

£CAMEROON

@Torture and ill-treatment

Amnesty International is concerned at continuing reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Cameroon and at what appears to be an emerging pattern of short-term detention and ill-treatment in police custody.

In September 1991 at least 15 prominent members and leaders of newly-formed opposition groups, including **Samuel Eboua**, **Jean-Jacques Ekindi**, **Charles Tchoungang**, **Anicet Ekané** and **Henriette Ekwé**, whose cases are described in further detail below, were arrested and detained without charge for approximately 24 hours. During this time they were allegedly tortured and ill-treated and held in harsh and unsanitary conditions. Many other detainees, who appear to have been arrested because of their support for multi-party democracy in Cameroon, have been held in similar circumstances in recent months. The authorities have not investigated torture allegations or brought to justice those responsible for torture.

During the three decades following the creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon (now the Republic of Cameroon) in 1961, arrests of government opponents were regularly followed by reports of their prolonged incommunicado detention and torture. Prisoners arrested during the 1970s and after an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1984 were often detained for months or years, sometimes without charge or trial at camps for administrative detainees, and sometimes after unfair trials before military courts. Ordinary penal procedure laws require the security forces to refer detained suspects to the courts within a few days of arrest. However, a series of special laws, revised most recently at the end of 1990, have conferred powers of long-term, sometimes indefinite, detention without charge or trial on senior government officials, and as a result the security forces have been able to detain prisoners incommunicado without charge or trial for long periods with impunity. It is at such times that torture has occurred.

In recent months a pattern has emerged of government opponents and critics being detained for short periods, without being referred to the courts, during which they are subjected to torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Recent arrests have occurred in a context of increasingly violent protest at the government's refusal to hold a "National Conference" to debate political reform.

Previously Amnesty International has highlighted its concerns about the poor prison conditions and ill-treatment endured by both criminal and political prisoners in Cameroon, which have sometimes been so harsh and life-threatening as to constitute cruel, inhuman and

degrading treatment. This has included the routine beating of criminal suspects, particularly on the soles of the feet, and reports of torture using electric shocks. Sentenced political prisoners have also been tortured or ill-treated. In December 1988 political prisoners at Nkondengui prison in Yaoundé, who went on hunger strike to protest at the continued imprisonment of some prisoners beyond their court-imposed sentences, were allegedly beaten, hung upside down, and left in the hot sun for several hours in order to break their hunger strike.

Amnesty International has continued to monitor reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, of which the following incidents are examples:

- in November 1989 some 30 political prisoners in Nkondengui prison were reportedly severely beaten, tortured and left without any medical treatment after a search of their cells by the prison authorities produced a radio, a copy of the Qur'an, prayer beads and other prohibited items. The prisoners concerned included some detained without trial, others convicted after unfair trials before special military courts, and some who continued to be held despite the expiry of their sentences imposed in connection with the unsuccessful April 1984 coup attempt. Two prisoners were reported to have died as a result of the beatings and subsequent medical neglect. There has been no official investigation into their deaths, nor into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment.
- in February 1990 two prisoners of conscience, **Anicet Ekané** and **Henriette Ekwé**, were held illegally and incommunicado for several weeks before being referred to the judiciary and brought to trial. During this period they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment under interrogation. Anicet Ekané said he was stripped, beaten and forced to remain standing without food and water for three days. Henriette Ekwé was reportedly also deprived of food for three days while under interrogation by the police.
- in May 1990 as many as 300 students were detained for approximately 24 hours following a demonstration on the campus of the University of Yaoundé. According to reports, many were severely beaten by the police and some sources also alleged that two women students were raped and killed by the police, although Amnesty International was unable to verify this.
- in April 1991, when over 200 students were detained for about 24 hours following a demonstration calling for the release of political prisoners, eye-witnesses reported seeing about 50 students being beaten in a police station in Yaoundé.
- on 23 September 1991 **Jean-Jacques Ekindi**, a former government supporter who resigned from the ruling party, the Rassemblement démocratique du peuple

camerounais, Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, in May 1991, to form the Mouvement progressiste, Progressive Movement, was arrested when he tried to organize a political rally in Douala. Held for less than 24 hours before being released without charge, he was allegedly tortured in custody - an eye-witness recalled seeing him in his cell, his buttocks and the soles of his feet bleeding - and required hospital treatment after his release. His wife and mother were also reported to have been assaulted by members of the security forces, although they were not arrested.

- Some 15 prominent members and leaders of newly-formed opposition groups were detained for about 24 hours on 24 September 1991 when they organized a demonstration to protest against the detention of Jean-Jacques Ekindi. They included **Samuel Eboua** of the Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès, National Union for Democracy and Progress, **Charles Tchoungang** of the Organisation camerounaise des droits de l'homme, Cameroon Human Rights Organization, and former prisoners of conscience **Anicet Ekané** and **Henriette Ekwé**. They were reportedly tortured and several of them required hospital treatment after their release. **Charles Tchoungang** alleged that they had been beaten on the soles of their feet with an iron bar and whipped with wire encased in a rubber tube. "They carefully avoided hitting us on the face", he said, "because they said one had to be able to recognize our faces even in our coffins". Another detainee, **Samuel Eboua** of the Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès, said that he was locked in a small, darkened cell in his underwear with 40 other people, then beaten up. In an interview with Radio France Internationale on 11 October 1991, Cardinal Christian Tumi, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Douala, said that he had visited Samuel Eboua in hospital after his release and had been shocked by the brutality of the torture he had received.

Although detainees in recent months have been detained for shorter periods than in the past, Amnesty International is concerned that the brutal treatment meted out to them reflects a continuing pattern of repression of non-violent political opponents of the government. Although new laws introduced in December 1990 were portrayed by the government as reforms which would herald a new era of free political activity, they retained broad powers of administrative detention without charge or trial and contained no safeguards against arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of detainees or provision for the investigation of torture allegations¹. Under the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other

¹ The Law relating to the State of Emergency (Loi relative à l'état d'urgence), No. 90/47 of 19 December 1990, and the Law relating to the Maintenance of Law and Order (Loi relative au maintien de l'ordre), No. 90/54 of 19 December 1990, provide for long-term, or even indefinite, administrative detention on the orders of a wide range of government officials. For further information on the December 1990 laws, please refer to *Cameroon: Human rights developments during the first half of 1991* (AI Index: AFR 17/07/91), September 1991.

Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which entered into force for Cameroon in June 1987, states' obligations include taking effective measures to prevent torture, properly investigating allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and bringing to justice those responsible.

Amnesty International knows of no cases in recent years where torture allegations have been the subject of any official inquiry in Cameroon. The authorities also appear to have blocked civil actions for damages lodged before the courts by former detainees. Amnesty International has been informed that suits filed by lawyers on behalf of two former detainees since 1988 have simply not been granted a hearing in the courts, despite written complaints made to the Minister of Territorial Administration (the minister of the interior), the Supreme Court and the Centre national d'études et de recherches, the National Research and Intelligence Centre, the security police. One of these detainees reportedly lost the sight in one eye as a result of being whipped across the face with wire cable.

Amnesty International is calling on the Cameroonian authorities to introduce safeguards to protect all prisoners from torture or ill-treatment and to institute impartial investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment with a view to bringing to justice those responsible, in line with its international obligations including the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.