

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 17/04/92

Distr: UA/SC

UA 118/92

Deaths in custody/Fear of further deaths

8 April 1992

CAMEROON:

Up to 70 deaths at Tcholliré prison camp

Amnesty International has recently received information about large numbers of deaths in atrocious conditions at a prison camp in northern Cameroon. Over the past four months, since December 1991, as many as 70 inmates are reported to have died from malnutrition and medical neglect at Tcholliré prison camp, described by recent prisoners as a "hell on earth" (*l'enfer des hommes*). Further deaths are feared in coming weeks as a result of seasonal temperature rises.

Many of the victims had been sentenced to death by Cameroon's courts, but a warrant had not been signed for their execution and in some cases they were still appealing against their conviction.

Although no official executions are known to have taken place since 1987, the death rate at Tcholliré is so high that it appears that conditions there may be deliberately harsh to provoke the deaths of inmates. The conditions are a gross violation of human rights, both depriving prisoners arbitrarily of their lives and of their right to the dignity inherent in a human being, and subjecting them to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Tcholliré prison camp, where political detainees were held in harsh conditions until the early 1980s, is situated in Northern Province. Over 200 prisoners under sentence of death were transferred to Tcholliré from prisons further south in mid-1990. There have been reports that as many as half these prisoners, at least 106, have died in one section of the camp, known as Tcholliré II. Normally, deaths in custody should be referred to the judicial authorities for investigation. However, as far as Amnesty International is aware, this procedure has not been followed in the case of any of the deaths of prisoners in Tcholliré.

Amnesty International has previously expressed its concern about harsh conditions and deaths in prisons in Cameroon. Among over 260 political prisoners released in 1990 and 1991, many had become seriously ill due to inadequate diet and medical neglect. Several were reported to have gone blind or nearly blind.

The deaths and ill-treatment of the Tcholliré II prisoners appear to be either deliberate or the result of very serious negligence on the part of the Cameroonian authorities. Amnesty International is calling for immediate and urgent steps to be taken to prevent more deaths.

Amnesty International is also appealing for an independent judicial inquiry into these deaths at Tcholliré prison camp, and for warders or other officials responsible for unlawful killings or other human rights violations to be brought to justice. It also urges that all deaths in custody should be promptly investigated by an independent judicial authority.

Further details of conditions in Tcholliré prison camp can be found in Cameroon: Up to 70 deaths from malnutrition reported at prison camp, AI Index: AFR 17/05/92, 9 April 1992.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that over 70 prisoners are alleged to have died since December 1991 as a result of malnutrition and medical neglect in Tcholliré prison in northern Cameroon;

- expressing concern that prisoners are held there in conditions which are not only cruel, inhuman and degrading (thereby violating Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) but also deny inmates their rights to respect for life and integrity of the person and to the respect of the dignity inherent in every human being, rights guaranteed by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which Cameroon ratified in September 1989;

- calling for immediate and urgent steps to be taken to prevent more deaths: prisoners should be provided with adequate food and medical attention, appropriate washing and toilet facilities should also be provided, and prisoners should have daily exercise in the fresh air;

- appealing for an independent judicial inquiry into the deaths at Tcholliré prison, and for warders or other officials responsible for unlawful killings or other human rights violations to be brought to justice;

- urging that all deaths in custody should be promptly investigated by an independent judicial authority.

APPEALS TO:

1) President:

Son Excellence Monsieur Paul Biya
Président de la République
Palais de l'Unité
Yaoundé, Cameroon

**Monsieur le Président de la République /
Dear President**

Telegrams: President Biya, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 221699

Telexes: 8207 PRESID KN (Secretariat général); 8595 PRESID B KN (Cabinet civil)

2) Minister of Internal Affairs:

M. Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui
Ministre de l'Administration territoriale
Ministère de l'Administration territoriale
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

**Monsieur le Ministre /
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministre Tsoungui, Yaounde, Cameroon

Telexes: 8503 MINAT KN; 8268 MINAT KN

3) Minister of Justice:

M. Douala Moutomé
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

**Monsieur le Ministre /
Dear Minister**

Telegrams: Ministre Moutome, Yaounde, Cameroon

4) Governor of the Northern Province:

Mr Aladji Mamat
Gouverneur de la Province du Nord
4000 Garoua, Cameroon

**Monsieur le Gouverneur /
Dear Governor**

Telegrams: Gouverneur Mamat, Garoua, Cameroon

5) Head of Tcholliré Prison Camp:

Monsieur le Directeur
Prison de Tcholliré II
PO Box 10, Tcholliré
Province du Nord, Cameroon

**Monsieur le Directeur /
Dear Sir**

Telegrams: Monsieur le Directeur, Prison Tchollire II, Tchollire, Cameroon

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs:

M. Jacques-Roger Booh Booh
Ministre des Affaires étrangères
Ministère des Affaires étrangères
1000 Yaoundé 4, Cameroon

and the following newspapers:

Postwatch, PO Box 235, Bamenda, Cameroon
Cameroon Post, BP 1981, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Le Messager, BP 5925, Douala, Cameroon
Challenge Hebdo, BP 13088, Douala, Cameroon
La Nouvelle Expression, BP 5646, Douala,
Cameroon

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 May 1992.