

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/02/97

23 January 1997

Further information on UA 250/96 (AFR 17/06/96, 31 October 1996) and follow-ups (AFR 17/08/96, 12 November, AFR 17/09/96 15 November, AFR 17/11/96, 11 December, AFR 17/12/96, 13 December, AFR 17/13/96, 18 December, AFR 17/01/97, 14 January 1997) - Prisoner of conscience / Fear of further prisoners of conscience

CAMEROON Eyoum Ngangué, journalist

Eyoum Ngangué, a journalist working for the independent *Le Messager* newspaper and its satirical weekly supplement, *Le Messager Popoli*, was arrested in Douala on 22 January 1997 and is currently being detained by the police.

Eyoum Ngangué and the chief editor of *Le Messager*, Pius Njawe, had been sentenced to prison terms and fines on 3 October 1996 on charges relating to an article which appeared in December 1995 in *Le Messager Popoli* about draft amendments to the Constitution presented by President Paul Biya to the National Assembly. The charges were brought by the Public Prosecutor's Office; no complaint had been lodged by any individual. Although they were initially only ordered to pay fines, the Court of Appeal in Douala subsequently convicted them of insulting the President of the Republic and members of the National Assembly (*outrage par injure fait au président de la République ainsi qu'aux membres de l'Assemblée nationale*) and disseminating false information (*propagation de fausses nouvelles*). Their sentences were increased to fines and prison terms: Eyoum Ngangué to one year's imprisonment and Pius Njawe to six months. Both men appealed to the Supreme Court against their convictions and sentences.

Pius Njawe was arrested on 29 October 1996 and imprisoned at the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. He was held until 15 November 1996 when he was released conditionally following a ruling by the Supreme Court (see original UA and updates of 12 and 15 November). Until 22 January 1997 Eyoum Ngangué had not been detained and was continuing his activities as a journalist.

Violations of the right to freedom of expression have increased significantly in Cameroon, particularly during 1996 when at least seven journalists were sentenced to prison terms and several others were arrested and detained without charge. Most of those imprisoned have been prisoners of conscience and others, convicted but not imprisoned, would be prisoners of conscience if forced to serve their sentences. In some cases, there have been serious irregularities in judicial procedures against journalists and prosecutions against them appear to have been attempts to inhibit criticism of prominent members of the government, or those closely associated with them, and government policies. Amnesty International is concerned that attempts by the government of Cameroon to stifle its critics and opponents will intensify in the months leading to legislative and presidential elections, scheduled for March and October 1997.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest of Eyoum Ngangué on 22 January 1997 and requesting clarification of the reasons for his detention;

- urging his immediate and unconditional release if, as it appears, he has been detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- adding concern that at least seven journalists were sentenced to prison terms during 1996 and several others detained without charge;
- reminding the government of Cameroon of its obligations to guarantee the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which it ratified in 1984.

APPEALS TO:

President

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

Fax: +237 221 699

Telegrams: President, Yaounde, Cameroon

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

Prime Minister

Mr Peter Mafany Musonge
Premier Ministre
Cabinet du Premier Ministre
Immeuble Étoile
1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon

Fax: +237 235 765

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Premier Ministre / Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

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

Telegrams: Ministre, Justice, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

Minister of State for Communication

M. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni
Ministre d'Etat chargé de la Communication,
Ministère de la Communication
BP 1588, Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Ministre, Communication, Yaounde, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

- *Le Messager*, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, République du Cameroun
- *Cameroon Post*, BP 1981, Yaoundé, République du Cameroon
- *The Herald*, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, République du Cameroun
- *La Nouvelle Expression*, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, Douala, République du Cameroun

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 March 1997.