

# URGENT ACTION

## CAMEROONIAN WRITER HELD IN HARSH CONDITIONS

**Bernard Zepherin Teyou is a Cameroonian writer, held as a prisoner of conscience for writing a book about the President's wife. His health is significantly deteriorating because of poor prison conditions in New Bell Prison, in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital.**

**Bertrand Zepherin Teyou** was arrested in Douala on 3 November 2010 while trying to launch a book he wrote about Chantal Biya, the wife of President Paul Biya. Bertrand Zepherin Teyou had hired a room at the Somatel Hotel for the signing of his book, *La Belle de la République bananière: Chantal Biya, de la rue au palais* (The Banana Republic's Beauty: Chantal Biya, from the street to the palace). The book is about Chantal Biya's humble origins and her ascendancy to Cameroon's First Lady. Just before the book was about to be launched in the presence of journalists, the hotel management refused to let him use the venue he had hired. Members of the security forces arrived soon after and arrested him. After his arrest, he was detained at a police station in Douala and subsequently charged with contempt of a personality (*outrage à personnalité*) and unlawful assembly (*manifestation illégale*). He was transferred to Douala's central prison, New Bell.

On 10 November 2010, Bertrand Zepherin Teyou was tried by the High Court (*Tribunal de première instance*) in Douala, which found him guilty of the charges. The court sentenced him to a fine of 2,030,150 million CFA francs (approximately 4,425 US dollars) or two years' imprisonment if he was unable to pay the fine. Unable to pay the fine, he remains in New Bell prison. He is said to suffer from heavy bleeding caused by acute haemorrhoids, reportedly exacerbated by poor prison diet. Overcrowding is a problem in Cameroonian prisons and the food is known to be of poor quality and inadequate.

According to Articles 152 to 156 of the Cameroonian Penal code, the offence of contempt is only applicable to senior government and legislative officials, as well as foreign dignitaries. It does not mention their spouses or members of their families. Furthermore, Bertrand Teyou was not sued by the First Lady, nor was she a witness in the case after he was arrested, detained and during his trial. As for the charge of unlawful assembly, Bertrand Teyou had informed the Cameroonian authorities, as required by law, of his intention for the launch of his book.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in French, English or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Bertrand Teyou;
- Noting that Amnesty International believes him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that he is provided with the medical treatment and food he requires for his medical condition.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 MAY 2011 TO:

His Excellency

Paul Biya  
President of the Republic  
Office of the President  
P. O. Box 1000  
Yaoundé  
Republic of Cameroon

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mr Amadou Ali

Vice-Prime Minister  
Minister of Justice, Keeper  
of the Seals  
Ministry of Justice  
Yaoundé  
Republic of Cameroon

**Salutation: Dear Vice-Prime  
Minister**

### And copies to:

Mr Issa Tchiroma Bakary  
Minister of Communications  
Ministry of Communications  
Yaoundé  
Republic of Cameroon

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bertrand Zepherin Teyou went on a hunger strike on 15 February 2011 to protest against 'the lack of respect for his fundamental rights' and poor diet. At the insistence of his family worried about his health, he stopped the hunger strike. According to Bertrand Zepherin Teyou, he has received medical treatment outside of the prison but only if and when he can pay for it.

When Amnesty International delegates visited Cameroon in August 2010, prisons and other detention centres were overcrowded and conditions were often life-threatening. Medical care and food were often not provided or were inadequate. Disturbances and escape attempts were frequent, and several prisoners were killed during escape attempts. Prison guards were poorly trained, ill-equipped and their numbers inadequate for a large prison population.

Douala (New Bell) prison, with an official capacity of 700, held more than 2,453 inmates in August 2010. Many of its inmates were in pre-trial detention and were held together with convicted prisoners. Some prisoners were held in leg irons.

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