

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 17/01/91

Distr: UA/SC

UA 14/91 Fear of becoming prisoners of
conscience

15 January 1991

**CAMEROON: Pius Noumeni Njawe, aged 33 years, editor of *Le Messenger*
Célestin Monga, economist and journalist on *Le Messenger***

The editor of the independent newspaper, *Le Messenger* (*The Messenger*), and one of its journalists are currently on trial on charges of showing contempt for the head of state, the courts and the National Assembly. Although they are reportedly not in custody at the present time, Amnesty International is concerned that, if convicted, they would receive long prison sentences and would become prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs.

On 1 January 1991 Célestin Monga was arrested in Douala, Cameroon's main port and economic centre, and detained incommunicado and without charge until his release on 4 January. On 7 January he and Pius Njawe were charged under Article 153 of the 1967 Penal Code with showing contempt for the head of state, an offence carrying a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment, and under Article 154 with showing contempt for the courts and for members of the National Assembly, punishable by up to one year's imprisonment.

The charges related to an open letter from Célestin Monga to President Paul Biya, the head of state, published in *Le Messenger* on 27 December 1990. In the letter, Célestin Monga criticized the President for claiming to have led the country to democracy when basic rights were still denied, the majority of the population had insufficient means to live and a few enriched themselves at the state's expense. He also criticized the courts' corruption and lack of independence from the government, as well as government control of the National Assembly.

On 10 January 1991 the trial opened before the Court of First Instance in Douala. Several thousand people gathered outside the court, calling for the release of the journalists and for political reforms. A number of people were injured in clashes with the security forces and others were arrested. After preliminary formalities, the trial was adjourned until 17 January.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although the government promised moves towards multi-party democracy in 1990 and in December 1990 the National Assembly approved legislation providing for the registration of opposition parties, supporters of new political parties have continued to be harassed by the security police. Another law passed in December 1990 apparently maintained government powers to censor newspapers and magazines before their publication. In April and July 1990 President Biya publicly announced that all political prisoners would be released, but at least 77 of those held in connection with a coup attempt in 1984 remain imprisoned.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters, preferably in French or English:

- expressing concern at the prosecution of journalists Pius Njawe and Célestin Monga under legal provisions which allow for the imprisonment

of prisoners of conscience, that is people held for the non-violent expression of their political views;

- explaining that, if they were convicted and sentenced to prison terms, Pius Njawe and Célestin Monga would be prisoners of conscience imprisoned, in violation of international human rights treaties ratified by Cameroon, for exercising their basic human rights in a non-violent way;

- urging that the case against them be withdrawn;

- urging that laws allowing the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience be repealed and that the security forces be ordered not to detain and harass non-violent government critics and opponents for publicly expressing their political opinions.

APPEALS TO:

Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de la Présidence
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telexes: 8207 PRESID KN or 8230 PRESID2 KN or 8595 PRESID B KN

Telegrams: President Biya, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 22 08 70

M. Adolphe Moudiki
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

Telexes: 8566 MINJUSTI KN

Telegrams: Ministre Justice Moudiki, Yaounde, Cameroon

M. Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui
Ministre de l'Administration territoriale
Ministère de l'Administration territoriale
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Tsoungui, Yaounde, Cameroon

Telex: 8503 MINAT KN; 8268 MINAT KN

Monsieur le Procureur général près la Cour suprême
Palais de Justice
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

**Telegrams: Procureur general la Cour supreme,
Yaounde, Cameroon**

COPIES TO SOME OF THE FOLLOWING:

M. Jacques-Roger Booh Booh
Ministre des Affaires étrangères
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

Le Messager, BP 5925, Douala, Cameroon

La Gazette, BP 5485, Douala, Cameroon

Cameroon Tribune, BP 1218, Yaoundé, Cameroon

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 February 1991.