

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/31/97

16 December 1997

Further information on UA 105/97 (AFR 17/05/97, 16 April 1997) and follow-ups (AFR 17/09/97, 14 May, AFR 17/10/97, 13 June, AFR 17/15/97, 10 July and AFR 17/24/97, 22 August) - Torture and ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience / Medical Concern / Death in custody

CAMEROON Reports of torture amid large-scale arrests`

More than 50 of those arrested in connection with violent incidents in North-West Province in late March 1997 are still held although they have not yet been formally charged with any offence.

Most are being held at the Central Prison in the capital, Yaoundé, known as Nkondengui prison; others have been transferred to the Principal Prison in Mfou, some 20 kilometres from Yaoundé. Those held at Nkondengui prison include two women, Prisca Fonyam and Grace Yaya Kwei. Among those transferred to Mfou prison is Ebenezer Akwanga, a student and leader of the Southern Cameroons Youth League.

Concern for their health and safety remains. Conditions in Cameroon's prisons are notoriously poor, with severe overcrowding, inadequate hygiene and sanitary facilities and seriously deficient diet and medical care.

At least five of those detained in connection with these incidents have since died either as a result of torture and ill-treatment or lack of medical care. Emmanuel Konseh died in late March after being severely beaten and stabbed with a bayonet. In May two detainees held at the gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda, North-West Province, died: Samuel Tita who died as a result of lack of medical care and food, and Pa Mathias Gwei who was denied medical care although critically ill as a result of torture. The following month Daniel Tata also died at the gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda. One of the many detainees transferred from Bamenda to Nkondengui prison was Ngwa Richard Formasoh who died on 5 July apparently as a result of dehydration caused by diarrhoea for which he did not receive treatment.

No charges have been brought against the more than 50 people who remain detained, almost nine months later. Amnesty International acknowledges the government's responsibility to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks in North-West Province during which 10 people, including three gendarmes, died.

However, many of the two to three hundred people arrested at the time appeared to have been detained only because of their association with the principal opposition political party, the Social Democratic Front. Others were associated with the Southern Cameroons National Council, an organization which advocates independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West Provinces, and an affiliated organization, the Southern Cameroons Youth League. The government has claimed that a group supporting independence for these two provinces was responsible for the attacks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 16 September 1997 Amnesty International published a report - *Cameroon: Blatant disregard for human rights* - which documented the Cameroon Government's continuing and increasing contempt and disregard for human rights. Hundreds of critics and opponents of the government, including members and supporters of opposition political parties, journalists, human rights activists and

students, have been harassed, assaulted, arrested and imprisoned. Torture and ill-treatment of both political detainees and common law prisoners remain routine. There have been at least eight deaths during 1997 as a result of torture and ill-treatment or subsequent lack of medical care. Prisoners and detainees are held in conditions which deny their basic rights and which pose a threat to both health and life.

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

- expressing concern about the health and safety of the more than 50 detainees who remain either at the Central Prison, Nkondengui, in Yaoundé or at the Principal Prison in Mfou in connection with violent incidents in North-West Province in late March 1997;
- urging that they be treated humanely in accordance with international standards, in particular, that they be protected from torture and ill-treatment and that they receive all necessary medical care as a matter of urgency, including admittance to hospital if necessary.
- repeating your request for independent investigations into the deaths of those who have died in custody following their arrest in connection with these incidents, and also into all other allegations of torture and ill-treatment, 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, Cameroon

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: +237 221 699

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

Minister of the Interior

M. Samson Ename Ename
Ministre de l'Administration territoriale
Ministère de l'Administration territoriale
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Administration territorial Ename, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Easo
Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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 10 February 1998.