

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 130/91 (AFR 17/04/91, 19 April 1991) - Legal Concern and fear of torture and ill-treatment

CAMEROON: Several hundred arrests

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All but two of the students arrested in connection with disturbances at the University of Yaoundé in early April 1991 were reported to have been released by 23 April 1991. According to official sources, one of those remaining in detention was held in connection with the death of a student suspected of being a police informer, the other for possessing confidential official documents. It was not known whether either had been formally charged with any offence. At the end of April 1991 opposition sources claimed that at least 48 people had died during the month as demonstrations spread to towns throughout Cameroon. The government said that 20 had been killed.

Legislation passed by the National Assembly on 22 April 1991 provided for the re-establishment of the post of prime minister and for the release of all remaining political prisoners. Sadou Hayatou, formerly Secretary General of the Presidency, was appointed Prime Minister on 25 April 1991, and on 26 April 1991 all political prisoners detained since 1983 and 1984 in connection with attempts to overthrow the government were released. About 80 others had already been released on the orders of President Paul Biya at the end of March 1991.

These moves did not, however, quell opposition demands for speedy political reform. Demonstrations, often violent, calling in particular for a national conference to discuss the political future of Cameroon, continued into May and resulted in further deaths, injuries and arrests. On 6 May 1991 there were clashes between the security forces and students at the University of Yaoundé. At least two students were reported to have died, many more were injured and some 250 arrested. All are believed to have been subsequently released. Four people, including a teenage boy, were killed by the security forces in Douala, Cameroon's largest city, during further political violence on 16 May 1991; another person died in Kumba, Southwest Province. The police announced that an inquiry into the deaths in Douala would be undertaken. A series of strikes took place during May 1991 amid calls for the resignation of President Biya.

No further action by Urgent Action participants is requested at the moment. Thank you to all who participated in this action.