

1 May 1997

Further information on UA 260/96 (AFR 17/07/96, 12 November 1996) and follow-up (AFR 17/10/96, 27 November) - Fear of torture and ill-treatment

CAMEROON Roger-Alexis WAMBA
Jules Armand MBE
Blaise NGOUNE TEMGOUA

Roger-Alexis Wamba, Jules Armand Mbe, Blaise Ngoune Temgoua and two other students were detained on the campus of the University of Yaoundé I on 27 October 1996. They were accused of provoking further unrest at the university which had been subject to strikes for several months during 1996. In May and June 1996 there had been violent confrontations between students and the security forces and also a vigilante group known as *auto-défense* operating with the acquiescence of the university authorities and the security forces. University buildings were burned and a university lecturer was assaulted. In June 1996 some 200 students were arrested and one student died, apparently during a confrontation between students and members of the security forces and *auto-défense*.

The five students arrested in October 1996 were detained by members of *auto-défense* and held overnight at the university. They were stripped and beaten on their buttocks and the soles of their feet. The following day they were transferred to the custody of the security services and detained at the *Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense*, the Ministry of Defence. While two students were released shortly afterwards, Roger-Alexis Wamba, Jules Armand Mbe and Blaise Ngoune Temgoua remained in detention and were denied all visits for a week. They were brought before the Public Prosecutor's Office (*le parquet*) on 12 November 1996 and again on 20 November 1996 and charged with inciting revolt against the government and institutions of the Republic (*incitation à la révolte contre le gouvernement et les institutions de la République*). Their trial has since been adjourned four times; they are next due to appear in court on 23 May 1997.

Some Urgent Action participants who sent copies of their appeals on behalf of Roger-Alexis Wamba, Jules Armand Mbe and Blaise Ngoune Temgoua to the Rector of the University of Yaoundé I, Professeur Jean Messi, have received a standard reply which contradicts and criticizes Amnesty International.

In his letter, written in French, Professeur Jean Messi denies the detention and torture of students at the University of Yaoundé I, but admits that students were apprehended at the university on 27 October 1996 and handed over to the security forces the following day. Professeur Messi accuses Roger-Alexis Wamba and fellow students ("*Wamba et consort*", "*le groupe de Wamba*" and "*les Wamba*") of involvement in violent incidents at the university since 1992, including in May 1996, and of planning further disturbances at the time of their arrest in October 1996. He justifies their detention as a measure to prevent further violence at the university.

Professeur Messi criticizes Amnesty International for not speaking out against the violence and deaths at the university and calls on the organization to condemn deaths resulting from violent incidents at the University of Yaoundé I from 1992 to 1993 and in 1996, as well as damage to university buildings.

He concludes by saying that he will take all necessary measures to prevent further killings and destabilization at the university.

Amnesty International's concern in the case of Roger-Alexis Wamba and others arrested with him in October 1996 was that they were in danger of torture and ill-treatment. It also called for their release if they were not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried in accordance with international standards. They were held for more than two weeks before being brought before a judicial authority to be charged, far exceeding the legal limit of 72 hours.

They were subsequently conditionally released. Neither Roger-Alexis Wamba, Jules Armand Mbe nor Blaise Ngoune Temgua is known to have been accused of personal involvement in any specific act of violence.

Those Urgent Action participants who have received a reply from Professeur Jean Messi and who wish to reply should include the following points in their letters, in French if possible:

- acknowledging his reply and briefly clarifying Amnesty International's mandate: to free all prisoners of conscience - that is, people detained for their beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic, birth or other status, who have not used or advocated violence -, to ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners, to abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel treatment of prisoners and to end extrajudicial executions and "disappearances";
- acknowledging the responsibility of the government to maintain law and order and to bring to justice those responsible for criminal acts;
- repeating your concern that the students arrested in October 1996 at the University of Yaoundé I were reported to have been beaten at the time of their arrest by members of the *auto-défense*;
- stressing the need for an impartial investigation into these reports, for those responsible to be brought to justice and for urgent measures to be taken to prevent further torture and ill-treatment by the security forces and groups acting with their acquiescence, notably the *auto-défense*;
- noting that while Roger-Alexis Wamba, Jules Armand Mbe, Blaise Ngoune Temgoua have been charged with "*incitation à la révolte contre le gouvernement et les institutions de la République*", they are not known to have been accused of individual responsibility for any act of violence.

LETTERS TO:

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