

UA 105/97 Torture and ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience

16 April 1997

CAMEROON

**Reports of torture amid large-scale arrests, including:
George Yimbu, official of the Social Democratic Front
Mr Njakoy, a member of the Human Rights Defence Group
Sama Richard Ndifang, businessman and member of the Human
Rights Defence Group**

Large-scale arrests have been reported in Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West Provinces, following attacks on military, police and civilian establishments in North-West Province in which several people were killed. Reports refer to as many as 300 arrests. Many detainees are reported to have been tortured and ill-treated and are being held incommunicado in harsh conditions. Most are held at the headquarters of the Gendarmerie Legion, the paramilitary police, and the *Brigade mixte mobile* (BMM), the security police, in Bamenda. Members and supporters of opposition political parties, in particular the Social Democratic Front (SDF), have been targeted for arrest, apparently without evidence of involvement in any criminal activity.

A series of attacks by armed groups occurred in the towns of Kumbo, Oku, Jakiri, Bamenda, Mbengwi, Bafut and Bambui in North-West Province between 27 and 31 March 1997, apparently with the objective of obtaining arms and ammunition.

Ten people, including a gendarmerie commander and two other gendarmes, were reported to have been killed in the incidents. While no group has claimed responsibility, the attacks have been attributed by the authorities to members of a group supporting independence for the English-speaking provinces. The presence of security forces has been intensified in both provinces and a curfew imposed in North-West Province.

Many of those arrested in Kumbo were subsequently transferred to Bamenda where they are held at the headquarters of the BMM. George Yimbu, SDF District Chairman for Bui Division, who was arrested in Kumbo on 30 March, was reported to have been badly ill-treated before being transferred to Bamenda the following day.

A member of a local non-governmental human rights organization, the Human Rights Defence Group (HRDG), Mr Njakoy, was arrested in Oku before being transferred to Bamenda; he is reported to have received injuries to his face and head as a result of severe beatings. Sama Richard Ndifang, a businessman and also a member of the HRDG, was arrested on 1 April 1997. He is reported to have had his right foot cut off while in the custody of the gendarmerie; he remains in hospital after surgery. Although the Commander of the Gendarmerie Legion is reported to have condemned this torture, it is not known whether any action has been taken against those responsible.

Amnesty International is concerned that all those detained are at serious risk of torture and ill-treatment.

No charges are known to have been brought against those detained and no reasons have been given for the continued detention without charge or trial of large numbers of detainees. Although the violence occurred in North-West Province, more than 100 arrests were reported in Buea, South-West Province, on 2 April.

On 8 April, more than a week after the incidents took place, several people were reported to have been arrested in Fundong, North-West Province. Arrests are continuing in both North-West and South-West Provinces.

Government opponents believe that the authorities are exploiting the situation to intimidate members and supporters of opposition political parties and to prevent political activity in areas where there is strong support for the opposition in the weeks leading up to the parliamentary elections on 17 May.

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

- expressing serious concern about reports of torture and ill-treatment of many of those arrested in North-West Province since late March 1997 and urging immediate measures to guarantee the safety of all those detained;
- urging that all those detained be allowed immediate access to a lawyer, their families and a doctor;
- urging immediate and independent investigations into all reports of torture and ill-treatment in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- while acknowledging the responsibility of the government to bring to justice those responsible for criminal acts, expressing concern that some of those detained since late March in North-West and South-West Provinces are reported to have been arrested only because of their association with opposition political parties;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of any prisoner of conscience held solely because of their non-violent political opinions and activities.

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Fax: +237 221 699

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President Biya

Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for territorial administration (Interior)

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

Telegrams: Vice-Premier Ministre Tsoungui, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Premier Ministre / Dear Deputy Prime Minister

Secretary of State for National Security

M. Luc Loé
Secrétaire d'Etat à la Sécurité intérieure
Sûreté nationale
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Secrétaire d'Etat Loé, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat / Dear Minister of State

Commander, Gendarmerie Legion

Colonel Mohamadou Ousseini
Provincial Legion Commander
Gendarmerie Legion
5000 Bamenda, North-West Province, Cameroon

Telegrams: Gendarmerie Legion Commander, Bamenda, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Colonel / Dear Colonel Ousseini

COPIES TO:

Mr Francis Fai Yengo, Governor of North-West Province, Governor's Office, 5000
Bamenda, North-West Province, Cameroon

Mr Peter Oben Ashu, Governor of South-West Province, Governor's Office, 7000
Buea, South-West Province, Cameroon

Cameroon Post, BP 1981, Yaoundé, Cameroon

The Herald, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Le Messenger, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon

La Nouvelle Expression, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, Douala, Cameroon

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 30 May 1997.