EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 17/04/91 Distr: UA/SC 19 April 1991

UA 130/91 <u>Legal Concern and fear of torture</u> and ill-treatment

CAMEROON: Several hundred arrests

At least 8 people, and possibly many more, have been killed by the security forces since the beginning of April during violent demonstrations in towns throughout Cameroon. Several hundred people have been arrested and there are fears that they may be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment while in custody. Some have been detained for peacefully expressing their political opinions.

The current wave of unrest began on 2 April 1991 when 2,000 people, mostly students, demonstrated at the University of Yaoundé to call for a national conference to discuss political reform and an amnesty for all political prisoners. Police intervened with tear-gas; unofficial reports suggest that several hundred students were then arrested. Although most were reported to have been released by 11 April, some are reported to be still held in police custody in Yaoundé. Eyewitnesses reported seeing some 50 students being beaten in police custody. Three members of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), an opposition party, including its Secretary General, Dr Siga Asanga, a lecturer at the University of Yaoundé, were briefly detained on 12 April after protesting against the arrest of students.

Disturbances continued in the capital, Yaoundé, and rapidly spread to other towns. There were violent clashes in Yaoundé between the security forces and street vendors, protesting against economic conditions and the slow pace of democratic reform, which resulted in dozens of arrests. At least one person was killed in Bafoussam, West Province, on 10 April when a prison guard fired into a crowd demanding the release of prisoners from Bafoussam prison. The following day in Bamenda, Northwest Province, demonstrators set fire to a court house during a demonstration calling for political reform and the release of all political prisoners. Four people were shot dead and 11 seriously injured in Kumbo, also in Northwest Province, on 13 April when policemen fired into a crowd of demonstrators. A Cameroonian television report said that the police had opened fire in self defence after demonstrators had set fire to a court house, town hall and other government buildings. On 15 April three more people were shot dead in Kumba, Southwest Province, where public buildings, a brewery and a bridge were burnt down. Opposition sources said that the three died when police tried to disperse 2,000 demonstrators. Demonstrations against the government of President Paul Biya also took place in Douala, the country's chief economic centre in Coastal Province, and in Buéa and Tiko in Southwest Province.

Opposition leaders called for a general strike on 18 and 19 April despite promises by President Biya on 11 April that multi-party elections would be brought forward to take place before the end of the year, that the post of prime minister would be reintroduced and that there would be a general amnesty for government opponents. He refused, however, to concede demands for a national conference on the political future of Cameroon before elections take place.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In December 1990 a number of new laws came into force, portrayed by the government as reforms heralding a new era of multi-party democracy and freedom of political activity. Fourteen political parties have since been allowed to register. However, in further amendments to the Penal Code, new political offences were introduced which were punishable by long prison sentences. Other new laws related to freedom of association, law and order, public

meetings and demonstrations, political parties, states of emergency, the press and the creation of a State Security Court. Broad powers of administrative detention without charge or trial were retained by, or granted to, a wide range of government officials. Heavy restrictions have been placed on the holding of public meetings and demonstrations, and on the creation of new political parties.

On 28 March 1991 a presidential amnesty was announced for political prisoners. Over 80 prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, are reported to have been released, while others had their sentences substantially reduced. Most had been held for seven years, some without charge or trial, in connection with a coup attempt in 1984.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern about reports that students arrested on 2 April 1991 are still in custody;
- inquiring about the legal basis for their imprisonment and asking in particular if their cases have been referred to a judicial authority;
- requesting assurances that all those detained will be humanely treated in accordance with international standards and allowed access to relatives and any necessary medicial treatment.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya Président de la République Palais de la Présidence 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telexes: 8207 PRESID KN or 8230 PRESID2 KN or 8595 PRESID B KN

Telegrams: President Biya, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 22 08 70

M. Adolphe Moudiki
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon
Telexes: 8566 MINJUSTI KN

Telegrams: Ministre Justice Moudiki, Yaounde, Cameroon

M. Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui Ministre de l'Administration territoriale Ministère de l'Administration territoriale 1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Tsoungui, Yaounde, Cameroon

Telex: 8503 MINAT KN; 8268 MINAT KN

COPIES TO SOME OF THE FOLLOWING:

M. Jacques-Roger Booh Booh Ministre des Affaires étrangères Ministere des Affaires étrangères 1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

M. Sadou Hayatou Secrétaire général de la Présidence de la République Palais de la Présidence 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

<u>La Gazette</u>, BP 5485, Douala, Cameroon <u>Cameroon Tribune</u>, BP 1218, Yaoundé, Cameroon

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 May 1991.