Senegal President Abdoulaye Wade said on Tuesday separatist rebels had agreed to clear landmines from the southern Casamance region and the end was close for a decades-old conflict.

(05.01.2004)

In his New Year address, he said the rebels would start to remove mines before January 11, adding: "They know where they put the mines."

Hundreds of people have been maimed by mines in Casamance, a former tourist hotspot but isolated by a low-intensity conflict between rebels and government forces since 1982.

Wade promised a new amnesty for the rebels in Casamance, which is nearly cut off from the rest of the West African state by the Gambia.

The rebel Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) took up arms to demand more autonomy for the largely Christian and animist region from the rest of mostly Muslim Senegal.

Von: Reuters AlertNet, UK - 6 Jan 2004

<<< zurück zu: News

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