

**PROMOTING  
HUMAN RIGHTS IN  
SENEGAL**

## Inspired by the Jewish commitment to justice, American Jewish World Service works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world.

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** advances the health and human rights of women, girls and LGBT\* people; promotes recovery from conflict, disasters and oppression; and defends access to food, land and livelihoods. We pursue lasting change by supporting grassroots and global human rights organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and by mobilizing our community in the U.S. to advocate for global justice. Working together, we strive to build a more just and equitable world.

AJWS has worked in Senegal since 1992. We currently fund 13 social change organizations with a focus on the Casamance region, where 30 years of conflict have brought violence into the lives of civilians and robbed people of their basic civil and political rights. As Senegal's grassroots groups work to achieve peace and respect for human rights, AJWS is by their side, providing financial support, technical assistance, solidarity and an unwavering commitment to justice.



**ABOVE** Boats on Senegal's Gorée Island, a former hub of the Atlantic slave trade. *All photographs courtesy of Stefanie Rubin unless noted.*

**FRONT COVER** A member of USOFORAL, an AJWS grantee that brings Senegalese women together to advocate for peace in Casamance.

\*LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

# AJWS GRANTEES IN SENEGAL



## **DAKAR**

Y'en a Marre

## **KOLDA**

Comité d'Appui et de Soutien au Développement  
Economique et Social en Casamance

## **PIKINE**

Association Nationale pour le Bien-Etre de la Population

## **SEDHIOU**

Association de Développement le Gabou

## **ZIGUINCHOR**

Construire la Paix par le Développement Economique  
et Social

World Education Senegal

Association d'Appui aux Initiatives de Paix et  
de Développement

Dynamique de Paix en Casamance

Afrique Enjeux

Espoir Pour l'Enfance

Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance

Comité d'Action pour le Développement de la Zone  
de Palmier

Comite Regional de Solidarite des Femmes pour la Paix en  
Casamance /USOFORAL

# BACKGROUND: WHY WE PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS IN SENEGAL

In recent years, many observers have admired Senegal as a model of stability in West Africa. A former French colony that served as a hub for the global slave trade for centuries, the country is known for peacefully establishing its long-standing democratic government in 1960, upon gaining independence from France.

Because of this reputation for peace and stability, many people are surprised when they learn about the conflict that has simmered in Senegal's Casamance region for the last 30 years—a conflict that has killed thousands of people and displaced up to 60,000 more.<sup>1</sup>

The Casamance region stands apart from the rest of Senegal, in terms of both culture and geography. Senegal is a predominantly Muslim country, where 43 percent of the population is Wolof in ethnicity. But in Casamance, roughly 60 percent of the population belongs to the minority Diola ethnic group and either practices Christianity or subscribes to traditional indigenous beliefs. In addition, the region is separated from the rest of the nation by another country, Gambia.

In the last century, many Diola people felt that Senegal's leaders—largely Wolof in ethnicity—had ignored the voices and needs of people in Casamance. This tension ignited in 1982, when members of the Diola community formed a rebel group, Movement of Democratic Forces in Casamance (MDFC), in an attempt to make Casamance independent from the rest of the country. Since then, the MDFC has repeatedly attacked government forces, and some rebels have even launched attacks on their own communities, accusing them of cooperating with the government.<sup>2</sup> Periodic armed attacks continue in Casamance today, despite a 2004 peace agreement.

This conflict has trapped civilians in its crossfire for more than 30 years and littered the Casamance region with land mines. Tens of thousands of people have fled their villages and taken refuge along the borders of southern Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau. They have left behind farm land, cattle and other crucial possessions. As a result of the conflict, households are poorer compared to the rest of

## COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

- Senegal is known as a peaceful country, but an ethnic conflict has simmered in the Casamance region since 1982, claiming thousands of lives and displacing up to 60,000 people.<sup>2</sup>
- Land mines have killed more than 800 people in the area and caused communities to abandon many villages.<sup>3</sup>
- Women have traditionally served as mediators within Senegalese communities. In Casamance today, women are building on this traditional role in innovative ways to help end the conflict.

Senegal. Facing extremely limited opportunities, young people have resorted to growing and smuggling illegal drugs, relocating to urban areas or joining the rebel movement.

Over the years, various groups have organized in Casamance to try to resolve this conflict. Among the most significant are the efforts of women. Women in Senegal traditionally play a mediation role in communities—helping people resolve arguments and disputes—and many women's groups are now working to help resolve the differences that have led to violence. Whether leading protests, producing radio broadcasts that send messages of reconciliation, or ensuring that women have a voice in the country's official peace talks, AJWS grantees in Casamance are bringing together women to insist that peace is achieved and human rights are respected.

<sup>1</sup> Estimates for the total number of people displaced in Casamance range from 10,000 to as many as 60,000. Sources: BBC News. "Senegal to sign Casamance accord." 30 Dec 2004; Freedom House. "Senegal: Freedom in the World 2013." 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Fall, Aissatou. "Understanding the Casamance Conflict: A Background." Training for Peace. Dec 2010.

<sup>3</sup> IRIN News. "SENEGAL: No end in sight to Casamance conflict." United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 17 Feb 2012.



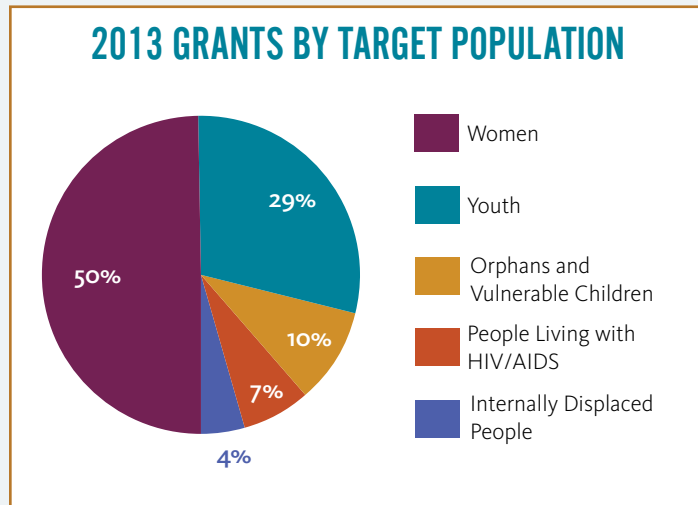
Women from USOFORAL dance and cheer each other on during a group discussion.

# OUR COMMITMENT IN SENEGAL

AJWS is committed to helping Senegal's people advocate for peace and human rights, particularly in the Casamance region, which is torn by conflict.

With AJWS's support, our grantees are:

- Mobilizing communities in Casamance to participate in local peacemaking efforts
- Fostering dialogue between communities of different ethnicities to build understanding and create a shared agenda for achieving peace
- Leading and inspiring women's efforts to promote peace, advocating for the inclusion of women in national peace talks, and empowering women to gain leadership positions in local and regional government



## \$7,436,075

### Total AJWS funding in Senegal since 1992

- Lobbying for the Senegalese government to make resolution of the Casamance conflict a national priority
- Building alliances between groups led by women to create a strong, unified women's movement
- Collaborating with other human rights organizations and building skills in community mobilizing, conflict mediation, advocacy and reporting human rights abuses

“It is not necessary for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

—ETHICS OF OUR ANCESTORS



# ON THE GROUND WITH AJWS GRANTEES



AJWS's grantees in Senegal are making substantial progress against tremendous odds. Each grantee's story shows how grassroots solutions are bringing about change in the country.



# COMITE REGIONAL DE SOLIDARITE DES FEMMES POUR LA PAIX EN CASAMANCE (Regional Solidarity Committee of Women for Peace in Casamance, or USOFORAL)

## Women join hands to bring peace to Casamance.

Thirty years of armed conflict in Casamance have left many people—especially women—feeling powerless: powerless to stop the frequent deadly bursts of guerilla violence, and powerless to feed and educate their children in the midst of the chaos of conflict. But one woman, Seynabou Male Cissé, a former high school teacher, saw the potential of women in her community. She believed their deep strength could be harnessed to help solve her country's problems. Today she is internationally recognized for having created a groundbreaking model for bringing about peace in her region.

### Launching a women's peace movement

In 1999, Seynabou founded **USOFORAL** (meaning "Let's join hands" in the local Diola language), a grassroots organization that builds on the traditional role of Senegalese women as mediators and givers of life to forge a peace movement. Under Seynabou's leadership, USOFORAL has set up local peace committees to mediate conflicts, direct reconciliation and negotiation activities, and engage women as leaders in their communities.

**Location:** Casamance, Senegal

**Website:** [www.usoforal.org](http://www.usoforal.org)

**Organizational Budget:** \$364,418

**AJWS Funding History:** \$15,000 - 40,000 annually since 2010

USOFORAL's creative approach to advocating for peace has created a profound impact in recent years. In January 2011, the organization worked in partnership with several other Senegalese organizations run by women to hold a peace vigil, which brought together about 5,000 women to denounce the killing of women in the conflict. The organization has inspired thousands of women to join hands and stand up for their right to live in peace.

### Bringing women to the negotiating table

In February 2011, USOFORAL led a delegation of women to the World Social Forum in Dakar. There, USOFORAL stressed the need for women to play a role in peace negotiations, highlighting the importance of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which supports the rights of women to be included in reconstruction in countries affected by conflict. Inspired by Seynabou's leadership, female activists from Casamance are now using UN resolution 1325 as a framework for powerful advocacy campaigns.



USOFORAL also co-founded **Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (Platform of Women for Peace in Casamance, or PFPC)**, a coalition of 170 women's groups that is now supported by AJWS, as well. PFPC has mobilized women across Senegal to advocate for peace and put women at the center of solutions to their country's struggles. (See next page to learn more.)

In 2013, the Women's World Summit Foundation awarded Seynabou its annual Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life, recognizing her outstanding contributions as a women's rights advocate and peacemaker.

Seynabou Male Cissé (far left), founder of USOFORAL, with other members.

# PLATEFORME DES FEMMES POUR LA PAIX EN CASAMANCE

## (Platform of Women for Peace in Casamance, or PFPC)

**To strengthen their impact, 170 organizations unite.**

In September 2010, USOFORAL's president, Seynabou Male Cissé, and Diattou Diedhou, director of a Senegalese women's group called KABONKETOR, spoke at a United Nations meeting about women and peace. At the meeting, these two women leaders realized that their groups could have a stronger impact if they worked together. They decided to create a coalition to unite the many women's peacemaking groups that had sprung up throughout Casamance.

The new coalition, called **Plateforme des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance (PFPC)**, has since grown to include 170 groups representing more than 40,000 women. AJWS provided PFPC with one of its first grants: unrestricted funding that helped the group register as an association, increase its membership and mobilize women to take action.

### Wielding strength in numbers

Since then, PFPC members have organized thousands of women to hold prayer vigils and marches through a grassroots protest campaign that they hope will finally bring an end to this conflict. They have conducted trainings on communication, negotiation and advocacy skills throughout the region, and they put pressure on warring parties to engage in dialogue.

"Through solidarity, we can improve [the situation in Casamance] because we are more organized and in touch," one of PFPC's activists told AJWS staff in November 2013. "We can bridge the gap."

### Gaining the support of Senegal's leaders

Their approach has already started creating change. With AJWS's support, PFPC and its members ran a campaign during Senegal's 2012 elections to persuade the candidates to promise to prioritize peace in Casamance if they were elected. In June 2012, newly elected President Macky Sall met with the coalition members and reaffirmed his support for peace. He also invited women from Casamance to participate in the negotiation talks.

In just a short time, PFPC's actions have caught the attention of the country's highest elected officials and made ending the conflict a national priority. Even rebel forces respect the coalition's influence. In May 2013, when a rebel faction took several hostages, PFPC organized a silent protest walk. Weeks later, the rebels released three of the hostages.

In January 2014, PFPC is planning a "peace caravan," in which people from all over Casamance will travel by bus to Dakar for a National Day of Peace event. The coalition hopes to bring thousands of people together to share their experiences with the conflict and stand together to push for reconciliation.

**Location:** Casamance, Senegal

**Organizational Budget:** \$105,220

**AJWS Funding History:** \$15,000 - \$50,000 annually since 2012

# WORLD EDUCATION SENEGAL

## A women's group uses radio to unite communities.

For many years, the conflict in Casamance was hidden from the world. The government sought to resolve it quietly without outside intervention. The media did not draw significant international attention to the prolonged Casamance conflict, and most citizens in this remote rural area had no way to tell others what they were experiencing. Many people believed that the conflict itself was fueled by lack of communication between communities, which increased misunderstanding and mistrust.

But in just a few short years, local grassroots organizations broke the silence. One local group founded a radio station, and less than a decade later, there are now 15 stations operating in Casamance and helping people resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue.

### Founding the first peace radio station in Casamance

A women's group called Regional Santa Yalla Union founded the first radio station in the region, Kassoumaye FM, in Ziguinchor. They thought if they could get people talking, they could improve life in their villages and bring an end to the conflict.

They set up the station with help from AJWS grantee **World Education Senegal** and began to broadcast programs about the local fishing trade. Once the station had gained the trust of the community, it began to broadcast programs about making peace. Today, the shows supported by the station—many of them run by youth—help generate local commerce and knit the community together. Local people use the radio to exchange goods, discuss common problems like landmines, malaria and HIV, and engage in open dialogue about issues that cause conflict. Programs on music, culture and sports help unite opposing factions through common interests.

### Replicating peace radio around the region

Kassoumaye FM was so successful that other communities began to start their own local stations with the support of World Education Senegal. Today, there are 15 World Education stations throughout Casamance, including three funded by AJWS, all enabling local people to raise their voices for peace and human rights. Many of the stations are managed by women and broadcast in multiple languages, so that everyone can listen and understand.

**Location:** Casamance, Senegal

**Organizational Budget:** \$946,259

**AJWS Funding History:** \$30,000 - \$35,000 annually since 2011



Women record a radio show with World Education Senegal.  
*Photograph courtesy of WES.*

# Y'EN A MARRE

## “Fed Up” with corruption, rappers inspire a new generation to create a better Senegal.

In the summer of 2011, the streets of Dakar—Senegal’s capital city—filled with young protesters who could no longer stand the economic and social problems they had witnessed throughout the country. Many young people were outraged about rampant government corruption, frequent power outages, strikes that close down schools, and the escalating prices of basic commodities.<sup>4</sup> They called for new leaders and joined others in accusing incumbent President Abdoulaye Wade of mismanaging their country.

**Location:** Dakar; actions nationwide

**Website:** [www.facebook.com/pages/Y-en-a-marre/173373102703740](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Y-en-a-marre/173373102703740)

**Organizational Budget:** \$198,123

**AJWS Funding History:** \$12,500 - \$35,000 annually since 2011

Many of the protests were led by a group of young, influential rappers and journalists. All in their 20s and 30s, this group came together in 2011 to transform the rage and desperation they felt into action. They aimed to fix the problems they saw in their country, using hip hop as a way to involve youth in social change. They called themselves **Y'en a Marre: “Fed Up.”**

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*“I want to participate in the development of my country... I didn’t want a life where I just eat, work, have a family and die. I want to create a new world.”*

—KILIFEU, RAPPER AND Y'EN A MARRE LEADER

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“We repeated the words ‘Y'en a marre’ to keep from feeling that we were sealed in by the futility of our lives ... as a mantra for bringing a mass movement into being,” wrote Fadel Barro, a founding member of the organization. “Within it, individuals would become more conscious of their own personal power, be willing to unite with others and then take bold grassroots action for the good of the whole community.”

In its first year, the group ran a voter registration drive and campaigned against President Abdoulaye Wade’s bid for re-election. The organization’s efforts sent young people to the polls in record numbers, and the youth vote ultimately played a major role in defeating Wade.<sup>5</sup> “I want to participate in the development of my country,” said Kilifeu, one of Y'en a Marre’s leaders. “I didn’t want a life where I just eat, work, have a family and die. I want to create a new world.”

## Taking matters into their own hands

Since the election, the group has continued to strengthen young people’s leadership and stoke their desire for social justice, encouraging volunteerism and grassroots response to communities in need. Last year, during an episode of major flooding, Y'en a Marre organized volunteers to take to the streets again—this time to clean blocked roads and damaged hospitals, rather than waiting for the government to help.<sup>6</sup>

Y'en a Marre’s leaders plan to build on their initial success to “give our generation a boost towards a better tomorrow.” The organization hopes to eventually support youth entrepreneurship so that young people can improve their lives; take environmental action to protect Senegal’s natural resources; and monitor public officials to hold them accountable for keeping promises and governing justly.



Y'en a Marre organized this 2012 demonstration in Thies, Senegal. Photograph from Y'en a Marre

<sup>4</sup> Quist-Arcton, Ofeibea. “Enough Is Enough; Say Senegalese Rappers.” National Public Radio. 19 Feb 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Enaudeau, Jacques. “Senegalese collective who brought Abdoulaye Wade down reinvents media activism.” Africa Is a Country. 21 May, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Cockburn, Steve. “Floods in Dakar: After the drought, the deluge.” From the Dakar Side of the Toon. 1 Sep 2012.

# TOSTAN

## A longtime AJWS grantee makes “breakthroughs” for communities, women and girls in Africa.

**Tostan**—which means “**breakthrough**” in Wolof, the national language of Senegal—is among the highest-profile social change organizations working on the African continent. AJWS was one of its earliest supporters, first funding the organization just a year after its launch in Senegal in 1991. AJWS stood by Tostan and its founder, Molly Melching, as the organization grew and achieved its extraordinary goals.

**Location:** Dakar, Thies and national

**Website:** [www.tostan.org](http://www.tostan.org)

**AJWS Funding History:** \$5.47 million total from 1992–2010. This total represents annual grants from AJWS’s core grantmaking program (avg \$25,000) as well as annual larger grants (\$45,000–1M) from a donor-advised fund.

### Stopping female genital cutting

Today, Tostan is recognized worldwide for its campaign to end the practice of female genital cutting,<sup>7</sup> which has been performed on an estimated 92 million women and girls currently living in Africa.<sup>8</sup> Through grassroots education and organizing, Tostan convinced thousands of communities in Senegal and multiple African countries to abandon the cutting tradition. Tostan leaders credit their success to an innovative approach that involved building trust in communities and creating a safe space for people to discuss this sensitive issue. To accomplish this, Tostan staff

invited community members to learn about the harms caused by the practice, then built consensus to change it—without condemning the many people who embraced the practice in the past.

In Senegal, the majority of villages where cutting was commonplace have now committed to stop it. In 2010, the government launched a new action plan to end female genital cutting throughout Senegal—and they modeled it largely after Tostan’s program.<sup>9</sup>

### Replicating a successful model across the continent

Stopping female genital cutting is just one part of Tostan’s approach to empowering local people. Through adult education classes, the organization aims to give people the skills they need to become dynamic participants in the overall development of their communities. Recognized by UNESCO as one of the world’s most innovative informal education programs, Tostan has engaged more than 220,000 people in 22 local languages across eight African countries. The programs have achieved striking achievements—not only in stopping female genital cutting, but in lowering child and maternal mortality rates, reducing poverty and stopping other harmful practices, such as child marriage.

By empowering local people to forge their own solutions to their problems, the organization has helped change an inestimable number of lives.

<sup>7</sup> Female genital cutting, also known as female genital mutilation and female circumcision, is defined by the World Health Organization as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”

<sup>8</sup> Dugger, Celia. “Senegal Curbs a Bloody Rite for Girls and Women.” The New York Times. 15 Oct 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Republic of Senegal. Accelerating the Abandonment of Cutting: National Action Plan, 2010-2015. Feb 2010.



Members of a community where Tostan offers education programs.  
Photograph by Lauren DiSilvio



# TRAVEL AND ACTIVISM

AJWS sends groups of Jewish leaders, rabbis, activists, philanthropists and young professionals on delegations and activist trips to meet our grantees and support their work in action. After these powerful experiences in Senegal and around the world, they return home to become ever stronger advocates for global justice and *tikkun olam*—the Hebrew phrase for “repairing the world.”

Over the years, AJWS sent dozens of volunteers to Senegal, where they worked closely with our grantees. Whether contributing their skills to grassroots human rights organizations or learning how to become advocates for human rights themselves, these volunteers made a difference in many ways and in many lives.

Today, AJWS’s trips are designed to prepare American Jewish leaders and activists to become strong advocates for U.S. policies that will benefit people living in developing countries.

For more information about opportunities to travel with AJWS, visit [www.ajws.org/travel](http://www.ajws.org/travel).



## Learn more about Senegal.

For a list of suggested books, articles and resources about human rights in Senegal, visit [www.ajws.org/senegalresources](http://www.ajws.org/senegalresources).

**ABOVE** A woman shares an illustration that Tostan uses for community discussions about health.

**BACK COVER** A woman and her child from a community served by Tostan.



## JOIN US.

We hope you'll support AJWS's work in Senegal and around the world. Here's how:

### DONATE

Your contribution helps AJWS pursue global justice worldwide.

Visit [www.ajws.org/donate](http://www.ajws.org/donate), call 800.889.7146 or send your contribution to:

**American Jewish World Service**  
45 West 36<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10018

### TAKE ACTION

Add your voice to AJWS's campaigns for human rights.

Visit [www.ajws.org/action](http://www.ajws.org/action) or e-mail [getinvolved@ajws.org](mailto:getinvolved@ajws.org).

### TRAVEL

Join an AJWS Study Tour or international activism opportunity to witness the power of grassroots change first hand.

Visit [www.ajws.org/travel](http://www.ajws.org/travel).

### CONNECT

Join our social networks to become a part of our community of changemakers.

- /americanjewishworldservice
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#### Our Commitment to Excellence

*Since 2004 AJWS has received an "A" rating from the American Institute of Philanthropy and a top rating of four-stars from Charity Navigator. AJWS also meets all 20 of Better Business Bureau's standards for charity accountability.*



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