
GUINEA-BISSAU

Republic of Guinea-Bissau

Population: 1.6 million (856,000 under 18)

Government armed forces: 9,300

Compulsory recruitment age: 18

Voluntary recruitment age: 16, younger with parental consent

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: signed 8 September 2000

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II

There were no reports of child soldiers serving in the armed forces, although by law children aged under 16 years could be enlisted with parental consent.

Context

Political tension and army unrest persisted. In October 2004, a year after ousting President Kumba Ialá, General Veríssimo Correia Seabra, the chief of staff of the armed forces, and Colonel Domingos de Barros were killed in a revolt by soldiers who were demanding payment of arrears owed to them for their service in the UN peacekeeping force in Liberia.¹ No one was prosecuted for those deaths.² The revolt was ended by a deal with the military hierarchy which included an offer of an amnesty for offences committed by soldiers between 1980 and 6 October 2004.³ However, the amnesty law had not yet been approved by parliament. There was serious unrest in the run-up to the July 2005 presidential elections, which were won by a former president, João Bernardo “Niño” Vieira.

Fighting erupted in March 2006 between the armed forces and a dissident faction of the Senegalese separatist armed group Democratic forces of Casamance Movement (Mouvement des forces démocratiques du Casamance, MFDC), led by Salif Sadio, which had entered Guinea-Bissau territory. The ensuing conflict, which lasted for a month, resulted in the isolation of over 20,000 people in rural communities in the north, and the displacement of at least 10,000 people, mostly women and children, some 2,000 of whom fled to Senegal. The MFDC reportedly laid mines and other explosive devices in the area.⁴ There were no reports of children taking part in the fighting.

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

Decree 20/83 of 9 July 1983 provided for compulsory military service for men aged

between 18 and 25. However, obligatory military service ceased to be implemented in the second half of the 1980s.⁵ The decree also provided for boys under 16 to perform military service with parental or guardian consent. Currently, no under-18s appeared to be serving in the armed forces.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

In October 2005 the government announced the destruction of its entire stockpile of approximately 5,000 landmines.⁶ Emergency de-mining in the north got under way following the fighting in March–April 2006.⁷ Nevertheless, Guinea-Bissau remained plagued by landmines and other explosive devices, and according to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, 32 of 39 sectors remained contaminated by mines and other munitions. This had a particularly negative impact on the rural poor and the national economy, since much of the land could not be cultivated.⁸

According to the Ministry of Defence, a security sector reform envisaged the reduction of the armed forces from 9,650 to 3,440.⁹ In 2007 the UNDP agreed to finance an independent census of the armed forces, in order to take into account the needs and numbers of armed forces to be targeted for demobilization.¹⁰

Developments

Senegalese children of MFDC fighters or who were refugees from the conflict in Casamance grew up in extreme poverty in Guinea-Bissau, and were exposed both to conflict and to armed criminal activity.¹¹

- 1 “Soldiers Stage Revolt in Guinea-Bissau”, AP, 6 October 2004.
- 2 US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2006: Guinea-Bissau, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 6 March 2007, www.state.gov.
- 3 “Guinea-Bissau renegade troops reach deal with military”, AFP, 10 October 2004.
- 4 Report of the UN Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UNGBIS), UN Doc. S/2006/487, 6 July 2006.
- 5 Confidential sources, 31 July 2007.
- 6 “Guinea-Bissau: Stockpiles gone but landmines a continued threat”, IRIN, 26 October 2005.
- 7 Report of the UN Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UNGBIS), UN Doc. S/2006/946, 6 December 2006.

- 8 “Guinea-Bissau: International attention on drug trafficking could help demining efforts”, IRIN, 26 July 2007.
- 9 Report of the UN Secretary-General, above note 7.
- 10 Report of the UN Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office in that country, UN Doc. S/2007/715, 6 December 2007.
- 11 Confidential sources, May 2007.