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**£CAMEROON**





## @Killings and torture in Ndu

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At least four civilians were shot dead by gendarmes in Ndu, in Cameroon's North-West Province, in early June 1992. There were also reports of detainees being tortured there. Amnesty International is concerned that the security forces seem to have used indiscriminate and excessive lethal force in their attempts to control civil unrest and that they subjected detainees to torture or to other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The organization is calling on the government of Cameroon to institute an independent judicial inquiry into the incidents at Ndu with a view to bringing to justice those responsible for any human rights violations. The findings of any such inquiry should be made public.

A political rally to be held in Ndu on 6 June 1992 by a leading opposition party in English-speaking Cameroon, the *Social Democratic Front* (SDF), was banned by the authorities shortly beforehand. On 6 June gendarmes were sent to Ndu to recover unpaid taxes. Taxes have not been paid in some areas since a civil disobedience campaign in 1991 by opposition parties tried to force the government to convene a national conference on the country's political future. During that campaign, tax collectors were reportedly chased away from Ndu by local people. However, under the pretext of collecting taxes in June 1992, gendarmes reportedly used extortion and violence against the people in some areas known for their support of opposition parties. For six days from 29 May 1992 gendarmes reportedly launched assaults on the town of Bali in North-West Province, raping women and looting and destroying property, after the local population protested against extortion by gendarmes at roadblocks.

In Ndu, gendarmes and police sealed off the market area on 6 June, arresting about 50 people who could not provide tax receipts proving that they had already paid their taxes, and firing warning shots to disperse the angry crowd that gathered. Most of those arrested were subsequently released by the crowd or escaped from custody during the day. In the evening, when the gendarmes tried to leave Ndu with six remaining prisoners, they were attacked with stones and reportedly fired indiscriminately into the crowd, killing three people and wounding several more. Those killed were **Anthony Tangiri**, a court messenger, **Joseph Yongla**, a trader, and **Glory Ngeh**, a tradeswoman who died three days later from gunshot wounds. On the night of 6 June, local people burned the homes of three gendarmes in Ndu, and a policewoman married to a gendarme was reportedly stripped and beaten by a crowd. In reprisal, gendarmes broke windows of homes, stores and vehicles that night, and reportedly attacked the occupants of cars arriving in Ndu, killing one man, **Hilary Bantar Njeta**.

On 8 June gendarmerie reinforcements arrived in Ndu. Hundreds of residents fled with their families, but were allowed to leave the town only on presentation of their papers and tax receipts. Early on 9 June gendarmes started systematically looting homes and destroying property in Ndu, with no pretence that they were collecting taxes or tax receipts. Nearly every house and store had windows, doors and furniture damaged or burned. People who resisted were assaulted and women were raped, in some instances allegedly gang-raped.

On 9 June the gendarmes arrested up to 100 people, including children, reportedly kicking them and beating some of them with gun-butts. Many of the detainees were apparently SDF supporters. They were taken to the main road in Ndu where they were forced to strip to their underwear, crawl along the ground and throw their clothes on a fire. At a school building where the reinforcement gendarmes were stationed, detainees were held together in a hall where they were forced to strip completely and were subjected to sexual humiliations and, in some cases, torture. The men were then separated from the women and were kicked and beaten with gun-butts, belts and whips throughout the day before being released later in the afternoon or evening. Nearly all the detainees were reported to have been blood-stained and to have shown signs of injury.

However, not all those detained were released that day. **Mary Biena Kimbi**, a local SDF member, was arrested by gendarmes on the evening of 6 June and taken to the Gendarmerie Brigade headquarters in Ndu. She was reportedly stripped, beaten and sexually tortured following her arrest, then held for four days without food or water. On about 12 June she was transferred to the Gendarmerie Brigade headquarters in the nearby town of Nkambe, where she remained in incommunicado detention, denied all contact with family or lawyer. On 19 June she was taken to the Gendarmerie Company headquarters in Nkambe, where she and another woman detainee were reportedly whipped with belts, after which she was unable to walk. On 20 June a delegation from the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms, a human rights monitoring body established by the government in February 1992, was repeatedly refused permission to see her by the Brigade Commander. She was at that time said by the authorities to be held without charge under an administrative detention order on the authority of the Senior Divisional Officer of Donga Mantung Division, North-West Province.

The six Ndu men who were arrested on 6 June were also held at the Gendarmerie Brigade headquarters in Nkambe. They were ordered to be released after they had paid their taxes but were apparently re-detained immediately under administrative detention orders. It is not known when Mary Biena Kimbi and the six men were released.

It appears that the authorities have been using administrative detention orders in an abusive fashion to provide a semblance of legality for the imprisonment of government critics or opponents. In May 1992 at least 16 SDF activists were detained in Nkambe on accusations of illegally banning the holding of a market, obstructing tax collection, holding illegal political rallies and inciting the population to violence. The Law relating to the Maintenance of Law and Order, No. 90/54 of 19 December 1990, gives the authorities unlimited powers of administrative detention, without any legal safeguards, of people suspected of "banditry". Such detainees may be held indefinitely for renewable 15-day periods and have no legal recourse against arbitrary or unjust detention. None of the accusations against the SDF detainees appear to be related to banditry, and it therefore appears that these broad powers of detention, granted on a permanent basis to unspecified government officials, have been mis-used to detain political opponents of the government. Amnesty International has previously expressed concern at the renewal in December 1990 - under the guise of reforms of security laws - of virtually unlimited powers of administrative detention.

It has been alleged that gendarmes were sent into Ndu to "punish" its occupants for supporting the SDF. SDF members have previously been harassed, detained and killed by the security forces. In October 1991, following weeks of peaceful demonstrations in Bamenda, North-West Province, at least two people were shot dead when a political rally scheduled to take place was banned by the authorities and the security forces opened fire with live ammunition and grenades on demonstrators who were trying to disperse. At least 50 people were reported to have been severely injured, some 10 losing hands or limbs. No inquiry is known to have been held into these killings, nor did it appear that any measures were taken by the authorities to prevent or limit the number of deaths caused by the security forces.

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