

12 December 1997

Further information on UA 353/97 (AFR 17/27/97, 7 November 1997) - Fear of torture and ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience

CAMEROON Members and supporters of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) including:

Justin Pokam
Thomas Seme
Konga Philip Kuate
Victoria Musong (f)
Grégoire Diboule
Oliver Finya
Wavie Asago
Richard Nyieka
Stephen Aka
Julius Mbenya

also new name: Chief Mondì

All but one of the many members and supporters of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the principal opposition political party, arrested at the time of the presidential election in October 1997, have since been released without charge.

While most of those detained were released after a few weeks, some were held for a month or longer. Konga Philip Kuate, arrested in Ebolowa, was held until 14 November and Justin Pokam, arrested in Yaoundé, was held until 11 November.

The detainee still held is Chief Mondì, Chairman of the SDF electoral district in Pinyin, Mezam Division, North-West Province. He was arrested on 22 October when he went to visit other SDF members and supporters already detained at the gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda. He is apparently accused of preventing the presidential election from proceeding and remains held without charge or trial at the gendarmerie headquarters. An application to a court for his release was submitted on 3 December.

Conditions at the gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda are harsh, with poor hygiene and sanitary facilities, and Chief Mondì is reported to be held in a filthy cell.

Some of those detained, such as Justin Pokam and Thomas Seme, were reported to have been severely beaten.

There were large-scale arrests of SDF members and supporters in several towns and villages before and after the presidential election. The SDF and the *Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès* (UNDP), together with two smaller opposition parties, refused to contest the presidential election in the absence of an independent electoral commission and called for a boycott of the election. Those arrested were accused of distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the election or supporting the boycott. President Paul Biya was re-elected for a seven-year term. The opposition disputed the government's claim of high voter turn-out. A new government was announced on 7 December.

Most, if not all, of the SDF members and supporters arrested at the time of the presidential election appeared to be prisoners of conscience, arrested and detained solely because of the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

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

- welcoming the release of almost all the SDF members and supporters arrested at the time of the presidential election, but adding that most, if not all, appeared to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their peaceful political opinions and activities;
- expressing concern, however, that Chief Mondji, arrested in Pinyin, North-West Province, on 22 October 1997, remains held without charge at gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda;
- requesting assurances that he is being humanely treated;
- urging his immediate and unconditional release, if, as it appears, he is a prisoner of conscience;
- calling for immediate and independent investigations into all reports of torture and ill-treatment of SDF members and supporters arrested at the time of the presidential election, in order to bring those responsible to justice.

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité

1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: +237 22 16 99

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

Prime Minister

M. Peter Mafany Musonge
Premier Ministre
Cabinet du Premier Ministre
Immeuble Etoile

1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Prime Minister Mafany Musonge, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 23 57 65

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

Head of National Security

M. Luc René Bell
Délégué général à la Sûreté nationale
Sûreté nationale

1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Délégué général sûreté nationale, M. Bell, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: M. Bell / Dear Mr Bell

COPIES TO:

Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei, President, National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, PO Box 20317, Yaoundé, 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

L'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 January 1998.