that 300 MASSOB members were being detained in March 2005 states:

“About 300 members of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) are allegedly being illegally detained in various police cells in the country by security agents while two of their leaders in Onitsha have been forced to flee the country.” (Daily Champion (18 March 2005) *Nigeria: 300 Massob Activists in Jail - Group Alleges* Nweze, Alphonsus)

In a section titled “Nations Within A Nation” an *International Crisis Group* report refers to the killing of MASSOB members as follows:

“In the South East, MASSOB has been active since 2000, agitating for an independent Ibo nation state. Clashes with police have been common. As recently as March 2006, police killed MASSOB separatists who had argued that Igbos should no longer be regarded as Nigerians and attempted to prevent their inclusion in the census.” (International Crisis Group (25 October 2006) *Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment*, p.16)

The *Freedom House* annual report on Nigeria states:

“In 2006, security forces clashed with demonstrators in southeastern Anambra State who supported the banned separatist Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The organization claims that ethnic Igbos suffer discrimination by the government and seeks a separate Igbo state in the southeast. Human rights groups report that dozens of pro-Biafran activists have been killed in the past seven years and hundreds have been detained.” (Freedom House (2 July 2008) *Freedom in the World 2008 – Nigeria*)

In a section titled “Security Forces Accused of Abuses” an *IRIN News* report states:

“Several residents interviewed said the security forces upon their deployment embarked on cordon-and-search operations in sections of the city, particularly in Fegge and Okpoko, believed to be strongholds of MASSOB. 'Many people found with guns or MASSOB identity cards were summarily shot dead,' Isotonu Nkwankwaka, a resident of the Fegge district, told IRIN. Residents also accused the security forces of invading shops and markets in the city, which is one of the biggest trading towns in Nigeria, looting goods and stealing money. At the Bridge Head Market and Nkpor Market, residents pointed out charred buildings and shops they said were burned by soldiers. Emeka Uzoka, a shopkeeper on Mbaukwu Street, said a group of soldiers came into the street one day shooting

into the air, forcing residents to flee. Soldiers then went into their shops and helped themselves to drinks and money left behind. 'All the money I had in drawer, my sales for the day, was stolen by the soldiers,' Uzoka told IRIN. According to Innocent Dike, a MASSOB official in Onitsha, at least 200 suspected members of the group have been killed since troops were deployed. Several houses believed to belong to MASSOB activists were also razed, he said." (IRIN News (4 September 2006) *Nigeria: Government cracks down on Biafra separatist resurgence*)

In a section titled "Torture and Ill-Treatment of Members of Self-Determination Groups" a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

"During the course of our recent research, Human Rights Watch interviewed seven members of MASSOB, each of whom gave accounts of ill-treatment that appeared to be inflicted as a result of their membership in the organization. Since its formation in 1999, members of MASSOB, which advocates an independent state of Biafra in the predominantly Igbo south-east of Nigeria, have been harassed, arrested, detained and killed by the police. Although there is no law proscribing MASSOB, the federal government has declared membership of the organization illegal on the grounds that they constitute a threat to the security and sovereignty of the nation." (Human Rights Watch (27 July 2005) "*Rest in Pieces*" – *Police Torture and Deaths in Custody in Nigeria*, p.34)

This report also states:

"Five of the MASSOB supporters Human Rights Watch interviewed were arrested during a clash with police on March 29, 2003. They described how the police stopped a large convoy of MASSOB members holding a rally near Okigwe, Imo State, threw tear gas canisters and then opened fire. There are conflicting reports of the number of people killed during the clash. One MASSOB member who was injured during the incident told Human Rights Watch he saw the bodies of six people who were killed in the clash. Another MASSOB member said he witnessed the death of two women and saw twenty dead bodies. MASSOB leader Raph Uwazuruike claims fifty were killed while the police put the figure at seven people." (ibid, pp.34-35)

This report describes the arrest of 53 suspected MASSOB supporters in 2004 as follows:

"More recently, on September 11, 2004, fifty-three people were arrested at a football match organized by MASSOB in the Ojo area of Lagos. The match was part of a 'Biafran Freedom Tournament'. Eyewitness described how police attempted to break up the crowd, fired tear gas and arrested participants and spectators. According to their lawyers and press reports, those arrested included a thirty-eight-year-old woman and a teenage girl who, along with thirty-four others who claimed they were not members of MASSOB. The fifty-three were detained at the state police command at Panti, Lagos for nearly one week before being charged with treasonable felony for conspiring to 'levy war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria [...] by participating in the launching of the Biafra Freedom Football Tournament.' Lawyers acting for the accused told Human Rights Watch

about their clients' alleged ill-treatment in police custody. They described how during detention at Panty, the male suspects were stripped naked and beaten with batons and gun butts. Several of the suspects were reportedly held at gunpoint and forced to admit to membership of MASSOB and sign confessional statements." (ibid, p.36)

In a section titled "Arrest and Detention" the *US Department of State* country report on Nigeria states:

"Members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), a separatist group espousing Igbo unity and the secession of Igbo states, initiated frequent violent clashes with the government, particularly in Onitsha, Anambra State. Police sometimes reacted by arresting large numbers of MASSOB members. Most of the 69 members arrested in a June 2006 sweep remained in detention at year's end." (US Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) (11 March 2008) *Nigeria: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2007*)

An *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response to an information request states:

"A number of civil society watchdogs, including human rights organizations, media sources, civil rights activists and academics, say that members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) frequently face harassment and the risk of arrest and detention by state authorities." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (27 June 2005) *NGA100172.E – Nigeria: Treatment of members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); availability of state protection (August 2004-June 2005)*)

A *This Day* article refers to a list published by MASSOB of the names of 2,020 members allegedly killed by the authorities since 1999, stating:

"In a joint press conference addressed by Comrade Edison Samuel, MASSOB's Regional Administrator for Awka, and Onitsha, and Nze Christian Umeaka, its regional administrator for Nnewi, all in Anambra State, MASSOB said the compendium of the dead in which the names, addresses, date and year of death of each member was compiled showed that in Okigwe Zone, Imo State, 263 people were killed, while the casualties in Aba/owerri, Enugu/Abakaliki axis of the South-east stood at 448 and 198 respectively. The organisation said it lost 1044 members in the 'Onitsha Massacre of 2006/2007,' while 67 others were killed in different communities in Abia north during the period under review. MASSOB said most of these killings were extra-judicial, while the massacre and detention of its members across the country have continued unabated." (This Day (13 May 2008) *Nigeria: MASSOB Releases List of Slain Members Onyekamuo, Charles*)

A *This Day* report on the alleged killing of two MASSOB members states:

"No fewer than two persons were allegedly shot dead yesterday as security swooped on the members of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign

State of Biafra (MASSOB), who were celebrating Biafra Day at Aba. Leaders of the organisation, who addressed newsmen at Umuahia during a rally attended by hundreds of Massobians, said that the dead were among those shot by the police while several others were arrested.” (This Day (31 May 2008) *Nigeria: Two Feared Dead As Massob Celebrates Biafra* Ugwu, Emmanuel)

A *This Day* report on the arrest of alleged MASSOB members states:

“Seventy-eight (78) members of the Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) were yesterday arraigned before the Federal High Court, Enugu on an 8-count charge of treasonable felony by the Federal Government. The suspects were said to have been arrested from various towns in Anambra State last week during the commemoration of the 41st anniversary of the defunct Biafra in which the movement said its members were going to stage a protest march from Owerri, Imo State to Enugu.” (This Day (4 June 2008) *Nigeria: FG Charges 78 Massob Members for Treason* Ugwoke, Francis)

See also *BBC News* report which states:

“They are among the 84 members of the Movement for the Actualisation of a Sovereign State of Biafra (Massob) arrested in Enugu in May. They are accused of treason after allegedly celebrating the anniversary of the start of the Nigerian civil war. Their lawyer insists that Massob is a non-violent organisation. Uju Joy Ogwefi said the 73 men and one woman were on their way to a friend's house when the police stopped their convoy and arrested them.” (BBC News (28 July 2008) *Biafrans deny treason in Nigeria*)

A *Vanguard* article states:

“Eze further disclosed that over 300 members of the organisation were still being held at Enugu and Kuje prisons at Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory for participating in the organisation's activities. According to him, ‘hundreds of our members were arrested during MASSOB's one million man march in May 2008 on our way to Enugu from Okigwe in Imo State to protest against the continued detention and killing of our members by security agents sponsored by the Federal Government.’” (Vanguard (21 January 2009) *Nigeria: Massob Calls for Release of Members* Ndiribe, Okey)

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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