



Executive summary: Southern Cameroons, bilingualism, discrimination, judicial abuse, political arrests, arbitrary detention, jungle justice, electoral corruption, exploitation of timber, media restrictions

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Southern Cameroons

1. Introduction

The modern-day Republic of Cameroon, with a total population of approximately 17 million, is constituted of two former United Nations Trust Territories – French Cameroun and British Southern Cameroons. After Francophone Cameroun gained independence from France in 1960, UN Resolution 1608 (1961) had called for dialogue between the new Francophone Cameroun authorities, the British government, and Southern Cameroons authorities to negotiate a possible union between Southern Cameroons and Francophone Cameroun. The dialogue promised under Resolution 1608 was never realized, and a plebiscite was organised by the UN in 1961. The plebiscite put two alternatives to the electorate: union with Nigeria or union with Cameroun, with no option for independence. Southern Cameroons voted in favour of union with Cameroon. Some Anglophone leaders have argued that the subsequent union between the two Cameroun and Southern Cameroons as an illegal annexation.

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2. Bilingualism and Discrimination

In addition to historic tensions between the two Cameroons, Anglophone Southern Cameroons has been subject to reportedly widespread cultural assimilation. Though the 1961 Federal Constitution calls for equal promotion of English and French, increased centralization has led to the increasingly dominant use of French in public media, official documents and communications, and more.

Whilst Cameroon remains officially bilingual, French has been reportedly imposed as the language of instruction at nursery and primary school levels. On the whole, English is poorly represented in general public media. Standardized examinations are set in French and are rarely translated into English, leading to serious and obvious unfairness for Anglophone students in Southern Cameroons. Gross discrimination in university enrolment and employment in government administration has been widely reported, and increased general centralization has led to the gradual cultural erosion of the Anglophone community. As a result, Anglophone groups have reported widespread discontent with non-implementation of bilingual policies.

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3. Judicial Process

The judiciary of Cameroon suffers widely from corruption and delay, which has led to overcrowded prisons. Of the 431 prisoners in Bamenda Central Prison in Southern Cameroons in 2007, over 250 had been awaiting trial for a period ranging from 3 to 10 years. Reports of squalid conditions in detention centre and use of torture are common.

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A new Criminal Procedure Code has been in effect since January 2007, and requires that signed warrants accompany any arrests and detentions. However, little improvement has been seen in Southern Cameroons, where arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention remain widely reported. Active political groups in Southern Cameroons continue to be subject to regular arrests and raids. On 20 January 2007, leaders of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) were arrested at a press conference in their Bamenda Secretariat without being

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50 presented with any warrants. The National Vice Chair, Dr Nfor Ngala Nfor, was subsequently
detained for two months before being granted bail. Dr Nfor has also been arrested on several
other occasions, including in November 2005, when he was held incommunicado for three
weeks along with other SCNC activists.

55 Problems with non-implementation of bilingual policies have also exacerbated judicial
unfairness. Released detainees and prisoners in Southern Cameroons have reported that
police interrogations are conducted solely in French, which many detainees do not speak or
understand. Many former detainees have also reported being forced to sign transcripts or
documents in French.

60 **4. Jungle Justice and Public Confidence**

Public confidence in police authority and judicial processes is generally low. This lack of
confidence, compounded by widespread reports of severe delay, bribery, and corruption in
the judicial system, has compelled citizens to seek first-hand, violent, punitive action against
criminal suspects. As such, mob justice (referred commonly as ‘jungle justice’) in the form of
65 public lynching and stoning is reportedly widespread in Southern Cameroons. Between June
and July 2008, at least three lynched corpses were found on the streets of Bamenda.

Overaggressive use of firearms by law enforcement against civilians has also exacerbated
already-low public confidence. In 2006, peaceful student protests against the decision by the
70 Minister of Higher Education to increase minimum admission requirements to university
medical programmes resulted in the deaths of at least four students as the gendarmerie shot
into the crowd of demonstrators. Several reports have verified that Buea University students
Hilary Muabe, Ivo Obia Nemba, Laura Mbianda, and Ngundam Ndeh were fatally shot at the
demonstration.

75 In light of the Buea University incident, some groups in Southern Cameroons have pointed to
the police brutality as politically motivated, noting that though the university demonstrations
were organized across Cameroon, only demonstrators in Southern Cameroons were faced
with violence and arrests.

80 In another incident, on 16 October 2007, a peaceful protest in Bamenda by taxi-motorcyclists
over the beating of another motorcyclist resulted in the shooting death of two protesters, Che
Patrick and Simon Ambe. Local Francophone authorities had reportedly called for an
investigation into the incident, but as of 2008, no formal investigation has been launched.

85 **5. Electoral Systems**

In 2006, a Parliamentary Bill calling for the creation of an independent electoral commission
known as Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) was adopted. The commission had been charged
with organizing municipal and legislative elections in July 2007, but reports of corruption,
90 irregularities, and abuse in ELECAM have exacerbated public confidence in the commission.
The July 2007 elections were organized by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and
Decentralization (CPDM).

95 **6. Exploitation of Timber**

Major illegal logging has been active in the Nguti Forest of Southern Cameroons since 1998,
and was extended to the forests of Eyumojock in 2005. Illegal logging has been a serious



100 problem from both an environmental and social point of view. Aside from its notable impact
on biodiversity, widespread illegal logging has had devastating effects for those dependent on
natural resources. 80% of the working population of Southern Cameroons is engaged in
subsistence farming, pastoral farming, and plantation agriculture. Continued disturbance to
local ecosystems will have severe consequences in the local economy.

105 Ill equipped law enforcement in forested areas has led to impunity for many illegal loggers.
There have also been reports of foreign private sector involvement in illegal logging, and
much of the illegal timber is reported to be for export to Europe.

110 In February 2008, members of the Babong village organized a nonviolent demonstration
against local exploitation of timber. 45 armed military officials were reportedly dispatched to
the area, and arrested 26 demonstrators. The demonstrators were detained for one week
incommunicado at the Mamfe Gendarme Office, and then transferred to the Mamfe
Divisional Prisons, where they were detained for two additional weeks.

7. Media restrictions

115 Whilst notable progress has been made in media liberalization laws since 1996, strict libel
laws remain an obstacle to ensuring adequate freedom of expression for journalists and media
outlets. In February 2008, private TV Channel Equinox TV was shut down by the Minister of
Communication, Jean Pierre Biyiti Bi Essam. Whilst the official reasoning provided in the
ministerial text of the decision cited allegedly “irregular activities” by the station, some
public speculation points to the controversial broadcast of an interview with the wife of
120 former President Ahmadou Ahidjo by Equinox TV.

125 In 2007, Ndofekeh Colday Olivier, creator of CRTV Bamenda programme “Red Carpet,”
invited Augustine Feh Ndangam on the show to discuss the SCNC. About five minutes into
the airing of the pre-recorded programme, the network was reportedly instructed to stop the
programme. Olivier was met with law enforcement officials and issued a warning. The
programme was then suspended one year.

8. Recommendations

130 All in all, it seems that the plight of political minorities in Southern Cameroons is largely
centred on poor political will by the Francophone government to recognize grievances from
Anglophone leaders, and implement policies of equal recognition and respect. Nonetheless, in
spite of incidents of widespread violations of human rights in Southern Cameroons,
Cameroon in general remains a politically and socially diverse and stable country, and
undoubtedly stands as an important potential model for other African countries.

135 Across contemporary African politics and civil societies, interethnic and linguistic divides
remain an important obstacle to peace. The international community should insist upon the
resolution of these divides in Cameroon, and encourage exemplary treatment of political
minorities in Southern Cameroons. The success of this will mark a new standard for
140 commendable political recognition of minorities in Africa.

In particular, UNPO urges Cameroon authorities:



Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Universal Periodic Review: Cameroon

- 145 *To strengthen overall implementation of bilingual policies, and ensure that Anglophones in Southern Cameroons are not subject to adverse inequality in employment, education, media representation, and in judicial procedures, as pursuant of Article 2 and 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which Cameroon has signed and ratified;*
- 150 *To commit to investigating widespread allegations of abuse by law enforcement, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings, and explore possible judicial remedies for victims;*
- To commit to combating impunity in the event of abuse by law enforcement and military personnel;*
- 155 *To strengthen judicial structures, and adopt measures against overaggressive use of force by authorities and corruption in the judiciary to avoid unreasonable delay and corruption;*
- 160 *To commit to guaranteeing media freedom for all, without prejudice to linguistic background and political affiliation;*
- To remedy loopholes and abuse within CPDM and ELECAM, strive to restore public confidence, and ensure fair Presidential elections in 2011;*
- 165 *To commit to providing increased education and training for police in nonviolent means of conflict resolution against nonviolent political dissidents; and*
- To enter into dialogue with Southern Cameroons political groups in order to improve relations between Anglophone Southern Cameroons political leaders and their Francophone counterparts.*
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