

AI Index: PRE 01/039/2009
29 January 2009

Cameroon: A catalogue of human rights abuses

Amnesty International today released a report on the alarming human rights situation in Cameroon, accusing the government of gross violations spanning more than ten years – including killings and torture.

The catalogue of abuses revealed in the report mainly involves repression of political dissent.

“Political opposition is not tolerated in Cameroon,” said Tawanda Hondora, Amnesty International’s Africa Deputy Programme Director. “Any dissent is suppressed through either violence or abuse of the legal system to silence critics.”

Amnesty International said that Cameroonian security forces habitually use excessive and unnecessary force – and the perpetrators have almost always enjoyed impunity.

In late February 2008, security forces killed as many as 100 civilians during demonstrations against the escalating cost of living. Amnesty International has seen photographs and received testimonies suggesting that some of the victims were shot at point blank range, with no effort made to arrest them instead.

“Unfair trials, intimidation and harassment, including death threats, are routinely used by the authorities to quash criticism from politicians, human rights defenders and journalists,” said Tawanda Hondora.

“The silencing of the media is particularly worrying. If a journalist is deemed too critical of the government they are silenced -- and radio and TV stations are shut down.”

Journalist Michel Mombio was arrested in September 2008 and spent 10 days in custody. He was then transferred to the central prison in the capital, Yaoundé, and charged with fraud and blackmail. He was still in custody without trial in January 2009.

Journalists covering street protests in February 2008 were assaulted by members of the security forces. The victims included a cameraman from Canal 2 International television, who was beaten and arrested and had his camera destroyed. He was only freed after soldiers forced him to pay them.

According to the Amnesty International report, prison conditions in Cameroon are characterised by inadequate food and medical care as well as overcrowding. All too often minors are held together with adults and there is inadequate separation of males from females, which has led to sexual and other forms of violence and exploitation.

Prisons are reportedly infested with rats and cockroaches and some inmates have resorted to sleeping in the toilets for lack of another place to rest.