

13 August 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 and AFR 17/08/98, 26 June 1998) - Prisoner of conscience / Health concern / Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment

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

Amnesty International remains seriously concerned about the health of prisoner of conscience Pius Njawé who continues to be held in Central Prison, New Bell, Douala. Conditions at the prison are particularly harsh and although Pius Njawé has deteriorating eye-sight he is being refused access to specialist treatment.

Although Pius Njawé was allowed to see a specialist in hospital on 13 May 1998, he has since been prevented by the prison governor (*régisseur*) from attending a subsequent appointment, despite recommendations from the prison doctor.

Article 22 (2) of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners states that "*Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals...*".

Pius Njawé was arrested on 24 December 1997 following an article published in *Le Messenger* two days earlier which raised questions about President Paul Biya's health. Although the newspaper subsequently published a government denial that President Biya was ill, on 26 December Pius Njawé was nevertheless charged with *propagation de fausses nouvelles*, dissemination of false news, and sent to New Bell prison. On 13 January 1998 he was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine. The Court of Appeal in Douala reduced the fine and the prison term to one year on 14 April 1998.

Some Urgent Action participants have received responses from diplomatic representatives of Cameroon in their country, for example in the USA and Japan. These replies state that Pius Njawé has been tried, convicted and sentenced for a criminal offence with due process of the law and that the matter is the responsibility of the judiciary, not the executive.

Amnesty International believes that Pius Njawé has been imprisoned solely because of his legitimate professional activities, in violation of his right to freedom of expression. More than 30 court cases have been brought against *Le Messenger* since 1990, almost all of them by the government.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that: "*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers*". Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Cameroon ratified in 1984, obliges Cameroon to guarantee freedom of expression.

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

- repeating your call for Pius Njawé's immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience;
- expressing serious concern at the harsh conditions in which he is being held which pose a threat to his safety and health, and urging immediate action to ensure that he is held in conditions which conform to international standards for the treatment of prisoners;
- expressing concern that he has been refused permission to attend hospital appointments and urging that he be allowed to receive all necessary medical treatment, including regular access to a doctor of his own choice and treatment in a hospital;
- reminding the Government 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 22 16 99

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

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

Appeals to the Governor of New Bell prison should specifically request that Pius Njawé be allowed to visit a hospital, as necessary.

Governor of New Bell prison

M. Daniel Njang
Régisseur, Prison centrale de Douala
New Bell, Douala, République du Cameroun

Telegrams: Régisseur, Prison centrale, New Bell, Douala, Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Régisseur

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

L'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 your section office, if sending appeals after 21 February 1998.