

EXTERNAL

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Fear of torture and ill-treatment

12 November 1996

CAMEROON Four students including:

Alexis WAMBA

Francis MBE

NGOUME

Amnesty International fears that four students of the University of Yaoundé may be tortured and ill-treated while held in the custody of the security forces.

Alexis Wamba, Francis Mbe, Ngoume and a fourth student, whose name has not been confirmed, were arrested around 25 October 1996. They were reported to have been beaten at the time of their arrest. They were first taken to gendarmerie headquarters in Yaoundé but were subsequently transferred to the *Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense*, Ministry of Defence. However, it appears that they may have been moved again since then. Their present whereabouts are unknown.

The four students have been accused of provoking further unrest at the University of Yaoundé which has been subject to strikes by students for several months this year. However, they have not yet been formally charged with any offence.

During the month of June 1996, some 200 students were arrested by the security forces at the University of Yaoundé where students had been striking since early May 1996 for better conditions and for an end to the imposition of fees recently introduced by the university authorities. Dozens of students were arrested in the early days of the strike which then escalated. There were violent confrontations between striking students and the security forces, university buildings were burned and a university lecturer was physically assaulted.

Most students were released after a short time but others remained in various places of detention. These included the Central Prison in Yaoundé, the office of the *Ecole de police*, police school, the *Centre national d'études et de recherches* (CENER), the security police, and the *police judiciaire*, judicial police. Detainees were also held by special units of the security forces known as the *Groupe spécial d'opération* (GSO), Special Operation Group, and the *Groupe mobile d'intervention* (GMI), Mobile Intervention Group.

While in detention, some of the students were tortured and ill-treated. They reportedly received electric shocks and were beaten on their genitals and on their backs. They were not allowed visits from relatives, lawyers or doctors.

Several students were held until 17 July 1996 when they were charged with criminal offences relating to disturbances at the university and provisionally released; they have not yet been tried. According to Cameroon national law, anyone arrested and detained has to be referred to a judicial authority within 72 hours or released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture and ill-treatment, 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 frequency of beatings of detainees, including on the soles of their feet, was publicly acknowledged in 1994 at a training seminar for law enforcement

officials, involving police, gendarmes and prison officers. The seminar was organized by the government-created *Comité national des droits de l'homme et des libertés*, National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms. 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.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest of Alexis Wamba, Francis Mbe, Ngoume and one other student from the University of Yaoundé;
- 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;
- requesting their release if they are not to be promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence and tried in accordance with international standards.

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité

1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

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

Prime Minister

Mr Peter Mafany Musonge
Premier Ministre
Cabinet du Premier Ministre
Immeuble Étoile

1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Prime Minister Achu, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 235765

Telexes: 8282 KN

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Easo
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice

1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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:

- *Le Messager*, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, République du Cameroun
- *Cameroon Post*, BP 1981, Yaoundé, République du Cameroon
- *The Herald*, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, République du Cameroun
- *La Nouvelle Expression*, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, Douala, République du Cameroun

Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei

President, National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms

PO Box 20317, Yaoundé, 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 24 December 1996.