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Cameroon fails to protect the fundamental human rights of its citizens

The Commonwealth should reinforce the recent recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and give a clear signal to Cameroon that it must comply with its international human rights obligations, Amnesty International urged today.

Commonwealth Heads of State and Government will be meeting in Durban, South Africa, between 12 and 15 November.

“The Human Rights Committee has just strongly criticized the failure of Cameroon to protect and respect the fundamental human rights of its citizens,” the organization said. “The Commonwealth should look seriously at the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations and also scrutinize Cameroon’s human rights record.”

After considering Cameroon’s latest report of its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it ratified in 1984, the Human Rights Committee in Geneva on 5 November described continuing and serious human rights violations in Cameroon.

The Committee expressed serious concern that the rights guaranteed by the ICCPR are being persistently violated by the Cameroon authorities. It identified the following human rights violations as the most serious:

widespread extrajudicial executions;
the continued imposition of death sentences;
abuse of the use of weapons by the police, sometimes resulting in deaths;
the continued practice of torture by police officials and the absence of an independent mechanism for investigation;
indefinite administrative detention;
the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians;
prison conditions characterized by severe overcrowding, inadequate food and medical care;
prosecution and punishment of journalists for the crime of publication of false news;
lack of independence of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms.

The Human Rights Committee has made specific recommendations to the Cameroon government for ending human rights violations and for bringing the perpetrators to justice.

“The government should now take immediate and effective measures to implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee to end human rights violations,” the organization urged.

Cameroon became a member of the Commonwealth in November 1995 despite reservations both within Cameroon and internationally that it had not made sufficient progress towards respect of human rights. During its four years of membership, Cameroon has failed to fulfil its commitments to the rule of law and human rights as set out in the Harare Declaration of 1991 which sets out fundamental principles agreed by members of the Commonwealth.

Amnesty International is calling on Commonwealth Heads of Government to include Cameroon in the mandate of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) on the Harare Declaration.

Background

Amnesty International has repeatedly drawn the attention of the international community to the Cameroon government’s blatant disregard for human rights.

Several hundred people have been extrajudicially executed by the security forces since March 1998 in a campaign against armed robbery in the north of the country. Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and detainees, some of whom have died as a result, remain routine. There is a high mortality rate among prisoners, and others have died when the security forces appeared to have used excessive or lethal force.

Critics and opponents of the government, including journalists, supporters of opposition political parties and human rights activists, continue to be arbitrarily detained and imprisoned. In October 1999, 36 civilians were convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from one year to life after an unfair politically-motivated trial before a military tribunal.
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For further information, see *Cameroon: Lengthy prison terms after unfair trial before military tribunal* (AI Index: AFR 17/10/99), 7 October 1999, and *Cameroon’s human rights record under scrutiny by the United Nations* (AI Index: AFR 17/03/99), 26 October 1999.

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