

4 March 1998

Further information on UA 07/98 (AFR 17/01/98, 8 January 1998) and follow-up (AFR 17/03/98, 15 January 1998) - Prisoner of conscience / Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment

CAMEROON Pius Njawé, journalist, director of *Le Messenger*
 Michel Michaut Moussala, journalist, director of *Aurore Plus*

Amnesty International is repeating its call for the immediate and unconditional release of Pius Njawé, a prominent journalist and director of the independent newspaper *Le Messenger*, who has been imprisoned since December 1997 as a prisoner of conscience. The organization is also seriously concerned about the harsh conditions in which Pius Njawé is detained which it believes pose a threat to his safety and health.

Pius Njawé was arrested on 24 December 1997 following an article in *Le Messenger* two days earlier 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 *propagation de fausses nouvelles*, dissemination of false news, and transferred to the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. On 13 January 1998 he was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine.

The organization believes that Pius Njawé has been imprisoned solely because of his legitimate professional activities and 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.

Prison conditions in Cameroon deny basic rights 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.

Pius Njawé is held in a cell with about a hundred other prisoners, all accused or convicted of criminal offences. Violence frequently breaks out in the cell. At the end of December 1997, Pius Njawé was threatened by a group of prisoners on death row who blamed him for preventing visits to the prison because of the police presence to deter demonstrations by his supporters. According to reports, in an attempt to isolate Pius Njawé, the prison authorities have punished a number of prisoners who have associated with him.

Pius Njawé's wife, Jeanne Ongbatik, was physically assaulted by prison officials on several occasions when attempting to visit her husband. On 9 January 1998 she lost the child that she was carrying. A complaint submitted by Pius Njawé to the Public Prosecutor concerning the ill-treatment of his wife has not been pursued by the authorities.

Although Pius Njawé's wife is able to bring him food daily, he has often been denied visits from colleagues and on several occasions his doctors have been denied access. When he was detained in 1996 Pius Njawé was also denied access to his doctor and medical treatment.

Michel Michaut Moussala, who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine after being convicted of *diffamation*, defamation, at the same trial has not yet been arrested and imprisoned.

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

- urging that Pius Njawé be immediately and unconditionally released as a prisoner of conscience;
- expressing serious concern about 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;
- urging that he be allowed regular access to members of his family, lawyers and his doctors;
- expressing concern at the continuing attacks on freedom of expression in Cameroon and urging that neither Michel Michaut Moussala nor any other journalist be imprisoned as prisoners of conscience;
- 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.

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 Messager, 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 15 April 1998.