

UA 94/96

Fear of torture / Legal concern

4 April 1996

CAMEROON More than 40 members of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) including:
Lawrence CHIMASA
Charles NKWANYUO

Since early March 1996 more than 40 members of the principal opposition political party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), have been arrested and detained. None is known to have been charged with any offence and Amnesty International believes that most are prisoners of conscience. There is also concern for their physical well-being. Torture and ill-treatment by police and gendarmerie of both political detainees and criminal suspects is routine and conditions in police stations, gendarmerie headquarters and prisons are often extremely poor. According to reports, some of the detainees are being denied visits from lawyers, doctors and members of their families.

Dozens of people were arrested in Limbe, South-West Province, in early March 1996 following demonstrations organized by the SDF in protest against the appointment by the government of representatives in place of elected mayors to head some local government authorities (see below). Five people were reported to have died during a demonstration on 1 March and dozens were arrested.

Thirty-two members and supporters of the SDF arrested on 1 March are reported to remain held in the Central Prison in Buea, South-West Province, despite a court order that they be released. Further arrests of members and supporters of the SDF were reported in Limbe on 4 March; some reports put the number of those detained in Buea as high as 60.

On 12 March Lawrence Chimasa, an official of the SDF, was arrested in Bamenda, North-West Province, following a demonstration organized by the SDF in Bamenda in protest against the appointment of government representatives. No charges have been brought against him. He is reported to be held in gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda and to have been denied all visits from a lawyer and members of his family.

Amnesty International has also received reports that Charles Nkwanyuo, an SDF official in Limbe, was arrested on 1 April and is being held in the gendarmerie headquarters in Limbe. His is not known to have been charged with any offence and it appears that he has been arrested solely because of his legitimate political activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrests of members and supporters of the SDF, whose leader John Fru Ndi was narrowly defeated in presidential elections in 1992 which were marked by widespread fraud, have occurred since local government elections took place on 21 January 1996. Although the party of President Paul Biya, the *Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais* (RDPC), Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), gained control of a majority of local authorities, opposition political parties, including the SDF and the *Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès* (UNDP), National Union for Democracy and Progress, made significant gains, particularly in major towns.

On 27 February 1996 the government issued a decree nominating government representatives to head local government authorities in place of elected mayors in 20 of the most significant authorities, including those in major towns. According to reports, in some cases, the delegates appointed by the government

had been unsuccessful CPDM candidates in the elections. Opposition political parties, including the SDF and the UNDP, denounced the decree.

Critics and opponents of the government, including members and supporters of opposition political parties and journalists, continue to be repeatedly harassed and detained in Cameroon.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest and detention of members and supporters of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), in particular Lawrence Chimasa, Charles Nkwanyuo and more than 40 arrested in Limbe in early March 1996;
- stating that most appear to be prisoners of conscience and urging the immediate and unconditional release of all those who have been detained solely because of their peaceful political activities and opinions; any who are charged with an offence should be given a prompt and fair trial;
- expressing concern about reports that some of the detainees are being denied visits from family and lawyers and urging that all detainees be allowed access to lawyers, doctors and their families;
- requesting assurances that these detainees are being well treated in accordance with international standards.

APPEALS TO:

1) President:

Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: President Biya, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 221699

Telexes: 8207 PRESID KN (Secretariat général)

8595 PRESID B KN (Cabinet civil)

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President

2) Prime Minister:

Mr Simon Achidi Achu
Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office
Immeuble Etoile, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Prime Minister Achu, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 235765

Telexes: 8282 KN

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

3) Minister of Justice

M. Douala Moutomé
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice, 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Peter Oben Ashu
Governor of South-West Province, Governor's Office
7000 Buea, South-West Province, Cameroon

Mr Luc-René Bell
Governor of North-West Province
Governor's Office, 5000 Bamenda, North-West Province, Cameroon

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

Cameroon Post, BP 1981, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Le Messenger, BP 5925, Douala, Cameroon
The Gazette, PO Box 408, Limbe, Cameroon
La Nouvelle Expression, BP 5946, 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 17 May 1996.