

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/15/97

10 July 1997

Further information on UA 105/97 (AFR 17/05/97, 16 April 1997) and follow-ups (AFR 17/09/97, 14 May, AFR 17/10/97, 13 June) - Torture and ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience / Medical Concern / Death in custody

CAMEROON Reports of torture amid large scale arrests

There has been a further death among those detained following violent incidents in North-West Province in late March 1997. **Richard Ngwa Formasoh** is reported to have died in the Central Prison in the capital, Yaoundé, known as Nkondengui prison, on 6 July. He is believed to have died as a result of injuries sustained during torture and ill-treatment at the time of his arrest and while detained at the Gendarmerie Legion in Bamenda, North-West Province, before being transferred to Yaoundé. Richard Ngwa Formasoh, aged 25, was a tyre repairer from Mile 8, Mankon, in Bamenda. His death follows that of **Samuel Tita** on 1 May and also that of **Pa Mathias Gwei** on 25 May, both of whom died as a result of torture and ill-treatment and lack of medical treatment.

Many of those arrested in North-West Province sustained serious injuries at the time of their arrest, including bullet and bayonet wounds; others were tortured and ill-treated in detention. This latest death heightens still further fears for the well-being of all those who remain held in connection with the events of late March in North-West Province. Conditions of detention are harsh and medical care inadequate. Twelve detainees are believed to be still held at the Gendarmerie Legion in Bamenda. All requests to the authorities for visits to these detainees have been refused. Richard Ngwa Formasoh was among 37 detainees who were subsequently transferred to Nkondengui prison. They include a woman, **Prisca Fonyam**, who is a nurse.

Particular concern remains about **Ndifet Zacharia Khan**, a traditional medicine practitioner, who was arrested in Bamenda. He was reported to have been severely beaten when arrested and also to have a bullet wound to his thigh. Although subsequently transferred to a military hospital in Bamenda, his condition deteriorated seriously, with the development of extensive gangrene. He was transferred to a military camp in Yaoundé at the beginning of June. Another detainee, **Pa Chakara**, a farmer aged 58, who was transferred to Yaoundé is reported to have been admitted to hospital.

More than three months after the arrests, no charges have been brought against any of those detained. Amnesty International acknowledges the government's responsibility to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks in North-West Province, during which 10 people died. However, many people appeared to have been detained only because of their association with the principal opposition political party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF). Others are associated with the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an organization which advocates independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces. The government has claimed that a group supporting independence for these two provinces was responsible for the attacks.

North-West Province is a stronghold of the SDF and the attacks occurred seven weeks before parliamentary elections. Opponents of the government believed that the situation was exploited by the authorities to intimidate members and supporters of opposition political parties and prevent political activity in the period preceding the elections on 17 May 1997. The results of the elections were announced by the Supreme Court on 6 June: the ruling *Rassemblement*

démocratique du peuple camerounais, Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, received an absolute majority with 109 seats. The main opposition parties, the SDF and the *Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès*, National Union for Democracy and Progress, received 43 and 13 seats respectively. Both parties had earlier called on the Supreme Court to annul the elections because of widespread fraud and irregularities. International observers noted that the elections had been marred by cases of fraud and intimidation.

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

- expressing deep concern about reports of the death of Richard Ngwa Formasoh on 6 July 1997, apparently as a result of torture and lack of medical care, as well as the deaths of Pa Mathias Gwei on 25 May and Samuel Tita on 1 May;
- urging immediate independent investigations into these deaths and all other allegations of torture and ill-treatment, in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- expressing concern that other detainees are reported to be critically ill, including Ndifet Zacharia Khan, and urging that they receive all necessary medical care as a matter of urgency;
- expressing concern that some 50 people who remain held in connection with the events in North-West Province in late March 1997 - 12 at the Gendarmerie Legion in Bamenda and others at the Central Prison in Yaoundé - have not been charged with any offence, more than three months after their arrest;
- acknowledging the government's responsibility to bring to justice those who have committed criminal acts, but requesting clarification of the reasons for the continued detention without charge or trial of those still held;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of anyone detained only because of their political opinions and activities, who has neither used nor advocated violence.

APPEALS TO:

President

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

Fax: +237 221 699

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

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

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Easo
Mknistre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Commander, Gendarmerie Legion

Colonel Mohamadou Ousseini
Provincial Legion Commander
Gendarmerie Legion
5000 Bamenda, North-West Province, Cameroon

Telegrams: Gendarmerie Legion Commander, Bamenda, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Colonel / Dear Colonel Ousseini

COPIES TO:

Mr Francis Fai Yengo, Governor of North-West Province, Governor's Office,
5000 Bamenda, North-West Province, Cameroon

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

La Nouvelle 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 24 August 1997.