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(09.01.2004)

Operations to clear landmines in the southern Senegalese region of Casamance torn by a 21-year-old civil war will begin Sunday, a delegation from the region said after meeting President Abdoulaye Wade Saturday.

The delegation said the national army would conduct the operation, adding that development partners conditioned their financial support to the conclusion of a peace deal between the government and the rebel Movement of the Democratic forces of Casamance (MFDC).

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Several hundreds of landmines have been placed in the Casamance since the outbreak of the strife 22 years ago.

The province of Ziguinchor, at the core of the conflict, has 473 mines, against some 130 in Kolda, 185 km east of here.

Most of the explosive devices are set in strategic places, namely along the Guinea Bissau-Senegal border, around villages and farms as well as banana, mango, and cashew plantations.

The MFDC rebels are fighting for an independent state in Casamance.

Von: Panafrcian News Agency, 10 January 2004

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