

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/09/96

15 November 1996

Further information on UA 250/96 (AFR 17/06/96, 31 October 1996) and follow-up (AFR 17/08/96, 12 November) - Prisoner of conscience / Fear of further POCs / Health Concern

CAMEROON Pius Njawe, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Messenger*

Pius Njawe, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Messenger*, was released on bail (*liberté provisoire*) on 15 November 1996, following a Supreme Court ruling the previous day. His lawyers had asked requested his release on bail on 4 November 1996.

Pius Njawe had been arrested on 29 October 1996 and imprisoned at the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. There was particular concern about his health since he was being denied access to his doctor and the medical treatment which he required for diabetes.

Amnesty International considers that Pius Njawe was a prisoner of conscience. He was sentenced to a fine and six months' imprisonment on 3 October 1996 after being convicted of insulting the President of the Republic and members of the National Assembly ("*outrage par injure fait au Président de la République ainsi qu'aux membres de l'Assemblée nationale*") and disseminating false information (*propagation de fausses nouvelles*). Another journalist working on *Le Messenger*, Eyoum Ngangué, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in the same case but has not been imprisoned. The Supreme Court has yet to rule on their appeal against their convictions and sentences.

Freedom of expression is increasingly under attack in Cameroon and repression of the press appears likely to intensify as legislative and presidential elections - scheduled for March and October 1997 - approach. In addition to Pius Njawe and Eyoum Ngangué, several other journalists have been convicted of criminal offences and sentenced to prison terms during 1996. Others have been arrested and detained for questioning. Newspapers have been suspended. Amnesty International is concerned that the legal system is being used to prosecute people solely because of their opposition to the government and for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

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

- welcoming the release on bail on 15 November of Pius Njawe whom Amnesty International considered to be a prisoner of conscience, and urging that his release be made unconditional;
- expressing concern, however, about the increasing number of journalists who have been convicted and sentenced to prison terms solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- urging that no other journalist be imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience;
- reminding the government of Cameroon of its obligations to guarantee the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1984.

APPEALS TO:

President:

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya
Président de la République

Palais de l'Unité
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Faxes: + 237 221699

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

Faxes: + 237 235765

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice:

M. Laurent Esso
Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of State for Communication:

M. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni
Ministre d'Etat chargé de la Communication,
Ministère de la Communication
BP 1588
Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Salutation: Monsieur of Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

- *Le Messenger*, 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

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 20 December 1996.