

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 17/03/98

15 January 1998

Further information on UA 07/98 (AFR 17/01/98, 8 January 1998) - Prisoner of conscience / Health concern / Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and new concern: Fear of arrest as a prisoner of conscience

CAMEROON Pius Njawé, journalist, director of *Le Messenger*

new name: Michel Michaut Moussala, journalist, director of *Aurore Plus*

On 13 January 1998, Pius Njawé, a prominent journalist and director of the independent newspaper *Le Messenger*, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine. Another journalist, Michel Michaut Moussala, director of the newspaper *Aurore Plus*, was sentenced to six month's imprisonment and a fine at the same trial.

Pius Njawé was arrested on 24 December 1997 and detained by the *police judiciaire* (the police investigation department) following an article in *Le Messenger* two days earlier by another journalist which questioned the state of health of President Paul Biya. Two days later the newspaper published the government's denial that President Biya was ill. On 26 December, however, Pius Njawé was charged with dissemination of false news (*propagation de fausses nouvelles*) and transferred to the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. Amnesty International believes that Pius Njawé, who has been imprisoned on many occasions in the past, most recently in late 1996, is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely because of his legitimate professional activities and in violation of his right to freedom of expression.

Michel Michaut Moussala was convicted of defamation (*diffamation*). The charges related to an article which accused a National Assembly member of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (*Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais*) of corruption, importing arms and attempting to overthrow the government (*détournement de fonds publics, importation d'armes et tentative de coup d'état*). Although not yet arrested, there are fears that Michel Michaut Moussala could be imprisoned at any time as a prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International is also concerned about Pius Njawé's health while imprisoned at New Bell prison. When he was detained in 1996 he was denied access to his doctor and medical treatment. Prison conditions in Cameroon deny basic rights, pose a threat to both health and life 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. An increasing number of journalists have been brought to trial on criminal charges, convicted and sentenced to prison terms for criticizing the authorities. Others have been arrested and detained before being released without charge. Journalists have been harassed and assaulted and newspapers suspended and confiscated.

The right to freedom of expression in Cameroon is guaranteed both by national law and international human rights law. The Constitution provides for freedom of expression and the press. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cameroon in 1984, states that everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression.

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

- expressing serious concern that Pius Njawé has been convicted and sentenced to a two-year prison term and a fine, and urging his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience;
- expressing concern also about the conviction of Michel Michaut Moussala to a six-month prison term and urging that he not be imprisoned;
- 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;
- requesting assurances that Pius Njawé is being treated humanely in prison and in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners, and urging that he be allowed regular access to members of his family, lawyers and a doctor of his choice.

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 22 16 99

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

Prime Minister

M. Peter Mafany Musonge
Premier Ministre
Cabinet du Premier Ministre
Immeuble Etoile
1000 Yaoundé, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Premier Ministre, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Faxes: + 237 23 57 65

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, 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

Le Messenger, BP 5925, 11 Boulevard de la Liberté, Douala, Cameroon

Cameroon Post, BP 1981, Yaoundé, Cameroon

The Herald, BP 3659 Messa, Yaoundé, Cameroon

L'Expression, BP 15333, 12 rue Prince de Galles, Douala, Cameroon

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 28 February 1998.