

CAMEROONMembers of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), including:
Justice Frederick EBONG, high court judge

Chief AYAMBA

James Sam SABUM

Amnesty International is concerned about the safety of members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), including those named above, who were arrested on 8 and 9 January 2000 following demonstrations in Buea and Limbe, South-West Province.

Torture and ill-treatment of political detainees and criminal suspects in Cameroon are routine and conditions of detention in police stations, gendarmerie headquarters and prisons are extremely harsh. Severe overcrowding, poor hygiene and ventilation, inadequate food and medical care result in a high mortality rate.

Justice Frederick Ebong, Chief Ayamba and James Sam Sabum, all prominent SCNC members, have since been transferred to the capital, Yaoundé. Some of those arrested were released after questioning. Amnesty International is concerned, however, that an unknown number of others may be held incommunicado by the gendarmerie (the paramilitary police) in Buea and Limbe where there is reported to be an increased security force presence. Access to detainees at gendarmerie headquarters is routinely denied.

The SCNC advocates increased autonomy for Cameroon's English-speaking minority and supports independence for the English-speaking North-West and South-West Provinces. During the demonstrations in Buea and Limbe members of the SCNC attempted to raise a flag pre-dating 1972. (In 1972 federal state institutions were replaced by a unitary state in which the French-speaking community is predominant.) On 31 December 1999, members of the SCNC were reported to have gained entry to national radio station premises in Buea, disarming a member of the security forces, and broadcast a taped message calling for independence.

No charges have yet been brought against those detained. Under Cameroon law, detainees should be referred to a judicial authority to be either charged or released within 72 hours of arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least 10 people arrested in connection with armed attacks in North-West Province in March 1997 died as a result of torture and ill-treatment at the time of their arrest or subsequent lack of medical care in detention. The authorities attributed the attacks, during which 10 people including three gendarmes died, to the SCNC and the affiliated Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL).

In October 1999, 36 alleged SCNC supporters were convicted of offences relating to the attacks in North-West Province after a unfair politically-motivated trial before a military tribunal in Yaoundé. Three were sentenced to life imprisonment and the others to prison terms of up to 20 years. Eighteen remain imprisoned at the Central Prison, known as Nkondengui prison, in Yaoundé. Another 30 were acquitted.

Five others who had collected signatures for an unofficial referendum on independence organized by the SCNC in September 1995 have been held for several years without charge or trial in Nkondengui prison: Abel Acha Apong, Chrispus Kenebie, John Kudi and Jack Njenta were arrested in September 1995 and Arrey Etchu Wilson in February 1997.

In November 1999 the United Nations Human Rights Committee, considering Cameroon's most recent report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1984, expressed concern about the use of torture by the security forces and harsh prison conditions. It called on the government to take effective measures to ensure that detainees are protected from torture and ill-treatment and held in humane conditions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/E-mails/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, English or your own language:

- requesting the reasons for the arrest and continuing detention without charge of members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), including Justice Frederick Ebong, Chief Ayamba and James Sam Sabum now detained in Yaoundé and others who may be held in Buea and Limbe, following demonstrations on 8 and 9 January 2000;
- requesting clarification of the number of those detained and where they are held;
- urging that they be released unless they are to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial in accordance with international standards, including Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cameroon in 1984;
- urging that all those detained be humanely treated while in detention and held in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners and that they be allowed visits from lawyers, doctors and family members.

APPEALS TO (please note that fax numbers can be very difficult to obtain):

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Ezzo
 Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux
 Ministère de la Justice
 1000 Yaoundé
 République du Cameroon
Telegrams:Ministre Justice, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Faxes:+ 237 22 01 97
E-mails:celcom@camnet.cm
Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Head of National Security

M. Luc René Bell
 Délégué général à la Sûreté nationale
 Sûreté nationale
 1000 Yaoundé
 République du Cameroon
Telegrams:M. Bell, Sûreté nationale, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Faxes:c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs + 237 20 11 33 (you may get a recorded message. If this happens, please try later)
Salutation:Monsieur le Délégué général / Dear Mr Bell

Minister of State for Defence

M. Amadou Ali
Ministre d'Etat délégué à la Présidence chargé de la Défense
Palais de la Présidence
1000 Yaoundé
République du Cameroun
Telegrams:Ministre d'Etat Défense, Présidence, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Faxes: + 237 20 33 06
E-mails:celcom@camnet.cm
Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre d'Etat / Dear Minister of State

COPIES TO:

Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei, President, National Commission on Human Rights and
Freedoms, PO Box 20317, Yaoundé, Cameroon

The Herald, BP 3659, Messa, Yaoundé, Cameroon **faxes: + 237 31 84 97**

Le Messenger: BP 5925,226 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon **faxes:**
+ 237 42 02 14

Cameroon Tribune: BP 1218, Yaoundé, Cameroon **faxes: + 237 30 43 62**

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 March 2000.