

UA 113/98

Torture and ill-treatment / Health Concern 15 April 1998

CAMEROON

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and 49 others

There is serious concern for the health and safety of 59 prisoners who have spent up to a year in appalling and life-threatening conditions without charge or trial. Some of the prisoners are reportedly so ill they are unable to stand up. There are fears that some of them could die if not given urgent medical attention.

The prisoners were among around three hundred people arrested following attacks by armed groups on several towns in North-West Province in late March 1997, during which 10 people, including three gendarmes, were killed (see UA 105/97, AFR 17/05/97, 16 April 1997 and follow-ups). They were initially held in Bamenda in North-West Province but were subsequently transferred to Yaoundé.

Fifty-one of the prisoners are now in the Central Prison in Yaoundé, known as Nkondengui prison, and the other eight at the Principal Prison in Mfou, some 20 kilometres from Yaoundé.

Six of those detained in connection with the incidents in North-West Province in March 1997 have already died either as a result of torture and ill-treatment or lack of medical care.

While no group claimed responsibility, the authorities attributed the attacks to members of a group supporting independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West Provinces. Some of those held are associated with the Southern Cameroons National Council, an organization which advocates independence for these provinces, and an affiliated organization, the Southern Cameroons Youth League.

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 in recent years. Torture and ill-treatment of both political detainees and common law prisoners remain routine; some of the victims have died as a result. Prisoners and detainees are held in conditions which deny their basic rights and which pose a threat to both health and life. There is severe overcrowding, inadequate hygiene and sanitary facilities and seriously deficient diet and medical care.

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 59 detainees who remain either at the Central Prison, Nkondengui, in Yaoundé or at the Principal Prison in Mfou;
- urging that they be treated humanely in accordance with international standards for the treatment of prisoners, 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;
- acknowledging the government's responsibility to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks that occurred in North-West Province in late March 1997 but expressing concern that these prisoners have been held for up to a year without charge or trial.

APPEALS TO:

Please note: fax tone may be difficult to obtain

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 28 May 1998.