

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 17/02/99

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / West Africa Subregional Team
Date: 15 January 1999

***Further Information on
MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***

(See AI Index: AFR 17/15/98, 20 November 1998)

**Deaths in custody and ill-treatment in prison
CAMEROON**

Theme: torture and ill-treatment / lack of medical care / detention without charge or trial

Summary

On 20 November 1998, Amnesty International [AI] issued a medical letter writing action on behalf of a group of prisoners reported to be in serious ill-health. Ten prisoners who were arrested in Cameroon in early 1997 had subsequently died either as a result of torture or lack of medical care. AI has now learned of the release during 1998 of around 20 of those arrested in March 1997 in connection with attacks by armed groups on towns in North-West Province who remained held. However, 42 of these prisoners are still being held without charge or trial in extremely harsh conditions. Several of them are reported to be seriously ill.

Amnesty International is renewing its calls on the authorities of Cameroon to promptly charge or bring to trial the prisoners who remain in detention, or to release any against whom there is no evidence of a recognizably criminal offence. All prisoners should be treated humanely in accordance with international standards for the treatment of prisoners, and be given access to adequate medical care including transfer to hospital if necessary.

Recommended Actions

Appeals are requested, preferably in French, from health professionals to the addresses below:

- C referring to your earlier letter [if appropriate], welcoming the unconditional release of some 20 of those who remained held without charge or trial in connection with the events in North-West Province in March 1997
- C expressing serious concern at reports that several of the prisoners who remain in detention are seriously ill and asking for more information on their current state of health
- C urging the authorities to provide all detainees in Cameroon with adequate medical care in accordance with international human rights standards

- C urging the authorities to promptly charge and bring to trial the remaining 42 prisoners and to release any against whom there is no evidence of a recognizably criminal offence

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 12 March 1999, and copy any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

ADDRESSES

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

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

M. Laurent Easo
Ministre de la Justice
Garde des Sceaux, Ministère de la Justice
1000 Yaoundé
Cameroon

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

M. Samson Ename Ename
Ministre de l'Administration territoriale
Ministère de l'Administration territoriale
1000 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

Ordre des médecins du Cameroun
BP 219
1000 Yaoundé
Cameroon

and to diplomatic representatives of Cameroon accredited to your country.

'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment'

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Article 5**

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FURTHER INFORMATION ON MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Ill-treatment in detention and lack of medical care
CAMEROON**

(See AI Index: AFR 17/15/98, 20 November 1998)

On 20 November 1998, Amnesty International [AI] issued a medical letter writing action on behalf of a group of prisoners reported to be in serious ill-health. Ten prisoners who were arrested in Cameroon in early 1997 had subsequently died either as a result of torture or lack of medical care. AI has now learned of the release during 1998 of around 20 of those arrested in March 1997 in connection with attacks by armed groups on towns in North-West Province who remained held. However, 42 of these prisoners are still being held without charge or trial in extremely harsh conditions. Several of them are reported to be seriously ill, including:

- Ebenezer Akwanga: too weak to stand; previously reported to suffer paralysis of his lower limbs as a result of torture
- Grace Yaya Kwei [f]: in need of medical care after undergoing an operation [no details]
- Fidelis Nyankwe: suffers from a fractured arm and swollen legs
- Ndum A Robertson: suffers from tuberculosis
- Ndifon Joseph Tangu: diabetic; needs a special diet and regular medical attention
- Ndifet Zacharia Khan: has had toes on both feet amputated following severe beatings at the time of arrest and has been returned to Nkondengui prison from a military hospital

Throughout Cameroon, prison conditions fall far short of international standards for the treatment of detainees. Ill-treatment of prisoners is endemic in the country's prisons, and abuses against detainees are frequent. Medical care is generally inadequate, which sometimes seems to be deliberate deprivation and the result of serious negligence on the part of the authorities. The government of Cameroon is bound both by national legislation as well as by international instruments to prohibit torture, to protect the human rights of all its citizens, and to ensure that detainees are treated humanely and are given access to adequate medical care when ill.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the long period of detention without charge or trial of the remaining prisoners who are being detained in connection with the events in North-West Province in March 1997, and urges the government to promptly release any against whom no recognizably criminal charge is brought.

Please also refer to the original Medical Letter Writing Action [AFR 17/15/98, 20 November 1998].