

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 17/17/98

7 December 1998

Further information on UA 07/98 (AFR 17/01/98, 8 January 1998) and follow-ups (AFR 17/03/98, 15 January 1998; AFR 17/04/98, 4 March 1998; AFR 17/06/98, 15 April 1998; AFR 17/08/98, 26 June 1998; AFR 17/10/98, 13 August 1998 and AFR 17/13/98, 16 October) - Prisoner of conscience / Health Concern / Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment

CAMEROON Michel Michaut Moussala, journalist, director of the newspaper *Aurore Plus*

Pius Njawé, journalist, director of *Le Messenger* (released)

Amnesty International is concerned about reports that Michel Michaut Moussala's health is seriously deteriorating while held in particularly harsh conditions at the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. He is reported to have acute asthma and to be in need of regular medical attention.

In January 1998 Michel Michaut Moussala was convicted of defamation (*diffamation*) and sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine. In September, he was arrested and imprisoned. The charges related to an article published in *Aurore Plus* newspaper accusing a National Assembly member of the ruling *Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais*, Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, of corruption (*détournement de fonds publics*) and other criminal offences. His appeal against conviction and sentence is scheduled to be heard on 23 December.

Prison conditions in Cameroon deny basic rights, and often amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Most prisons are severely overcrowded, sanitary facilities are non-existent or inadequate, and health care and nutrition are also seriously deficient. Disease is rife and there is a high mortality rate among prisoners.

Freedom of the press is constantly under attack in Cameroon. In recent years an increasing number of journalists have been convicted of criminal charges and imprisoned for criticizing the authorities. Amnesty International considers Michel Michaut Moussala to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely because of his legitimate professional activities and in violation of his right to freedom of expression.

Pius Njawé was tried at the same trial as Michel Moussala, but in a separate case, and sentenced to two year's imprisonment, subsequently reduced on appeal to one year. He was released in October 1998 after receiving a presidential pardon. In a fax to Amnesty International he wrote:

"At last I am free! Free after being arbitrarily detained for 10 months, just for trying to do my job as a journalist...

Free after 10 months of detention in horrible conditions, which I could only endure with your constant moral support. Really, if I was able to survive that hell, if I was able to keep a strong spirit, to the surprise of my oppressors, it was thanks to the constant backing and signs of solidarity from the members of your organization...

I would like to let you know that each of your actions, at any level, has greatly contributed not only to my release, but also to the promotion of press freedom...

I would like to sincerely express my deep gratitude for your support and solidarity. I would also like to say THANK YOU for all you have done for our cause. You were GREAT and I shall never forget...

I wish to see that solidarity grow stronger, to the benefit of those who all over this planet earth suffer from intolerance and arbitrariness."

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, English or in your own language:

- expressing concern for the well-being of Michel Michaut Moussala, whose health is reported to be deteriorating as a result of the harsh conditions of his detention;
- urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released as a prisoner of conscience;
- requesting assurances that he is held in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners, including provision of all necessary medical care;
- reminding the Government of Cameroon of its obligation to guarantee freedom of expression, including under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1984, and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression".

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence M. Paul Biya
Président de la République, Palais de l'Unité
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 20 33 06

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President Biya

Minister of Justice

M. Laurent Easo
Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux
Ministère de la Justice, 1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of Communication

M. René Zé Nguélé
Ministre de la Communication, Ministère de la Communication
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Ministre Communication, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei, President, National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, PO Box 20317, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Aurore Plus, BP 7042, Yaoundé, Cameroon
Le Messager, BP 5925, 226 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon
La Nouvelle Expression, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, Douala, Cameroon
Cameroon Post, BP 1981, Yaoundé, Cameroon
The Herald, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, Cameroon

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or you section office, if sending appeals after 18 January 1998.

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression".

Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>