

29 October 1998

Further information on UA 113/98 (AFR 17/07/98, 15 April 1998) and follow-up (AFR 17/11/98, 14 August 1998 and AFR 17/12/98, 10 September 1998) - Torture and ill-treatment / Health concern

CAMEROONEbenezer Akwanga, aged 26, student and President of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL)

John Bah Atoh

Fon Peter Fonyam

Prisca Fonyam (f)

Bika Iderisu

Grace Yaya Kwei (f)

Wilson Che Neba

Philip Tete, aged 59

Nseke Stanley Tete

Patrick Yimbu

Lawrence Fai

and 48 others

Lawrence Fai, who had become critically ill in the Central Prison in Yaoundé, known as Nkondengui prison, died around 5 September 1998 after finally being admitted to hospital. His death heightens concerns for other prisoners reported to be seriously ill, including Philip Tete and Ebenezer Akwanga, who is believed to have suffered paralysis of his lower limbs and impaired vision as a result of torture.

Lawrence Fai was among 59 prisoners who are reported to have been tortured and ill-treated during up to 18 months' detention. None has so far been charged or brought to trial.

The 59 were among around three hundred people arrested following attacks by armed groups on several towns in North-West Province in late March 1997, during which 10 people, including three gendarmes, were killed.

The prisoners were initially held in Bamenda in North-West Province but were subsequently transferred to Yaoundé. Fifty of the prisoners are now held at Nkondengui prison and the other eight, including Ebenezer Akwanga, at the Principal Prison in Mfou, some 20 kilometres from Yaoundé. Prison conditions are extremely harsh, with severe overcrowding, inadequate hygiene and sanitary facilities and seriously deficient diet and medical care.

While no group claimed responsibility for the attacks in North-West Province, the authorities attributed them to members of a group supporting independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West Provinces. Some of those held are associated with the Southern Cameroons National Council, an organization which advocates independence for these provinces, and an affiliated organization, the SCYL.

The death of Lawrence Fai brings to nine the number of those detained in connection with the incidents in North-West Province in March 1997 who have died either as a result of torture and ill-treatment or lack of medical care.

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

- expressing serious concern about the death in custody of Lawrence Fai in early September 1998 and calling for an independent inquiry into the circumstances of his death and for its findings to be made public;
- expressing serious concern about the health and safety of the remaining 58 detainees, including Ebenezer Akwanga and Philip Tete, held at the Central Prison, Nkondengui, in Yaoundé and at the Principal Prison in Mfou, in connection with the events in North-West Province in March 1997;
- urging that they be treated humanely in accordance with international standards for the treatment of prisoners and, in particular, that they be protected from torture and ill-treatment and receive all necessary medical care as a matter of urgency, including admittance to hospital if necessary;
- acknowledging the government's responsibility to bring to justice those responsible for criminal acts, but expressing concern that these prisoners have been held for up to 18 months without charge or trial;
- urging that they be promptly charged and brought to trial in accordance with international standards, and that any against whom there is no evidence of a recognizably criminal offence be released;
- reminding the government of its obligation under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified in 1984, to guarantee fundamental rights which are also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment", and Article 10: "Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him."

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya, Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité, 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President Biya

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Eso, Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux, Ministère de la Justice, 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior,

M. Samson Ename Ename, Ministre de l'Administration territoriale, Ministère de l'Administration territoriale
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Administration territorial Ename, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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

The Herald, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Le Messenger, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon

L'Expression, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, 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 10 December 1998.

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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