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## Cameroon: Registration and issuance of death certificates

### *Introduction*

The following note describes the procedure for death registration and issuance of death certificates in Cameroon. In doing so, the note includes a description of the system for civil registrations in Cameroon.

The description of the system for civil registrations in Cameroon include information on the declaration of death, while sections on issuance procedures touches upon copies, reissuance of civil status certificates and changes in the format and appearance of the layout introduced after 2011. These include the replacement of the document serial number with a matriculation code, along with space for information on nationality and ID-number.<sup>1</sup>

For more information regarding the changes in format and layout of Cameroonian civil status documents issued after 2011, see '*Cameroon: Civil registration and civil certificates*'.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Cameroon in March 2019 and is one out of several notes focusing on Cameroon.

### *Civil registrations in Cameroon*

Civil registrations such as birth registrations may take place in one of the following three types of administrative offices: in a main centre, a secondary centre or at a Cameroonian diplomatic mission abroad.<sup>2</sup> As of April 2019, Cameroon has 2,406 secondary centres, 420 main centres and 45 diplomatic missions abroad with civil status registries.<sup>3</sup> All three types of administrative offices mentioned here will be referred to as civil status registries in this note.

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<sup>1</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>3</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

Civil status registrars have competence to sign civil status certificates at the civil status registries. At main centres, the civil status registrars are the government delegates in city councils and their assistants as well as mayors and their assistants. At Cameroonian diplomatic missions abroad, the civil status registrars are the heads of diplomatic missions and consular posts as well as those assuring interim.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding secondary centres, registrars are appointed by the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development.<sup>5</sup> Civil status registrars of secondary centres are assisted by clerks appointed by a territorially competent Senior Divisional Officer. They jointly sign civil status certificates.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Declaration of death*

A death must be declared to the civil status registry where the event occurred, at the place of burial, at the place of residence or the deceased's place of birth. It can be declared by the head of the family, a relative of the deceased or any person with full knowledge of the death.<sup>7</sup>

The declaration must be certified by two witnesses. In the event of death in a hospital or penitentiary establishment, the head of the establishment shall declare it within 90 days.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Registration of death and issuance of the death certificate*

Information concerning the death is registered in three different books by civil status officers at the civil status registry. Every page in one of these books consists of two identical forms that are easily separated.<sup>9</sup>

Once the information has been registered in the three different books, a death certificate is issued to the registrant. One of the two identical forms in the civil status registry's book is removed, and constitutes the death certificate. The other remains in the book, and is referred to as the "souche".<sup>10</sup>

The registration books are then distributed as follows: One is sent to the court, another is sent to the BUNEC headquarters while the last one is archived at the civil status registry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>6</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Amendments of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, published in Training Manual on the Civil Status System, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization Cameroon, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Main centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Main centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Main centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

The death certificate must be jointly signed by a civil status registrar (mayor) and a secretary or clerk. According to the report of audience from BUNEC, civil status registrars will further affix a stamp on the civil status documents before they are issued to the registrant.<sup>12</sup> At the main centre Yaoundé 6, the civil status documents are signed by the secretary and signed and stamped by the mayor.<sup>13</sup> At a secondary centre, such documents will be signed by the civil status registrar and his clerk.<sup>14</sup>

During the process of registering the death and issuing the death certificate, the council will also collect all documents that belonged to the deceased.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Matriculation code*

Following the legislative changes after 2011 concerning civil registrations, a new matriculation code was introduced on civil status documents.



Image 1: Serial number on a birth certificate from 1982. (NIDC reference material)

Previously, the civil status documents included a serial number, based on the year of registration of the event. The new matriculation code further contains information on the place of issuance and the type of event registered.<sup>16</sup>



Image 2: Matriculation code on a death certificate. (NIDC reference material)

The Danish National ID Centre is familiar with further details regarding the matriculation code.

<sup>12</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Secondary centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Main centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>16</sup> National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

### *Copies*

If a copy of the death certificate is needed, it may be constructed in two different ways;

- It may be made as a photocopy of the souche from the civil status registry where the event was originally registered, or
- It may be a handwritten “copie - copie”. The process of purchasing the “copie - copie” and how it may be used as a legally valid copy of a civil certificate is, however, unclear.

The NIDC team observed copies being purchased from private retailers operating in close proximity to some civil status registries, and that the same retailer may also offer to fill in the information for the buyer.

It further appears that the retailers aim to match the layout of the “copie - copie” with the original layout. As the layout has changed over time, the retailer will have to carry many different formats. This information could not be confirmed by Cameroonian authorities.

Whether the copy is a handwritten “copie - copie” or a photocopy of the souche, the information should be approved by staff at the local civil status registry, where the original registration was made.<sup>17</sup>

### *Reissuance*

If the original document is lost, the person must obtain a court order in order to have the document reconstructed. Based on the reconstitution order from the court, the civil status registry will issue a new certificate. A mentioning of the court decision should always be referred to in the certificate.<sup>18</sup>

The original court decision stays with the applicant and the main- or secondary centre attaches a copy to the register. The date of registration is always the new date.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>18</sup> National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>19</sup> National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

## References

### *Oral sources*

General Manager and Director, National Civil Status Registration Office (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Mayor, deputy mayor and secretary, Main Centre Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Main centre Yaoundé 1 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Secondary centre Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

### *Written sources*

General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office (N/A): Report of audience. Received by e-mail 16 April 2019.