

# CAMEROON

## Extrajudicial executions in North and Far-North Provinces

Large numbers of criminal suspects are reported to have been extrajudicially executed in the north of Cameroon since March 1998 in an operation by the security forces to combat a serious and long-standing problem of armed robbery in the region. The security forces appear to operate outside the law, without any accountability to the judicial authorities.

In recent years several hundred people are estimated to have been killed during attacks by armed robbers, known as *coupeurs de route*, on people travelling by road in North Province (*Province du Nord*) and Far-North Province (*Province de l'Extrême Nord*). Armed robbers operate on roads between the major towns of the region, attacking vehicles, killing the occupants and stealing money and other valuables. In order to deter armed robbery, some vehicles, especially those travelling from Maroua to Kousséri, close to the border with Chad, in Far-North Province, have travelled in convoys escorted by the gendarmerie, the paramilitary police.

In early 1998 there was an apparent escalation in armed robbery in Far-North Province which included attacks on several European nationals working in Logone Chari Department (*Département de Logone-et-Chari*), one of whom was shot and seriously wounded on 12 February 1998. The following month the Cameroon government established a special unit of the army and gendarmerie, headed by a retired member of the armed forces, to be based in Maroua, Diamaré Department, and deployed in the north of Cameroon in order to tackle the insecurity in the region.

Following the deployment of this special unit of the security forces, reports began to be received of summary executions of criminal suspects, either captured *coupeurs de route* or those accused of armed robbery. The security forces are reported to go from town to town and from village to village, in search of *coupeurs de route*, raiding the homes of criminal suspects during the night. Those accused of armed robbery are arrested, taken from their homes, summarily executed and their bodies abandoned. It is often unclear on what evidence such arrests are made. Summary executions have been particularly prevalent in the area around the town of Maroua and also at the village of Motouroua, Kaélé Department, some 50 kilometres south of Maroua.

The breakdown in the rule of law in the region has led to a climate in which individuals have been denounced as *coupeurs de route*, arrested and then summarily executed without any legal process. In some cases there appears to be no evidence of their involvement in any criminal offence. Individuals are reported to have been denounced by paid informants or as a result of personal settling of scores. The breakdown in the rule of law and the general insecurity of the region has also led to

self-styled groups of civilians which go from village to village threatening and extorting money from people whom they accuse of being armed robbers.

The remoteness of the region has made it difficult to obtain information about all extrajudicial executions by the security forces in North and Far-North Provinces. Obtaining detailed information about summary executions has also been hampered by the climate of fear which now reigns in the region because of the apparently indiscriminate way in which this operation by the security forces is being conducted. Families and relatives are reported to be afraid to report arrests and summary executions for fear of reprisals. A non-governmental organization, the *Mouvement pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des libertés* (MDDHL), Movement for the Defence of Human Rights and Liberties, estimated in July 1998 that the number of those killed in the previous four months had been as high as 300. The victims are believed to include a number of Chadian nationals. Summary executions have continued throughout the following months and the actual number of victims during 1998 is therefore likely to be several hundred.

The following people are reported to be among the victims of extrajudicial executions in Far-North Province since March 1998. On 6 March 1998 **Bobo Alim**, **Mohamadou Baba** and **Raphai Ibrahim Fofe** were taken into custody and summarily executed at Kousséri, Logone Chari Department. **Adoum Yayah**, a car salesman, was arrested in Maroua in May 1998, taken from the town and summarily executed two days later on the road to the town of Mindif, Kaélé Department, some 25 kilometres from Maroua. **Sali Mangarnaka**, a trader from Maroua, was also summarily executed on the road to Mindif in May 1998 after being arrested at his home.

During June 1998 some 40 people are known to have been summarily executed after being arrested by the security forces. They included **Bouba Adam**, **Sadjo Brinbe**, **Maidoki**, **Amadou Petel**, **Alhadji Sour** and **Ababa Wando** who were all summarily executed on 19 June 1998. **Sali Moussa** and three others who were not identified were summarily executed on 13 June 1998 on the road to Mindif. **Hamadou Boukar** was executed in Mindif itself. **Fabrice Habib**, a customs officer, and three others were reported to have been summarily executed at Motouroua during the night of 15 and 16 June 1998. **Abakar**, **Djibril Kao**, **Abba Issa Koursa**, **Moussa Koursa** and **Bechir Mey** were arrested and summarily executed on 22 June 1998 between the villages of Zingué and Zingangui; five others who were unidentifiable because of extensive head injuries had also been killed in the same area the previous week. The body of **Alifa Baadi** was also found between Zingué and Zingangui. **Hamadou Boukar**, aged 38, a petty trader from Maroua was summarily executed two days after his arrest in June 1998. Also in June 1998 five unidentified people were summarily executed on the road to the village of Djoulgouf and another five on the road to the village of Nguinlaye.

Summary executions continued during July, August and September 1998. **Mati Gazanga, Massama Sarkin Fada** and two others were summarily executed on 8 July 1998. **Yerima fils Arabo**, from Maroua, was arrested at his home in August 1998 and was subsequently summarily executed on the road from Maroua to Bogo. **Hamadou Bah Gombel**, from Maroua, was arrested at his home in September 1998 and executed several days after his arrest on the road between Maroua and Waza, Logone Chari Department.

In addition to summary executions, criminal suspects have been arrested and held incommunicado in undisclosed places of detention. The fact that the whereabouts of detainees are unknown compounds fears that they may be tortured, ill-treated or extrajudicially executed by the security forces. **Djibrine Ahina, Mahamat Atti, Abdoulaye Bara, Adam Djibrine, Mahamat Djibrine, Alhadji Mahamat, Saibu Mahamat, Garba Moussa** and **Ngam Salleh**, all from Mazera, Logone Chari Department, were arrested on 17 May 1998 and taken to an undisclosed destination. They were held until 27 June 1998 when they were released without charge following interventions on their behalf by the MDDHL. Others arrested by the security forces are reported to have subsequently "disappeared", their fate unknown. They include **Bouba Hammawa** and his nephew who were reported to have been arrested in the village of Salak, Diamaré Department.

Amnesty International acknowledges the government's responsibility to maintain law and order and bring to justice those responsible for criminal offences, in accordance with international standards. The extrajudicial executions carried out by the security forces in the north of the country violate Cameroon's obligations under international human rights law. Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cameroon in 1984, states that: "Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life". Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified by Cameroon in 1989, states that: "Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right".

Immediate and effective measures must be taken by the government of Cameroon to end extrajudicial executions in the north of the country and to adhere to the provisions of international human rights treaties and other international instruments, including the United Nations Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions.

The government should demonstrate its total opposition to extrajudicial executions and make clear to all members of the police, military and other security forces

that extrajudicial executions will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Those in charge of the security forces should maintain strict chain-of-command control in order to ensure that officers under their command do not commit extrajudicial executions. Officials with chain-of-command responsibility who order or tolerate extrajudicial executions should be held criminally responsible for these acts. The security forces should use force only when strictly necessary and only to the extent required under the circumstances; lethal force should not be used except when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

The government should ensure that all reports of extrajudicial executions are investigated promptly, impartially and effectively by a body which is independent of those alleged to be responsible and which has the necessary powers and resources to carry out the investigation. The methods and findings of the investigation should be made public. Officials suspected of responsibility for extrajudicial executions should be suspended from active duty during the investigation. The government should ensure that those responsible for extrajudicial executions are brought to justice.

Please send letters, in French or English, to the Cameroon authorities:

- expressing serious concern about reports of extrajudicial executions of alleged criminal suspects in North and Far-North Provinces during operations by the security forces against armed robbery (*coupeurs de route*) in the region;
- acknowledging the government's responsibility to maintain law and order and bring to justice those responsible for criminal offences but urging that immediate measures be taken to prevent further extrajudicial executions; these measures should include: official condemnation of extrajudicial executions; strict chain-of-command control by those in charge of the security forces to ensure that officers under their command do not commit extrajudicial executions; and holding criminally responsible members of the security forces who order or tolerate extrajudicial executions by those under their command;
- urging an immediate investigation into reports of extrajudicial executions in the north of the country by a body which is independent of those alleged to be responsible and which has the necessary powers and resources to carry out the investigation;
- requesting that the findings of the investigation be made public and that those found responsible for extrajudicial executions be brought to justice.

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**Copies of appeals may be sent, with a covering letter, to:**

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