

UA 353/97

Fear of torture and ill-treatment/  
possible prisoners of conscience

7 November 1997

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

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

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned that many of the large number of members and supporters of the main opposition political party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), who remain in detention after being arrested during the period of the presidential election on 12 October 1997 are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. It also appears that many of them may be prisoners of conscience, arrested and detained only because of the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

The SDF and the *Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès* (UNDP), National Union for Democracy and Progress, together with two smaller opposition political parties, refused to contest the presidential election in the absence of an independent electoral commission and called for a boycott of the election. President Paul Biya was re-elected for a seven-year term on 12 October.

There were large-scale arrests of SDF members and supporters in several towns and villages in the period before and after the election. Among those reported to remain in detention are **Justin Pokam** and **Thomas Seme** who were arrested in the capital, Yaoundé, on 9 October and taken to a police station where they were reported to have been seriously beaten. In Ebolowa, South Province, a prominent SDF official, **Konga Philip Kuate**, was initially arrested on 6 October and held for six hours; he was rearrested on 12 October, accused of distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the election. Although eight people arrested in Bafia, Central Province, were released after the election, two others, **Victoria Musong** and **Grégoire Diboule**, were reported to have been arrested on 29 October and questioned about the SDF's activities.

In Santa, North-West Province, 24 people were arrested between 7 and 14 October, accused of calling for the boycott of the election, and transferred to the headquarters of the gendarmerie, the paramilitary police, in Bamenda. Although five were released on 24 October, the others remain held in particularly harsh conditions and are reported to be ill-treated. In Ako, also in North-West Province, 29 people have been held since 15 October.

A further five - **Oliver Finya**, **Wavie Asago**, **Richard Nyieka**, **Stephen Aka** and **Julius Mbenya** - were arrested in Ako on 20 October; they are being held in administrative detention for a renewable period of 15 days under the provisions of legislation passed in December 1990 which gives the administrative authorities broad powers of detention without charge or trial.

As many as 20 members and supporters of the UNDP were arrested in Far-North Province on 10 October because of their boycott of the election. They were

reported to have been publicly tortured, including beatings to the soles of their feet, by soldiers before being detained at a police station. On the day of the election they were escorted to the polling station and ordered to vote.

They were only released after paying bribes to the security forces. The Bishop of the Diocese of Maroua-Mokolo publicly denounced their torture and detention.

#### **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 five deaths during 1997 as a result of torture and ill-treatment and 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.

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

- expressing concern about the continued detention of some of the many members and supporters of opposition political parties, in particular the Social Democratic Front (SDF), arrested during the period of the presidential election of 12 October 1997 (*please refer to some of the names given*);
- expressing particular concern about reports of the torture and ill-treatment of some of those detained and urging immediate measures to guarantee the safety of all those who remain in detention;
- urging an immediate and independent investigation into all reports of torture and ill-treatment, in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the immediate and unconditional release of anyone detained only because of their peaceful political opinions and activities.

#### **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 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**

##### Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for the Interior

M. Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui  
Vice-Premier Ministre chargé de l'Administration territoriale

Ministère de l'Administration territoriale  
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

**Telegrams: Vice-Premier Ministre Tsoungui, Yaoundé, Cameroon**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Vice-Premier Ministre / Dear Deputy Prime 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 Messager*, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon

*La Nouvelle 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 25 December 1997.