

2 August 1999

Further information on UA 113/98 (AFR 17/07/99, 15 April 1998) and follow-ups (AFR 17/11/98, 14 August 1998; AFR 17/12/98, 10 September 1998, AFR 17/14/98, 29 October 1998 and AFR 17/19/98, 18 December 1998, AFR 17/05/99, 26 February 1999) - Torture and ill-treatment / Health concern

CAMEROON 53 prisoners (number amended), including:

Ebenezer Akwanga, aged 26, student and President of the Southern Cameroons Youth League  
Fon Peter Fonyam, aged 50  
Bika Iderisu, aged 22  
Ndifet Zacharia Khan, aged 56  
Grace Yaya Kwei (f), aged 38  
Wilson Che Neba, aged 19  
Fidelis Nyankwe, aged 40  
Ndum Anoh Robertson, aged 68  
Ndifon Joseph Tangu, aged 58  
Salifu Tanko, aged about 80 (age corrected)  
Philip Tete, aged 59

Died in detention: Patrick Yimbu, farmer, aged about 37

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On 14 April 1999, 53 prisoners, including those named above, were brought before a military tribunal to be charged after being held for up to two years in detention without charge or trial. Fifteen others released on bail last year were also charged.

They were charged in connection with attacks by armed groups on towns in North-West Province in late March 1997, during which 10 people, including three *gendarmes* (paramilitary police officers), were killed. No group claimed responsibility but the authorities blamed the attacks on the Southern Cameroons National Council, which supports independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West Provinces, and the affiliated Southern Cameroons Youth League.

They have been charged with offences which include murder, attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, attempted destruction, illegal possession of firearms, arson and robbery. Ebenezer Akwanga and another defendant were also accused of having planned and coordinated the attacks and charged with conspiracy.

Their trial before the military tribunal in Yaoundé began on 25 May. There were further hearings on 25 June and 13 July. The trial resumed on 27 July and two days later was again adjourned until August. Amnesty International is following the proceedings closely and a lawyer representing the organization attended the trial hearing on 13 July.

Amnesty International is concerned that the prisoners be tried according to international standards of fairness, including under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was ratified by Cameroon in 1984. The United Nations Human Rights Committee commented in 1984 that trials of civilians before military courts should be very exceptional and in conditions which genuinely afford the full guarantees stipulated in Article 14 of the ICCPR.

Patrick Yimbu, who was suffering from tuberculosis and a kidney infection died in a civilian hospital on 25 June. He had been transferred there from prison in December 1998. At least nine others among this group of prisoners have died either as a result of torture and ill-treatment at the time of their arrest or a lack of medical care in detention.

Amnesty International continues to work on behalf of these prisoners. They are the subject of an Action File being worked on by a number of groups in several countries.

**No further action by Urgent Action network is required. Many thanks to all for the appeals you have sent on their behalf. The continuous pressure may have contributed to ending their long-term detention without charge or trial and to some improvement in their treatment and conditions of detention.**