

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 51/06 (AFR 17/001/2006, 07 March 2006) - Fear of torture or ill-treatment/prisoners of conscience/harsh prison conditions

CAMEROON Nine male detainees, including one 17-year-old boy

Eight men and one 17-year-old boy who were detained in the capital, Yaoundé, because of their alleged sexual orientation, were all released in June. One of the men, Alim Mongoche, died on 23 June, 10 days after his release. His death was reportedly the result of an illness which he had contracted before his detention.

The detainees were arrested at a nightclub in Yaoundé by gendarmes on 22 May 2005, along with two other boys who were subsequently freed. They were initially detained at Nlongka detention centre in Yaoundé, and transferred in June 2005 to Kondengui Central Prison. They were tried on charges of practising homosexuality, which is a criminal offence under Section 347a of the Cameroonian Penal Code. Two of the detainees - François Ayissi and Marc Lambert Zanga – were acquitted and released on 13 June 2006. The remaining seven, including Alim Mongoche and a 17-year-old youth, were found guilty of practising homosexuality and sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment. However, they were all released soon after the trial because they had already spent more than 10 months in prison.

The detainees had been held in harsh conditions at Kondengui Prison, which is said to be overcrowded and unsanitary, and the prison diet is reportedly inadequate. Amnesty International had previously called on the authorities to ensure that the detainees were allowed access to medical attention. However, despite the poor health of Alim Mongoche and the appeals from international and local organizations, the authorities refused to permit his early release. On his release on 13 June, Alim Mongoche was transferred to hospital, where he died.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Homophobia is endemic in Cameroonian society. In December 2005, the Cameroonian Roman Catholic Church issued a statement denouncing homosexuality. In January 2006, three Cameroonian newspapers published a list of several dozen people, including several government officials, musicians and businessmen whom they accused of homosexuality. On 13 February 2006, an anonymous person claiming to represent a youth organisation published a memorandum urging all Cameroonians not to tolerate homosexuality and to report gay men and lesbians to the authorities. On 3 March 2006 the High Court in Yaoundé found the editor of the newspaper *L'Anecdote* guilty of defaming a government minister when the newspaper published a list, including the Minister's name, of people accused of homosexuality. The editor was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and ordered to pay a fine of 300,000 CFA francs (US\$425).

On 30 March 2006, three of a group of 12 females who were expelled from Eyenguè Nkongo college of Deido Plage in Douala students on suspicion of being lesbians were detained along with a female football player, after a complaint to the police by a grandmother of one of the students. The four young women were released on 7 June after a Douala court sentenced them to a 3-year suspended prison term and ordered them to pay a fine of 25,000 CFA Francs (approximately US\$44). The court ordered that they would be imprisoned for six months if they were found practising homosexual acts.

Many thanks to all who sent appeals. No further action is required from the UA Network. Amnesty International will continue to campaign on this issue using other techniques.

