



# Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Cameroon

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Head of state: **Paul Biya**

Head of government: **Philémon Yang**

**As in previous years, the authorities continued to restrict the activities of political opponents and journalists. People suspected of engaging in same-sex activities were detained and some were sentenced to prison terms. Those defending the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people were subjected to harassment and abuse. The authorities did not act to protect people from attacks. Conditions in some prisons were harsh and sometimes life-threatening.**

## Background

In November President Biya celebrated 30 years in power. Protest actions by opposition groups, linked to the anniversary, were dispersed by riot police.

Corruption remained pervasive, and government efforts to tackle the problem were limited in their effectiveness. In September a former government minister was jailed for 25 years for embezzling US\$29 million of public funds.

In September, Amnesty International submitted a memorandum to the government highlighting numerous human rights concerns.

## Harassment of political opponents

The authorities continued to use the criminal justice system to harass and silence political opposition groups.

- The trial of several dozen members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), arrested in 2008 and charged with holding illegal meetings and failing to produce identity cards, had not taken place by the end of the year. The accused had appeared in court on

more than 30 occasions but the trial was adjourned each time because of the failure of the prosecution to present witnesses or the absence of court officials, including presiding judges.

- Three members of the SCNC – Felix Ngalim, Ebeneza Akwanga and Makam Adamu – were arrested in April and charged with secession and revolution, offences under the Penal Code, in connection with their membership of and activities relating to the SCNC. During May members of the Territorial Surveillance police were alleged to have taken Felix Ngalim, detained at Kondengui prison in the capital, Yaoundé, to their offices in the city and beaten him with a truncheon, reportedly causing injuries to the soles of his feet, legs and other parts of the body. On 28 May, he was transferred to the central prison in Bamenda, capital of North West province. He appeared before the Bamenda High Court on 5 and 17 June and again on 3 July; each hearing was adjourned on the grounds that prosecution witnesses were unavailable to testify. Ebeneza Akwanga was reported to have escaped from Kondengui prison and fled Cameroon in May. Felix Ngalim was granted provisional release on 4 December and was awaiting trial at the end of the year.
- In December, Dieudonné Enoh Meyomesse, an author critical of President Biya, was found guilty of armed robbery and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment after an unfair trial by a military court in Yaoundé. He was considered a prisoner of conscience. He and several co-defendants, who were also sentenced to between two and nine years, had been arrested in November 2011.

Critics of the government expressed concern that some prosecutions for corruption targeted individuals who had disagreed with the government.

- Titus Edzoa and Michel Thierry Atangana, who were due to complete their 15-year prison term for corruption, were tried on new charges and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in October. As in 1997, their trial in 2012 was unfair and appeared to be politically motivated.
- Paul Eric Kingué, who had been imprisoned for alleged involvement in riots in February 2008 and for corruption, was sentenced to life imprisonment in February following further unfair trials on corruption charges. The Court of Appeal quashed the sentence but conducted a new trial and sentenced him in November to 10 years' imprisonment.

### **Human rights defenders**

Human rights defenders and members of their families received death threats or were targeted by people they believed to be government agents or supporters.

- On 27 March government officials prevented LGBTI activists in Yaoundé from holding an EU-financed workshop on the rights of sexual minorities. This action followed a violent disruption of the workshop by members of a self-confessed anti-LGBTI group known as the Rally for Cameroonian Youth. Members of the security forces had earlier arrested Stéphane Koche, the organizer of the workshop, and detained him for several hours.
- In January, human rights defender Maximilienne Ngo Mbe was threatened with rape by men who claimed to be members of the security forces. Her niece was abducted and raped by men who told her that they were attacking her because of her aunt's activities against the government.
- Lawyers Michel Togue and Alice Nkom were threatened with violence because they had represented people charged with homosexual acts. Family members were also threatened. The authorities failed to condemn the threats or to offer any protection.

### **Freedom of expression – journalists**

Several journalists were prosecuted during the year.

- Television journalists Alex Gustave Azebaze, Thierry Ngogang and Anani Rabier Bindji, who were arrested in June 2008 together with university lecturer Manassé Aboya, were still awaiting trial, charged with conspiracy to handle a confidential document without authorization, as well as conspiracy to make biased commentary. The charges were believed to be politically motivated. The four men had been arrested after they criticized a government anti-corruption initiative and the arrests of two newspaper journalists during a televised debate.

### **Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people**

Violence, arbitrary arrests and detention, and other human rights violations targeting individuals because of their real or perceived sexual orientation, continued to occur. The authorities failed to protect people who were subjected to attacks and other abuse by non-state actors.

- Franky Ndome Ndome who, together with Jonas Nsinga Kimie, was serving a five-year prison sentence for homosexual conduct, was beaten and otherwise ill-treated in June by guards at Kondengui prison. The two men were also repeatedly assaulted by fellow inmates. The authorities took no action against those responsible or to protect them from violence.
- Three women – Martine Solange Abessolo, Esther Aboa Belinga and Léonie Marie Djula – were arrested on 14 February in Ambam, Southern province. They were accused of being lesbians after Léonie Djula's husband reportedly told the authorities that his wife had been enticed by the other two women into engaging in same-sex sexual relations. Martine Abessolo and Esther Belinga subsequently appeared before the Ambam Court of First Instance on charges of engaging in same-sex sexual relations and defaming Léonie Djula. They were granted provisional release on 20 February and appealed against irregularities in their arrest. The Ebolowa Court of Appeal had not delivered a verdict by the end of the year.
- On 17 December the Court of Appeal upheld the 2011 conviction of Jean-Claude Roger Mbede for homosexual activity. He had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

### **Prison conditions**

Conditions in Cameroon's two largest prisons, in Yaoundé and Douala, were harsh and constituted cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and in some cases were life-threatening. Prisoners suffering from mental illness did not have access to psychiatric care. At the end of the year both prisons were holding five times their intended capacity.

### **Death penalty**

Government information indicated that 102 prisoners were on death row at the start of the year. The Cameroonian National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms recommended that the government abolish the death penalty.

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