

£CAMEROON

@1993: Political arrests and torture continue

Introduction

This report is a summary of Amnesty International's concerns in Cameroon during 1993.

During that year hundreds of critics and opponents of the government of President Paul Biya were detained for short periods, usually without charge or trial. Members of opposition political parties and journalists were among those targeted for harassment and arrest. In almost all cases they appeared to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully expressing their political views.

The pattern of torture and ill-treatment of political detainees and criminal suspects reported in previous years continued. Beatings while in the custody of the police and the gendarmerie were routine and at least two people died as a result of their injuries. No action was known to have been taken by the authorities against those responsible.

Amnesty International also received reports of excessive force used by the security forces which resulted in deaths. In March 1993 the security forces opened fire on a peaceful demonstration in Bamenda in North-West Province; two people died and more than 20 others were injured. There were also reports of extrajudicial executions of members of the Shua Arab community by government forces during security operations in the far north of the country.

Political developments in Cameroon during 1993

Opposition political parties united in a coalition known as the Union for Change. They continued to protest against the government of President Paul Biya, who had narrowly defeated John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in October 1992 in presidential elections which international observers concluded had been characterised by widespread fraud. The SDF had declared that it would not accept the results.

In May 1993 the government submitted a new draft constitution to a government-appointed committee. Although a second draft had been completed by the following month, a final draft had not been submitted to the Head of State by the end of the year. The draft constitution included restriction of the powers of the president and proscription of one-party rule. According to the draft constitution, Cameroon would remain a unitary state. This provision provoked criticism from the English-speaking community in Cameroon, which favours a federal system of government and greater autonomy for English-speaking regions.

Continued intercommunal fighting in the far north of the country claimed dozens of lives during 1993. Although leaders of the Shua Arab and Kotoko communities signed a peace agreement in September 1993, fighting continued.

Political arrests

Critics and opponents of the government, including leaders of opposition political parties and journalists, were harassed and detained, usually without charge or trial. In most cases political detainees were held for short periods but in some cases their detention was in violation of legislation which specifies that detainees may not be held for more than 72 hours before being referred to a judicial authority. Most were prisoners of conscience. During 1993 Amnesty International called for the release of prisoners of conscience and criticized the detention of opponents of the government beyond the legal limit. The government did not respond.

In early March 1993 the Union for Change called for a series of weekly demonstrations throughout the country to protest against the government of President Biya and to call for, among other things, new presidential elections. These demonstrations led to dozens of arrests in Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam and Bamenda; most of those arrested were released shortly afterwards. More than 100 supporters of an opposition party, the *Union des forces démocratiques du Cameroun* (UFDC), Union of Cameroon Democratic Forces, were arrested on 31 March 1993 when security forces raided the party's headquarters in Yaoundé. The day before, the Minister for Communications, Augustine Kontchou Kouomegni, had announced that all demonstrations involving a risk of violence were banned. Those arrested included the president of the UFDC, **Dr Victorin François Hameni Bieleu**, and its secretary general, **Dr André Kekuine**. Dr Hameni Bieleu had been held briefly, together with other opposition leaders, two weeks earlier and had also been detained in both 1991 and 1992. The following day, on 1 April 1993, a further 50 supporters of opposition parties, including the SDF, were arrested. They were held in the Presidential Guard's barracks at Ekounou, outside Yaoundé, where they received no food or water until 2 April 1993. They were denied visits from lawyers and families until their release on 8 April 1993. The authorities claimed that the UFDC had been planning a violent demonstration.

Members and supporters of opposition political parties continued to be harassed and detained throughout the year. **Jean-Michel Nintcheu**, president of the *Rassemblement pour la patrie* (RAP), Rally for the Nation, and a leading member of the Union for Change, was taken into custody by police for questioning on 14 October 1993 in Douala. After he escaped and went into hiding, the police surrounded his home and held his wife, **Clothilde Nintcheu**, and seven other family members, including children, hostage in an attempt to make him give himself up. They were held until 22 October 1993, although Jean-Michel Nintcheu had not been rearrested.

The same month, the leader of another opposition political party, **Mboua Massock**, was detained for a week without charge. He was arrested on 21 October 1993 after the *Programme social pour la liberté et la démocratie* (PSLD), Social Program for Freedom and Democracy, published a document which catalogued grievances against the government,

including its failure to pay public employees' salaries. He had been arrested on several occasions in previous years.

Although most government opponents and critics were detained without charge or trial, charges were brought against **Jean-Baptiste Nkouemou**, a member of the opposition *Union des populations du Cameroun* (UPC), Union of Cameroonian Peoples. However, he had been held incommunicado in police custody for three weeks before being brought before a magistrate. Normally resident in France, he had attended the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993 as a representative of a non-governmental human rights organization based in Paris, the *Ligue camerounaise des droits de l'homme*, Cameroon Human Rights League. Jean-Baptiste Nkouemou was arrested on 1 September 1993 on his arrival from Paris at Douala airport because he was in possession of leaflets denouncing human rights violations in Cameroon. He was verbally abused and threatened at the time of his arrest. He was charged with dissemination of false information, incitement to hatred and revolt against the government but was freed when a court dismissed the case against him on 13 October 1993.

Journalists were a particular target for arrest; at least 15 were detained at various times during the year. For example, in January 1993 **Martin Ayaba**, a journalist working for the independent *Cameroon Post*, was reported to have been arrested in Douala. He was stripped, beaten and held for 10 hours. **Pius Njawe**, editor of an independent newspaper, *Le Messenger*, who had been arrested on several occasions in previous years, was arrested in May 1993 following the publication of an article which criticized President Biya. He was released uncharged the following day. However, he was again arrested in August 1993, tried and convicted with two other journalists on charges relating to the publication of confidential documents; he received a six months' suspended sentence. **François Borgia Marie Evembe**, a political columnist working for *Le Messenger*, was arrested by police in Yaoundé in August 1993, also because of an article critical of President Biya. He was released after four days but rearrested by police at his home the following day and held for a further week before being released without charge. Thirty-two supporters of the SDF and five journalists, including François Borgia Marie Evembe, were detained overnight on 3 November 1993 after police dispersed a meeting in Yaoundé.

At least nine students from Yaoundé University arrested in June 1993 were detained for almost six months without charge or trial. They were arrested because of their membership of an organization called the Students' Parliament which had opposed increases in student fees announced in January 1993. Although the government claimed that the Students' Parliament was responsible for the death of a student at Yaoundé University in April 1993, no charges were brought against the detained students. Students said that he had been killed by the security forces. The Minister of Education announced that the death would be investigated but no findings were made known by the end of 1993.

In the north of Cameroon, at least 15 people were reported to be held illegally on the orders of a traditional ruler, known as the *lamido*, in Rey Bouba in the Department of Mayo Rey in Northern Province. Some of those detained were arrested in May 1993 while others had been held since 1992; they were reported to be supporters of opposition political parties. They were held in the private residences of the *lamido* and other local dignitaries. In May 1993 the *lamido* was reported to have ordered some 300 armed men under his control to open fire on the

inhabitants of Mbang Rey following protests against the removal from office of a local chief by the *lamido*; about 10 people died and several others were wounded. Despite complaints to the government by opposition members of the National Assembly from the Department of Mayo Rey about these detentions and killings, there was no official investigation and it appeared that the *lamido* had acted with the tacit approval of the authorities.

Torture and ill-treatment

As in previous years, beatings of political detainees and suspected criminals by the security forces were routine. Those arrested during 1993 were often stripped, held in filthy and overcrowded conditions and denied food and water. Visits by family members and lawyers were also often denied. At least two men died as a result of injuries sustained under torture, but other deaths in custody may also have occurred.

In March 1993 when **Dr Hameni Bieleu** was detained together with more than 100 other members and supporters of the UFDC, he received severe bruising to his eye as a result of beating. He was also denied regular medication to control diabetes. **Peter Ndoh**, a businessman, was arrested on 1 August 1993 by police in Bamenda, apparently for illegal possession of firearms. He was transferred to Douala where he was tortured while held incommunicado in police custody. According to reports, he was suspended from a tyre and beaten. His shoulder blade was broken and he also received injuries to his hand. Despite the severity of his injuries, he was initially denied medical treatment; he was finally admitted to hospital at the end of August 1993 before being returned to prison. Amnesty International intervened in both these cases but no response was received from the government.

SDF supporters who were detained in Yaoundé in early November 1993 were also beaten. One woman who was beaten and kicked had to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

Two men died from their injuries after severe and prolonged beating. On 16 March 1993 **Louis Abondo Langwoue**, aged 29, was arrested by gendarmes in Diang, Eastern Province, after being accused of theft by his employer. He died in a cell on 20 March 1993. When his body was taken by gendarmes to the Provincial Hospital in Bertoua for an autopsy, they claimed that he had been poisoned. A senior doctor at the hospital refused to certify that the cause of death was poisoning; he concluded that Louis Abondo Langwoue had died from severe continuous trauma, dehydration and shock, caused by severe and indiscriminate beating. The doctor was subsequently dismissed from his post at the hospital.

Another death occurred in December 1993. **Cyprian Tanwie Ndifor**, aged 23, who worked at a Catholic pastoral centre, was arrested on 15 December 1993 with a friend, apparently in connection with a theft. They were taken to gendarmerie headquarters in Bamenda. Although visited in detention on the day of their arrest, subsequent visits were refused. Three days later gendarmes admitted that Cyprian Tanwie Ndifor was dead. He had died on the night of 15 December 1993 after beatings to all parts of his body including his genitals and the soles of his feet.

Amnesty International called for impartial investigation of all reports of torture and ill-treatment, for those responsible for such abuses to be brought to justice and for all prisoners to be safeguarded from torture or ill-treatment. In none of these cases was any action known to have been taken by the authorities against those responsible.

Extrajudicial executions and excessive use of lethal force

Two people were killed when security forces shot at peaceful demonstrators in Bamenda on 25 March 1993. When tear gas failed to disperse the demonstration, which had been organized by the Union for Change, gendarmes opened fire. Two men were killed and more than 20 others were wounded. The Prime Minister, Simon Achidi Achu, denounced the killings and said that there would be an inquiry. A commission of inquiry, reported to have been composed entirely of government security officials, concluded that gendarmes had fired in self-defence. No action was taken against those responsible for the deaths.

The security forces were reported to have arbitrarily arrested and killed members of the Shua Arab community in June 1993 during military operations ordered by the Ministry of Defence against armed bandits in the Department of Logone and Shari in the far north. There has been a long-running conflict between the Kotoko community and Shua Arabs which has claimed hundreds of lives in recent years. During the military operations Shua Arabs were apparently indiscriminately accused of banditry by the Kotoko and the security forces were reported to have attacked several Shua Arab villages, rounding up and beating the inhabitants. At least seven men were reported to have been extrajudicially executed and another to have died as a result of torture. Sixty-two men were reported to have been arrested and held without charge in Makari before being transferred to Kousséri. They were subsequently released. The peace agreement signed by leaders of the two communities in September 1993 specified that members of the security forces responsible for maintaining order in the Department of Logone and Shari should be from other parts of the country.

In May 1993 10 soldiers and gendarmes accused of extrajudicial execution of Shua Arabs in Kousséri in January 1992 were tried by a military tribunal in Yaoundé. Six were convicted; two received sentences of death, the others terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 to 15 years. The other four were acquitted. Appeals against the convictions and sentences were still pending at the end of 1993.

Recommendations to the Cameroonian Government

Amnesty International is calling on the Cameroonian authorities to:

- ! end harassment, arrest and detention of critics and opponents of the government solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as guaranteed by the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- ! introduce safeguards to protect all prisoners from torture and ill-treatment and institute impartial investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment with a view to bringing

to justice those responsible, in line with Cameroon's international obligations including the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

- ! introduce strict control on members of the security forces, in accordance with international standards, in order to ensure that indiscriminate, excessive and lethal force is not used against demonstrators;
- ! initiate an impartial investigation into reports of extrajudicial executions by the security forces, ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and instruct those in charge of security forces to ensure that officers under their command do not commit extrajudicial executions.