

UA 157/02

Detention without charge/Fear of Torture
or ill-treatment

27 May 2002

CAMEROON Nwanchang Thomas (m) - member of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Nwanchang Thomas, member of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). He was arrested on 18 May, while distributing leaflets calling for the freedom of Southern Cameroons, by the Public Security Police in Bamenda, North-West province. He has been transferred to the Bamenda Central Prison, where he is at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Under Cameroon law, detainees should be referred to a judicial authority to be either charged or released within 72 hours of arrest. No charges have yet been brought against Nwanchang Thomas.

Political detainees and criminal suspects in Cameroon are routinely tortured or ill-treated. The conditions of detention in police stations, gendarmerie headquarters and prisons are extremely harsh. Severe overcrowding, poor hygiene and ventilation, inadequate food and medical care results in a high mortality rate amongst detainees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SCNC advocates increased autonomy for Cameroon's English-speaking minority and supports independence for the English-speaking North-West and South-West Provinces. In 1972 federal state institutions were replaced by a unitary state in which the French-speaking community is predominant.

The Authorities attributed armed attacks in March 1997 in North-West province, during which 10 people including three gendarmes died, to the SCNC and the affiliated Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL). At least 10 people arrested in connection with the attacks died as a result of torture and ill-treatment at the time of their arrest or subsequent lack of medical care in detention.

In October 1999, 36 alleged SCNC supporters were convicted of offences relating to the attacks in North-West Province after an unfair politically-motivated trial, before a military tribunal in the capital, Yaoundé. Three were sentenced to life imprisonment and the others to prison terms of up to 20 years. Eighteen remain imprisoned at the Central Prison, known as Nkondengui prison, in Yaoundé.

In November 1999 the United Nations Human Rights Committee, when considering Cameroon's most recent report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1984, expressed concern about the use of torture by the security forces and harsh prison conditions. It called on the government to take effective measures to ensure that detainees are protected from torture and ill-treatment and held in humane conditions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible in French, English or your own language:

- requesting the reasons for the arrest and detention without charge of Nwanchang Thomas,
- urging that he be released unless he is to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial in accordance with

international standards, including Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cameroon in 1984;
- urging that he not be ill-treated while in detention and held in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners and that he be allowed visits from lawyers, doctors and family members.

APPEALS TO

Prime Minister

S.E. Monsieur Peter MAFANY MUSONGE
Premier ministre, Ministre d'Etat
et Chef du gouvernement

Primature

1000 Yaoundé

République du Cameroun

Telegram: Premier Ministre, Yaounde, Republique du Cameroun

Fax: + 237 2235765

Email: spm@spm.gov.cm

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre/Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

S.E. Monsieur Amadou ALI

Ministre de la Justice

et Garde des Sceaux

Ministère de la Justice

1000 Yaoundé

République du Cameroun

Telegram: Ministre de la Justice, Yaounde, Republique du Cameroun

Fax: + 237 2230005/2222154 (if someone answers say "Je voudrais envoyer un fax, s'il vous plaît")

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/ Dear Minister

Director of National Security

M. Pierre MINLO MEDJO

Délégué général à la Sûreté Nationale

1000 Yaoundé

République du Cameroun

Telegram: Deleque general a la Surete Nationale, Yaounde, Republique du Cameroun

Fax: + 237 2207918 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Monsieur le Délégué général/ Dear Director

(please note that fax numbers can be very difficult to obtain, but please keep trying)

COPIES TO:

Newspapers

Le Messenger,

BP 5925, 226 Boulevard de la Liberté

Douala, Cameroon

Fax: + 237 342 02 14 (if someone answers say: "Je voudrais envoyer un fax, s'il vous plaît")

Cameroon Tribune
BP 1218, Yaoundé
Cameroon
Fax: + 237 230 43 62

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 8 July 2002.