

23 November 1999

Further information on UA 113/98 (AFR 17/07/98, 15 April 1998) and follow-ups (AFR 17/07/98, 15 April 1998; AFR 17/11/98, 14 August 1998; AFR 17/12/98, 10 September 1998, AFR 17/14/98, 29 October 1998 and AFR 17/19/98, 18 December 1998, AFR 17/05/99, 26 February 1999, AFR 17/09/99, 2 August 1999) - Torture and ill-treatment / Health concern

CAMEROON 53 prisoners, including:

Ebenezer Akwanga, aged 26, student and President of the Southern Cameroons Youth League
Fon Peter Fonyam, aged 50
Bika Iderisu, aged 22
Ndifet Zacharia Khan, aged 56
Grace Yaya Kwei (f), aged 38
Wilson Che Neba, aged 19
Fidelis Nyankwe, aged 40
Ndum Anoh Robertson, aged 68
Ndifon Joseph Tangu, aged 58
Salifu Tanko, aged about 80 (age corrected)
Philip Tete, aged 59

On 6 October 1999, three people were sentenced to life imprisonment and 33 to between one and 20 years in prison after an unfair trial before a military tribunal. Thirty were acquitted.

Two days later, 26 of those acquitted and still in detention and those who were sentenced to two years' imprisonment or less, were released from Central Prison, Nkondengui, Yaoundé. Fourteen others who were also tried had already been released on bail in 1998. Twenty-one prisoners remain in prison serving prison terms of between eight years and life. They are to appeal against their conviction and sentence.

Amnesty International believes the trial was neither impartial nor independent and that it was fundamentally flawed in several other respects. It therefore believes that those convicted should be granted a retrial before a civilian court and in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

On 27 October 1999, Grace Yaya Kwei, who was one of those released on 8 October and Stanley Nseke, who was released on bail last year, sent the following message to Amnesty International on behalf of their group of prisoners:

"We write to appreciate your commendable support for us during our long period of detention. We understand that as soon as you became aware of our arrest, you mobilized your members all over the world, in order to pressurize our government..."

It was comforting to know that people were talking about us out there. Some of us spent long months in the hospitals and either got well or died. On their behalf too, we write this appreciation.

Although we have been released we still face numerous problems, especially as we have been forced to restart our lives. Our farms, jobs, businesses were all lost, and some of us even lost homes. Also we continue to think about our brothers, husbands, fathers and children who have been sentenced...

Again, thank you for your support and for the support of others...

LONG LIVE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL"

Grace Yaya Kwei's husband and son were sentenced to life and 10 years' imprisonment respectively.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Those convicted, all civilians from Cameroon's English-speaking minority, had been charged in connection with armed attacks in towns in North-West Province in March 1997, in which 10 people, including three gendarmes, were killed. The authorities blamed the attacks on the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), which supports independence for Cameroon's two English-speaking provinces, North-West and South-West, and the affiliated Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL). The offences of which they were charged included murder, attempted murder, grievous bodily harm, attempted destruction, illegal possession of firearms, arson and robbery.

At least 10 prisoners died as a result of torture and ill-treatment at the time of arrest or because of a lack of medical care in detention.

Amnesty International continues to campaign for those still in prison through an Action File being worked on by groups in several countries.

No further action by the Urgent Action network is required. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.