

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST HELD ARBITRARILY FOR 200 DAYS

Peace activist Abdul Karim Ali has been arbitrarily detained since 11 August 2022. He was interrogated repeatedly about a video he made on 9 July 2022 denouncing a Cameroonian military chief for allegedly torturing civilians. Two of his friends have since been detained alongside him. The three men were then remanded to custody on 2 February 2023 on accusations of 'hostility against the fatherland', 'failure to report', 'secession', and 'rebellion'. Abdul Karim's detention appears to be based on the video or his activism for peace, in direct violation of his right to freedom of expression. The Cameroonian authorities should drop the charges against them unless they can promptly produce reliable evidence of an internationally recognisable crime.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

H.E Joseph Beti Assomo
Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cameroon
Ministry of Defence
Boulevard de la Réunification
B.P. 1162
Yaoundé, Cameroon
Email: defcamer@gmail.com

His Excellency,

*I am writing to request your urgent attention to the case of **Abdul Karim Ali**, a prominent Cameroonian peace activist who has been in detention since 11 August 2022. Abdul Karim Ali ran the Peace Research Center and would regularly deliver speeches and trainings on peace and security, including internationally. He was a vocal advocate of the Swiss-led mediation process as a way out of the Anglophone crisis. Two of his friends have also been detained in relation to their connection with him.*

*On 11 August 2022, Abdul Karim Ali was arrested without a warrant and taken into detention in the city of Bamenda, north-western Cameroon, where he was held for 84 days – four of which were incommunicado – at a military police station (gendarmérie) in inhumane conditions, including deprivation of food and water for several days, having to use a single bucket both as a toilet and for bathing. While no formal reason was given for his detention, he was interrogated repeatedly about a video he made on 9 July 2022 denouncing a Cameroonian military chief known as 'Moja Moja' for reportedly torturing civilians. Two of Abdul Karim's friends and his brother were also later detained by the gendarmerie, with reference to vague allegations of being his drivers. While his brother was released after payment of a large sum of money, his friends **Rabio Enuah** and **Yenkong Sulemanu** remain in detention and have been questioned about their failure to report Abdul Karim Ali to the police. In November 2022, the three men were transferred to the Secretary of State Defense (Secretariat d'État à la Défense - SED), a detention centre in Yaoundé, the capital. On 2 February 2023, they were remanded to custody at the Kondegui Central prison, Yaoundé, on accusations of 'hostility against the fatherland', 'failure to report', 'secession', and 'rebellion'.*

After 200 days in detention, the authorities have failed to produce adequate information about the reasons for the deprivation of liberty in violation of Cameroonian law and international human rights law and standards.

In light of the above, I urge you to ensure that the charges against Abdul Karim Ali, Rabio Enuah and Yenkong Sulemanu are dropped and that they are immediately released unless the authorities can promptly produce reliable evidence that they have committed an internationally recognizable criminal offence, as it appears that they have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The three men were presented before the Military Tribunal of Yaoundé three times. During their third appearance, they were remanded to custody by the Examining Magistrate on accusations of ‘hostility against the fatherland’, ‘failure to report’, ‘secession’, and ‘rebellion’.

Abdul Karim Ali’s close family have been forced into hiding after receiving threats. Amnesty International learned that Abdul Karim Ali’s wife has received threats through anonymous calls, which have led her to flee their home. The calls warned her not to alert people outside Cameroon about his situation and asked her to bring her husband and family’s passports to the military who were detaining Abdul Karim Ali.

This is not the first time Abdul Karim Ali has been detained, apparently in relation to his activism. On 25 September 2019 he was arrested and taken to the Secretary of State Defense detention centre where he was held, initially without access to a lawyer for five days, before finally being released without charge weeks later (1 November 2019).

Since 2016, the Cameroon authorities have been imprisoning hundreds of people simply for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. For example, five journalists are currently detained, as well as 62 people who protested at demonstrations organized by the political party the MRC. There were also hundreds of arrests at peaceful protests against the perceived discrimination against people living in the country’s Anglophone regions. Many of the detained individuals have faced convictions by military courts on charges that criminalize the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in violation of international human rights standards.

The detention of people simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly is arbitrary and it violates the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cameroon.

Furthermore, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which Cameroon is a signatory, prohibits enforced disappearance. According to the Convention “enforced disappearance is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.” As a state party to the Convention, Cameroon has the obligation to “refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of a treaty”.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French/English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 April 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Abdul Karim Ali (he/him)