

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/02/96

UA 147/96

Fear of torture/ill-treatment

17 June 1996

**CAMEROON** Several hundred students, including:  
Christophe EBANGA OMGENE  
Maurice TABO  
Célestin KAMGE KAPTUE

---

Amnesty International fears that students arrested during weeks of unrest at the University of Yaoundé in the capital of Cameroon may be tortured or ill-treated while held in the custody of the police and gendarmerie.

Students at the University of Yaoundé have been striking since early May 1996 for better conditions and for the suppression of certain fees recently introduced by the university authorities. The authorities are reported to have offered some concessions, but the strike has continued and there have been violent confrontations with the security forces.

Dozens of students were reported to have been arrested in the early days of the strike following demonstrations on the university campus. They were reported to be held by the security police, known as the *Centre national d'études et de la recherche* (CENER), and by the gendarmerie in Yaoundé. Some 30 students were reported to have been released on 2 June. It is not clear whether charges have been brought against them.

These releases, however, were followed by further arrests. Christophe Ebanga Omgene, a prominent student leader, was reported to have been arrested at his home in Yaoundé on 10 June. According to reports he has not been allowed access to members of his family, a lawyer or a doctor. Two other students, Maurice Tabo and Célestin Kamge Kaptue, were reported to have been arrested on 13 June.

The following day, 14 June, as many as 200 students were reported to have been arrested by police at student quarters near the university and taken away in military vehicles. Some were released after their identities were checked.

Others are believed to have been taken to the *Ecole de police*, police school, in Yaoundé, but the whereabouts of others are unclear. This latest wave of arrests appears to have been prompted by an incident two days earlier during which striking students physically assaulted a lecturer.

There have also been disturbances at the University of Douala. Police used truncheons and tear-gas to disperse students during a demonstration on 30 May.

The day before there had been clashes between striking students and those who refused to join the strike.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Torture, including severe beatings, of both political detainees and criminal suspects by the police and gendarmerie is routine in Cameroon. Some victims have died as a result of their injuries. The Cameroonian authorities have failed to undertake independent and impartial inquiries into these deaths and to bring those responsible to justice.

Students arrested in January 1994 following disturbances at the University of Yaoundé were reported to have been beaten by police and then taken to a detention centre known as the "Americanos" which has become notorious for ill-treatment. They were reported to have been tortured for several hours before being released.

The frequency of beatings of detainees, including on the soles of their feet, was acknowledged publicly at a training seminar for law enforcement officials, including police, gendarmes and prison officers, organized in 1994 by the *Comité national des droits de l'homme et des libertés*, National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms, which had been inaugurated by President Paul Biya in 1992.

Also in 1994 the United Nations Human Rights Committee deplored the many cases of torture in Cameroon, as well as illegal detention, death sentences and extrajudicial executions.

However, reports of torture and ill-treatment continue to be received by Amnesty International. Some 30 teachers on strike in Bafoussam, Western Province, were arrested on 15 May 1996; they included several women who were reported to have been beaten at the time of their arrest.

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

- expressing concern about reports that large numbers of students from the University of Yaoundé have been arrested;
- urging that immediate measures be taken to ensure that they are protected from torture and ill-treatment;
- urging that their whereabouts be made known and that they be allowed access to lawyers, family members and doctors;
- request the release of anyone who is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and promptly and fairly tried 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 Biya**

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) Delegate general for security:

Monsieur Luc Loé  
Délégué général à la Sûreté  
Délégation générale à la Sûreté nationale  
Palais de l'Unité, Yaoundé, Cameroon

**Telegrams: M. Loé, Délégué général à la Sûreté, Yaounde, Cameroon**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Délégué général/ Dear Sir**

**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  
*Le Messager*, BP 5925, Douala, 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 25 July 1996.