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2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cameroon is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. The country has a multiparty system of government, but the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. It has unfettered control of all government branches. The president retains the power to control legislation and rule by decree. On October 9, CPDM leader Paul Biya won reelection as president, a position he has held since 1982. The election was flawed by irregularities, including the failure to properly distribute all voter cards, late opening of polling stations, multiple voting, ballot-box stuffing, the absence of indelible ink, and intimidation of voters. There were instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of civilian control.

The most important human rights problems in the country were security force abuses – particularly of detainees and prisoners; denial of fair and speedy public trial; and restrictions on freedom of assembly.

Other major human rights abuses included arbitrary arrest and detention, prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention, life-threatening prison conditions, and infringement on privacy rights. The government harassed and imprisoned journalists, restricted freedoms of speech, press, and association, and impeded freedom of movement. Corruption was pervasive at all levels of government. Societal violence and discrimination against women and girls, including female genital mutilation (FGM), was a problem. Trafficking in persons, particularly children, and discrimination against pygmies, gays, and lesbians occurred. There was occasional discrimination against persons with albinism, although such incidents continued to decrease. The government restricted worker rights and the activities of independent labor organizations. Hereditary servitude, forced labor, including by children, and child labor were problems.

Although the government took some steps to punish and prosecute officials who committed abuses in the security forces and in the public service, impunity remained a problem.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

The government or its agents did not commit any politically motivated killings; however, security forces killed persons during the year. The government generally investigated and sometimes disciplined those responsible for such killings.

On July 29, soldiers from the army regiment based in Nkongsamba shot and killed Stephane Ewane, a high school student. Ewane and three friends were returning from a party when they saw a military patrol and fled, fearing arbitrary arrest, a common occurrence (see section 1.d.). One of the soldiers shot without warning and hit Ewane. An investigation continued at year's end.

Government officials confirmed that no action had been taken against security force members accused of human rights violations in 2008 in association with the February protests, according to the 2011 Amnesty International annual report. In 2008 as many as 100 persons were killed during protests against price increases and a constitutional amendment that removed presidential term limits.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances during the year.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, but there were continued reports that security forces tortured, beat, harassed, and otherwise abused citizens, prisoners, and detainees. Security forces also reportedly subjected women, children, and elderly persons to abuse. According to the *Report by the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2010*, 296 police officers and 115 soldiers and gendarmes were sanctioned or prosecuted for misconduct in 2010. Eight security force members were tried for alleged torture in 2010. Of the eight, two were convicted, two were acquitted, and four cases were pending at the end of 2010.

On January 1, in Tignere, the assistant prosecutor of Tignere, Faro, and Deo Division, Adamawa Region, intervened to stop soldiers from a Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) unit from beating a citizen. In response, the soldiers severely beat the prosecutor. No further information was available at year's end.

In January the chief of the Douala BIR dismissed a soldier who in August 2010 shot at a bus, which he reportedly assumed was being driven by bandits. One passenger was injured seriously.

On December 24, according to press reports, six BIR members indiscriminately entered homes in Bafut, Mezam Division, and beat the owners. They also looted homes and cars in the neighborhood. The incident occurred after Bafut youths, who were having drinks in a bar on December 23, refused to share their drinks with the BIR members when asked. An investigation was underway at year's end.

Security forces reportedly detained and tortured persons at specific sites, including temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities and cells located at the Directorate General for External Intelligence (DGRE).

Security forces beat journalists and gay men during the year (see sections 2.a. and 6).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Numerous international human rights organizations and some prison personnel reported that torture was widespread. In Douala's New Bell Prison and other minimum security detention centers, prison guards inflicted beatings, and prisoners reportedly were chained or at times flogged in their cells.

During a February visit, a delegation of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights criticized prison conditions, which it described as being below required standards. In June 2010 the penitentiary administration confirmed harsh prison conditions in a document presented to diplomatic missions. The document noted overcrowding, poorly maintained and unsound facilities with leaking roofs, insufficient toilets and beds, lack of water and electricity, scarcity of pharmaceuticals, lack of appropriate kitchens, absence of drainage, and lack of disinfectants.

During a 2009 visit to New Bell Prison in Douala, foreign government officials found that prison guards chained disobedient and violent prisoners in a tiny disciplinary cell, where they were reportedly beaten and denied access to food. Security forces reportedly stripped prisoners and detainees, confined them in severely overcrowded cells, denied them access to toilets or other sanitation facilities, and beat them to extract confessions or information about alleged criminals.

Guards and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported rapes among inmates. Individuals incarcerated in New Bell Prison for homosexual acts suffered discrimination by and violence from other inmates.

According to statistics released by Catholic Relief Services in its Protecting the Rights of Inmates and Detainees (PRIDE) project, as of November there were 23,916 prisoners and detainees, including 255 juveniles (180 in the Yaounde's Kondengui Prison and 75 in New Bell Prison) and 92 women (60 in Kondengui Prison and 32 in New Bell Prison).

Prisoners were kept in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons, where the number of inmates was as much as four to five times intended capacity. According to the PRIDE project, the Yaounde Kondengui Prison, originally built for approximately 1,000 inmates, held 2,928 in November. In November the country's 74 prisons, with a capacity of 16,995 inmates, housed 23,196 prisoners and detainees. Overcrowding was exacerbated by the large number of pretrial detainees.

Deficiencies in health care and sanitation, which were common in all prisons, remained a significant problem. According to an August report published by an NGO working in prisons, the penitentiary administration provided New Bell Prison with an annual healthcare budget of 4,000,000 CFA francs (\$8,000) for its more than 2,000 detainees.

Potable water was inadequate, and prisoners' families were expected to provide food for their imprisoned family members. For example, New Bell Prison contained seven water taps for approximately 2,000 prisoners, contributing to poor hygiene, illness, and death. The daily food allocation per prisoner was less than 100 CFA francs (20 cents). Corruption among prison personnel was widespread. Pretrial detainees reported that prison guards sometimes required them, under threat of abuse, to pay "cell fees," money paid to prevent further abuse. Prisoners bribed wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom.

Some prisoners were kept in prison after completing their sentences or receiving court orders of release due to inability to pay their fines.

There were two separate prisons for women and a few pretrial detention centers for women; however, women routinely were held in police and gendarmerie complexes with men, occasionally in the same cells. Mothers sometimes chose to be incarcerated with their children if the children were very young or if they had no other child care option. Conditions for male and female inmates were equally poor. Juvenile prisoners were often incarcerated with adults, occasionally in the same cells or wards. There were credible reports that adult inmates sexually abused juvenile prisoners. Pretrial detainees routinely were held in cells with convicted criminals. Some high-profile prisoners, including officials imprisoned for corruption, were separated from other prisoners and enjoyed relatively lenient treatment.

In temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities, adult men, juveniles, and women were held together. Detainees usually received no food, water, or medical care. Detainees whose families had been informed of their incarceration relied on their relatives for food and medicine. Overcrowding was common. Detention center guards accepted bribes from detainees in return for access to better conditions, including permission to stay in an office instead of a cell.

Many citizens in the North and Far North regions turned to traditional chiefs, or lamibe, for dispute resolution, and the government continued to permit lamibe to temporarily detain persons until they transferred them to the police or gendarmerie and the judicial system. Such detentions could last several weeks or months, depending on the gravity of the offense, the distance to the nearest security office, and the availability of lamibe, security officers, complainants, and transportation. Within the palaces of the traditional

chiefdoms of Rey Bouba, Gashiga, Bibemi, and Tcheboa, there were allegations of private prisons that had reputations for serious abuse. For example, those incarcerated were often tied to a post with chains attached to their wrists and ankles. During an April 2010 visit in the North and Far North regions, lamibe claimed to foreign diplomats that such detention facilities no longer existed, although incriminated subjects were often held under the veranda of a hut and could be seen by passersby.

Prisoners were permitted religious observance. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship. During a 2009 visit to the Buea Prison, diplomatic mission employees observed prisoners talking to the prosecutor and complaining about their conditions. The secretary of state for penitentiary administration and the inspector general in charge of penitentiary administration investigated credible allegations of inhumane conditions and acknowledged the existence of such conditions publicly; however, no action was taken during the year. The National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) also conducted investigations during the year and publicly denounced poor detention conditions. The NCHRF acted on behalf of prisoners or detainees to alleviate overcrowding, address the status of juvenile offenders, improve pretrial detention conditions, and other matters.

The country had no prison ombudsman.

The government permitted international humanitarian organizations access to prisoners. Both the local Red Cross and the NCHRF made infrequent, unannounced prison visits during the year. The government continued to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisons, and ICRC visits were conducted during the year in accordance with standard modalities.

The government continued its efforts to improve prison conditions. In March the penitentiary administration presented an assessment of the modernization of prisons that the government launched in 2008. According to the report, the government's initiative resulted in the total renovation of 47 prisons, the construction of 27 wells, and the purchase of 10 vehicles to transport prisoners, two pick-ups, one minibus, and two trucks. The administration also acquired more beds and mattresses.

As part of the PRIDE Project, Catholic Relief Services during the year implemented the first phase of a project to improve recordkeeping in prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, security forces continued to arrest and detain citizens arbitrarily.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police, DGRE, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Territorial Administration, and, to a lesser extent Presidential Guard, are responsible for internal security. The Ministry of Defense, which includes the gendarmerie, the army, the army's military security unit, and the DGRE, reports to an office of the presidency, resulting in strong presidential control of security forces. The national police and the gendarmerie have primary responsibility for law enforcement, although the gendarmerie alone has responsibility in rural areas. The national police, which includes the public security force, judicial police, territorial security forces, and frontier police, report to the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN), which is under the direct authority of the presidency.

Police were ineffective, poorly trained, and corrupt (see section 4). Impunity was a problem. Citizens often resorted to vigilante violence rather than calling police (see section 6).

The DGSN investigates reports of abuse and forwards cases that merit prosecution and trial to the courts. Lesser sanctions are handled internally. During the year DGSN authorities sanctioned at least 49 security officers, including 32 soldiers and gendarmes

and 17 police officers. Offenses included harassment of citizens, corruption, extortion, disregard of orders, forgery, and dangerous use of firearms.

The national gendarmerie and the army also have special offices to investigate abuse. The secretary of state for defense and the minister-delegate at the presidency in charge of defense subsequently sanction abusers. However, the minister-delegate of defense refers cases involving aggravated theft, criminal complicity, murder, and other major offenses to the military courts for trial.

The BIR, an elite unit earning twice the pay of the regular army, reportedly dismissed from its ranks officers implicated in violence against civilians. Those dismissed were demoted to the regular army with a 50 percent cut in pay.

According to the *Report by the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2010*, 296 police officers were sanctioned or tried for misconduct in 2010. Infractions included extortion, aiding a suspect to escape, and abusive use of a service weapon causing bodily harm. Penalties ranged from warnings to the three-month suspension of 96 officers without pay.

The report also noted that military tribunals in 2010 tried 57 cases involving a total of 115 soldiers and gendarmes for offenses ranging from corruption to manslaughter; 37 soldiers and gendarmes were convicted for offenses including manslaughter, torture, violation of instructions, false arrest, oppression, and attempted manslaughter. A captain and a lieutenant were among those disciplined. Preliminary administrative punishments – actions taken soon after the perpetration of the offense – ranged from written warnings to suspensions of up to six months and imprisonment for 10 to 12 days. More serious cases were transferred to the judiciary for prosecution and sentencing, which could take months or even years. The report also noted that an additional 21 proceedings were ongoing.

During the year foreign military personnel provided training to security forces on civil-military relations and the role of security forces during elections, including rules of engagement and escalation of force.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The law requires that police obtain a warrant for an arrest, except when a person is caught in the act of committing a crime; however, police often did not respect this requirement. The law provides that detainees be brought promptly before a magistrate, although this frequently did not occur. Police may legally detain a person in connection with a common crime for up to 48 hours, renewable once. This period may, with the written approval of the state counsel, be exceptionally extended twice before bringing charges. Nevertheless, police occasionally exceeded these detention periods. The law permits detention without charge – for renewable periods of 15 days – by administrative authorities such as governors and civilian government officials serving in territorial command. The law also provides for access to legal counsel and family members, although detainees were frequently denied access to both. The law permits bail, allows citizens the right to appeal, and provides the right to sue for unlawful arrest, but these rights were seldom respected.

Arbitrary Arrest: Police and gendarmes frequently arrested persons on Friday afternoons, although the number of such cases decreased during the year, according to NGOs and legal practitioners. Although the law provides for judicial review of an arrest within 24 hours, the courts did not convene on weekends, so individuals arrested on a Friday typically remained in detention until Monday at the earliest. According to some reports, police and gendarmes occasionally made such "Friday arrests" on spurious charges after accepting bribes from persons who had private grievances. Security forces and government authorities reportedly continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, often holding them for prolonged periods without charge or trial and, at times, incommunicado.

Police arbitrarily arrested persons without warrant during neighborhood sweeps for criminals and stolen goods. Citizens and foreigners, including undocumented immigrants were required to carry identification with them at all times, and police frequently

arrested persons without identification during sweeps. In July and September, such sweeps took place in the Yaounde neighborhoods of Mimboman, Etoudi, and Tongolo. While security forces subsequently released some detainees, others were transferred to the Prosecutor's Office and remained in detention at year's end on various charges, including theft, aggression, and evasion.

The DGSN claimed a policy of zero tolerance for police harassment, but police and gendarmes subjected undocumented immigrants – primarily from Nigeria and Chad – to harassment and imprisonment. During raids members of the security forces extorted money from those who did not have regular residence permits or valid receipts for store merchandise. Some members of the country's large community of Nigerian immigrants complained of discrimination and abuse by government officials.

The government arrested Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) activists for participating in SCNC activities (see section 3).

Security forces also arrested journalists and a human rights activist during the year (see sections 2.a. and 5).

Unlike in the previous year, police did not arbitrarily arrest women on the street suspected of prostitution.

In the North and Far North regions, the government continued to permit traditional chiefs, or lamibe, to detain temporarily persons outside the government penitentiary system, in effect creating private prisons, until they transferred them to the police or gendarmerie and the judicial system (see section 1.c.).

Pretrial Detention: The law provides for a maximum of 18 months' detention before trial, but many detainees waited up to 10 years before trial. According to the PRIDE project, more than 60 percent of inmates were pretrial detainees. The law precludes holding juvenile detainees more than three months after the conclusion of an investigation, but juveniles were sometimes held for more than a year without trial. Judicial inefficiency, a shortage of lawyers, corruption, and lost files due to an inadequate tracking system contributed to lengthy pretrial detention.

On his November 3 inauguration, President Biya granted amnesty to hundreds of prisoners sentenced to one year of imprisonment or less. Death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment, sentences of life imprisonment were commuted to 20 years' imprisonment, and 10-year sentences were reduced by eight years.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the judiciary remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to political influence. The court system is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. The constitution names the president as "first magistrate," thus "chief" of the judiciary and the theoretical arbiter of any sanctions against the judiciary, although the president has not played this role publicly. The constitution specifies that the president is the guarantor of the legal system's independence. He also appoints all judges with the advice of the Higher Judicial Council.

Despite such executive influence, the judiciary occasionally demonstrated independence. In September, for example, the Supreme Court confirmed its previous ruling that the minister of culture's decision to dissolve the Cameroon Music Corporation (CMC) was a violation of the law. The court ordered the ministry to reinstate the CMC to its previous status.

The legal system includes both national and customary law, and many criminal and civil cases can be tried using either one. Criminal cases generally were tried in statutory courts.

Customary courts served as a primary means for settling domestic cases, such as succession, inheritance, and child custody. Customary courts may exercise jurisdiction in a civil case only with the consent of both parties. Either party has the right to have a

case heard by a statutory court and to appeal an adverse decision by a customary court to the statutory courts.

Customary court convictions involving witchcraft are automatically transferred to the statutory courts, which act as the court of first instance. The law provides for sentences of between two and ten years' imprisonment and fines of between 5,000 CFA francs (\$10) and 100,000 CFA francs (\$200) to "whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic, or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquility, or to harm another in his person, property, or substance, whether by the taking of a reward or otherwise." In adjudicating such cases, courts relied on the testimony of witnesses and sorcerers, as well as confessions from the accused. Trials for alleged witchcraft occurred infrequently.

Customary law is deemed valid only when it is not "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience." However, many citizens in rural areas remained unaware of their rights under civil law and were taught they must abide by customary laws. Customary law ostensibly provides for equal rights and status, although men may limit women's rights regarding inheritance and employment. Some traditional legal systems regard wives as the legal property of their husbands. Customary law practiced in rural areas is based upon the traditions of the ethnic group predominant in the region and adjudicated by traditional authorities of that group.

Military tribunals may exercise jurisdiction over civilians when the president declares martial law and in cases involving civil unrest or organized armed violence. Military tribunals also have jurisdiction over gang crimes, banditry, and highway robbery if such crimes are committed with firearms.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair public hearing in which the defendant is presumed innocent. There is no jury system. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and the government generally respected this right. Defendants generally were allowed to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants had access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases and could appeal a conviction. Because appointed attorneys received little compensation, the quality of legal representation for indigent clients often was poor. The bar association and some voluntary organizations such as the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists offered free assistance in some cases. A program funded by the European Union to improve the human rights of detainees and their conditions of detention facilitated the provision of free legal assistance to 3,000 detainees.

Despite a 2009 legal aid bill to facilitate judicial access for all citizens, indigent defendants were not provided attorneys at public expense, primarily due to resistance from attorneys who claimed they were inadequately compensated for such work.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political detainees, but all were charged with other crimes.

During the year the Yaounde High Court repeatedly postponed the trial of two detainees widely considered by human rights NGOs to be political prisoners. Titus Edzoa, former minister of health and long-time aide to President Biya, and Michel Thierry Atangana, Edzoa's 1997 campaign manager, were arrested in 1997, three months after Edzoa resigned from the government and launched his candidacy for president. They were convicted on charges of embezzling public funds and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Both Edzoa and Atangana complained of irregularities in their trials and restricted access to counsel. At the end of 2009, the prosecutor filed new charges against both men for embezzlement, and hearings started a few weeks later. In February the government denied a visa to Atangana's French lawyer, which resulted in one of the trial postponements during the year.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens have the right to seek redress for alleged wrongs through administrative procedures or through the legal system, although both options involved lengthy delays. There were problems enforcing civil court orders due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

Although the constitution and law prohibit such actions, these rights were subject to restriction for the "higher interests of the state," and there were credible reports that police and gendarmes harassed citizens, conducted searches without warrants, and opened or seized mail with impunity. The government continued to keep some opposition activists and dissidents under surveillance. Police sometimes detained family members and neighbors of criminal suspects.

The law permits a police officer to enter a private home during daylight hours without a warrant if he is pursuing a criminal suspect. A police officer may enter a private home at any time in pursuit of a person observed committing a crime.

In late September and early October, police put the houses of SCNC officials and activists under surveillance to monitor preparations for protests on October 1, Unification Day. The SCNC is an Anglophone group the government considers illegal because it advocates secession. The group does not have legal status as it has never filed an application to become either a political party or other legally recognized organization.

An administrative authority, including a governor or prefect, may authorize police to conduct neighborhood sweeps without warrants. Such sweeps at times involved forced entry into homes in search of suspected criminals or stolen or illegal goods. Security forces sometimes sealed off a neighborhood, systematically searched homes, arrested persons, sometimes arbitrarily, and seized suspicious or illegal articles (see section 1.d.). Citizens without identification cards were detained until their identity could be established and were then released. There were several complaints that police arbitrarily confiscated electronic devices including cell phones.

In the Far North Region, human rights organizations reported that the traditional ruler of Meskine, Diamare Division, arbitrarily evicted some of his subjects from their land during the year.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Status of Freedom of Speech and Press

Although the law provides for freedom of speech and press, it also criminalizes media offenses, and the government restricted freedoms of speech and press during the year. Government officials threatened, harassed, arrested, and denied equal treatment to individuals or organizations that criticized government policies or expressed views at odds with government policy.

Freedom of Speech: Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately sometimes faced reprisals. The government attempted to impede criticism by monitoring political meetings.

On January 26, the vice chancellor of the University of Buea in the Southwest Region suspended Stanley Eyongetta Njieassam, a student leader, for criticizing the vice chancellor and challenging government policies. The suspension was lifted on February 26.

On April 29, author Bertrand Teyou, who was arrested twice in 2010 for publicly criticizing the president, was released from prison after paying a fine. In March 2010 gendarmes arrested and detained Teyou for talking about the president in "insidious terms" during the dedication ceremony of his book *The Antecode Biya*. Teyou subsequently was charged with conspiracy, incitement to rebellion, attempt to disturb public order, and perilous activity. Teyou, who was detained for eight days, was again arrested and detained in November 2010 in connection with the release of another book. The Douala Court of First Instance found Teyou guilty of defamation, insult, and illegal

protest, and sentenced him to pay a fine of two million CFA francs (\$4,000). Teyou, who could not pay the fine, remained in jail until his April release.

Freedom of Press: Approximately 400 privately owned newspapers published during the year, but only an estimated 25 had sufficient funds to publish regularly. The government enforced media regulations irregularly, often implementing arduous requirements selectively for regime critics. The government continued to disburse official funds to support private press outlets, although it disbursed funds selectively to outlets that were less critical of the government and with instructions to provide reporting favorable to the regime. Government officials used expansive libel laws to arraign journalists who criticized them and to suspend newspapers. Privately owned media were not accredited with the president's or prime minister's offices and were not invited to accompany the president on official trips.

After its September 26 to October 2 visit to the country, Reporters Without Borders noted that the law confuses media offenses with common crimes, gives too much power to political and administrative officials, and does not provide enough protection for access to information and the confidentiality of sources.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces detained, arrested, and abused journalists during the year. In a statement published on March 31, the National Syndicate of Cameroon Journalists (SNJC) denounced the sustained harassment and moral pressure of which journalists had been the victims since the beginning of the year. SNJC called on the government to respect the public liberties of citizens provided for in the constitution. On March 9, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) wrote a letter to President Biya expressing concern about ongoing abuses against press freedom. The CPJ called on the president to hold members of his administration accountable for using security forces and criminal laws to settle scores with the media and urged the president to initiate reforms that would refer matters of defamation to civil courts.

On January 20, in Ebolowa, Mvila Division, South Region, Police Commissioner Evina assaulted and beat Rodrique Tongue, a journalist working for *Le Messager* newspaper. Reasons for the assault were unclear. No action was undertaken against the commissioner.

On September 16, police from the Special Group for Operations seriously beat and injured Ulrich Fabien Ateba Biwole, a journalist of *Le Jour* newspaper, in the Yaounde neighborhood of Anguissa. Ateba Biwole was inquiring about a group of citizens escorted in the street by armed men in civilian attire. The armed men, who Ateba Biwole later learned were police officers, attacked him when they learned he was a journalist.

Journalists also were arrested and detained.

On March 30, security officers arrested and detained incommunicado Lamissia Aldorarc, the Adamoua Region correspondent of the Yaounde-based daily *Le Jour*. Aldorarc, who was investigating an alleged armed rebellion attempt, was held for several days in the DGRE Adamaoua Region office.

On September 5, police arrested Francois Fogno Fotso, editor of the private bimonthly *Generation Libre*, which in October 2010 had published an article detailing alleged corruption by a tax official. From September 5 to 9, Fotso was interrogated without the presence of a lawyer and pressured to identify the sources for the article. On September 9, Fotso was taken to court but not charged, and subsequently returned to the custody of military police in Yaounde. Fotso had been summoned four times by military police since the October 2010 article, but refused to comply with their demands. In a public statement, the Association of Patriot Journalists of Cameroon criticized what it called an "arbitrary arrest of a journalist who dared do his job."

Security forces also arrested and detained Cameroonian journalists representing foreign media outlets.

For example, on February 23, gendarmes of the Mboppi gendarmerie brigade in Douala arrested and detained incommunicado for 24 hours Reinnier Kaze, the correspondent of Agence France Press. Kaze was reporting on an anti-Biya march in Douala. The

gendarmes also arrested several other journalists on the same occasion, including the reporting team of Vox Africa, a pan-African television service.

Radio remained the most important medium and reached most citizens. There were approximately 375 privately owned radio stations operating in the country, three-fourths of them in Yaounde and Douala. The government required nonprofit rural radio stations to submit applications to broadcast, but they were exempt from licensing fees. Commercial radio and television broadcasters must submit a licensing application and pay an application fee with the application. After a license is issued, stations must pay an annual licensing fee, which was expensive for some stations. Although the government did not issue new broadcast licenses during the year, companies operated without them under a government policy of administrative tolerance.

Several rural community radio stations functioned with funding from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and foreign countries. The government prohibited these stations from discussing politics.

Television had lower levels of penetration than print media but was more influential in shaping public opinion in urban areas. There was one private cable television network. The 19 independent television stations skirted criticism of the government, although their news broadcasts sometimes focused on poverty, unemployment, and poor education, pointing to the role of government neglect and corruption. The state-owned Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) broadcast on both television and radio. The government levied taxes to finance CRTV programming, which gave the station a distinct advantage over independent broadcasters.

The government was the largest advertiser in the country. Some private media enterprises reported government officials used the promise of advertising (or the threat of withholding it) to influence reporting of the government's activities.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Journalists and media outlets practiced self-censorship.

Libel Laws: Press freedom is constrained by strict libel laws that suppress criticism. These laws authorize the government, at its discretion and the request of the plaintiff, to criminalize a civil libel suit or to initiate a criminal libel suit in cases of alleged libel against the president and other high government officials. Such crimes are punishable by prison terms and heavy fines. The libel law places the burden of proof on the defendant. Government officials abused this law to keep local journalists from reporting on corruption and abusive behavior.

For example, on March 24, the Douala-Ndokoti first instance court sentenced Jean Marie Tchatchouang, publisher of *Parole* newspaper, to a suspended six-month prison term and damages of one million CFA francs (\$2,000) to be paid to Ernest Ngalle, the general manager of Socatur, a Douala-based bus company, for alleged libel against the general manager. From September to December 2010, Tchatchouang published a number of articles that accused Ngalle of embezzlement. The court also suspended the newspaper for an undetermined period of time.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

On March 8, MTN-Cameroon informed its Internet service customers that the government required the suspension of Twitter SMS on its network. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications officially denied having initiated the measure, although some government officials alleged that intelligence services had made the suspension decision. The suspension was brief.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Although there were no legal restrictions on academic freedom, state security informants reportedly operated on university campuses. Professors said that participation in opposition political parties or public criticism of the government could affect their professional opportunities.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Although the law provides for freedom of assembly, the government restricted this right in practice. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, and processions to notify officials in advance but does not require prior government approval of public assemblies and does not authorize the government to suppress public assemblies that it has not approved in advance. However, officials routinely asserted that the law implicitly authorizes the government to grant or deny permission for public assembly. Consequently, the government often refused to grant permits for assemblies organized by persons or groups critical of the government and used force to suppress public assemblies for which it had not issued permits. The government also prevented civil society organizations and political parties from holding press conferences, where criticism of the presidential election, corruption, and abuse of power were expected.

In February the prefect of Wouri Division banned Martyrs' Week marches and rallies in Douala to commemorate the February 2008 riots. The prefect alleged that the planned events, organized by political and civil society organizations, were likely to disturb public order.

On September 10, Garoua gendarmes disrupted a meeting of the Association Citoyenne de Défense des Intérêts Collectifs. The organization sought to brief the public on its proposed agricultural policy for presidential candidates.

Authorities refused to grant the SCNC permission to hold rallies and meetings, and security forces arrested and detained SCNC activists (see section 3).

Security forces forcibly disrupted demonstrations, meetings, and rallies of citizens, trade unions, and political activists throughout the year. The use of excessive force by security forces resulted in numerous injuries to demonstrators.

For example, on February 23, the Douala anti-riot police used water-cannon trucks and tear gas to disrupt a demonstration organized by opposition parties and human rights organizations and activists to commemorate the victims of the February 2008 riots.

On May 31, police detained 37 members of the Cameroon Coalition for Food Self-Sufficiency and prevented more than 200 members from demonstrating for increased government support for farms and a curb on imports.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association, but the government limited this right in practice. The law prohibits organizations that advocate any type of secession, resulting in the disruption of SCNC meetings on the grounds that the purpose of the organization rendered any meetings illegal (see section 3).

The conditions for government recognition of political parties, NGOs, or associations were arduous, interminable, and unevenly enforced. The process forced most associations to operate in uncertainty, in which their activities were tolerated but not formally approved.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's [2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, security forces impeded domestic and international travel during the year.

The government cooperated with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers.

In-country Movement: Security forces at roadblocks and checkpoints in cities and on most highways extorted bribes and harassed travelers. Police frequently stopped travelers to check identification documents, vehicle registrations, and tax receipts as security and immigration control measures. There were credible reports that police arrested and beat individuals who failed to carry their identification cards as required by law (see section 1.d.).

During the two-week presidential campaign, the government closed the country's airspace to all but the president on the day he traveled to Maroua to launch his campaign and on the day he returned. Opposition candidates charged that the closure was intended to limit their campaign activities.

Foreign Travel: The government also closed the borders and canceled all flights from the evening before the election until after the polls had closed.

Exile: The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not use it; however, some human rights monitors and political opponents remained in self-imposed exile because they felt threatened by the government.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

In 2005 between 10,000 and 15,000 refugees and residents in and around the Adamawa Region villages of Djohong and Ngaoui were displaced following attacks and looting by unidentified armed groups from the Central African Republic (CAR). Officials in the Adamawa Region reported that most of the refugees have been assimilated and that only a few hundred IDPs remained. IDP children attended local schools, and the government provided refugees with medical care. During the year the government worked with UNHCR to protect and assist remaining IDPs, who the UNHCR reported were too few in number to incorporate in their statistics.

Protection of Refugees

The country's laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system of providing protection to refugees.

The country continued to host approximately 100,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were from CAR. Refugees were given the same rights to basic services as the host population. Refugee access to legal remedies – as with the general population – remained limited.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees and provided it to more than 124,000 persons, including 110,000 from CAR, 7,500 from Chad, and 4,000 from Nigeria.

Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The law provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, President Biya and CPDM members controlled key aspects of the political process, including the judiciary.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On October 9, CPDM leader Paul Biya, who garnered more than 77 percent of the vote, won reelection as president, a position he has held since 1982. The election was peaceful but marred by irregularities, including polls that opened late, a voter list that contained numerous duplicate entries, insufficient time to distribute

registration cards, inadequate training of polling officials, and the absence of indelible ink. These shortcomings effectively disfranchised an unknown number of voters and created opportunities for multiple voting and ballot box stuffing. Domestic and international observers concluded that the irregularities did not significantly affect the election outcome. Citizens residing overseas registered and voted.

The opposition's failure to unite behind a single candidate divided the opposition vote 22 ways and contributed to voter apathy and cynicism. According to the Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA), an organization with special consultative status at the UN, less than 30 percent of the population voted. The government claimed that 66 percent of the population cast ballots.

The election was administered by Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), which was established in 2006 and whose members were appointed by the president. ELECAM's original 12 Electoral Council members were formerly active CPDM members, resulting in public skepticism of ELECAM's credibility and objectivity. In May the government amended electoral legislation to increase the number of council members from 12 to 18. In July the president appointed six new members, who included prominent figures from civil society. On October 7, one of the new appointees was dismissed for allegedly receiving money from the CPDM to manage part of its public relations campaign.

After the election the Supreme Court received 20 complaints from political parties, 10 of which demanded either the partial or complete annulment of results as a result of irregularities. On October 19, the court dismissed all the cases for lack of evidence or late submission.

According to CHRAPA, coverage of campaign activities by the state media was biased, providing extensive coverage of the campaign activities of the incumbent but not of opposition parties.

The government greatly increased the number of municipalities run by presidentially appointed delegates, who have authority over elected mayors, effectively disenfranchising the residents of those localities. Delegate-run cities included most of the provincial capitals and some division capitals in pro-opposition regions; however, this practice was almost nonexistent in the southern regions, which tended to support the ruling CPDM party. In municipalities with elected mayors, local autonomy was limited, since elected local governments relied on the central government for most of their revenue and administrative personnel.

Political Parties: There were more than 253 registered political parties. Fewer than 10, however, had significant levels of support, and only five had seats in the National Assembly. The CPDM held an absolute majority in the National Assembly. Opposition parties included the Social Democratic Front (SDF), based in the Anglophone regions and some major cities, the National Union for Democracy and Progress, the Cameroon Democratic Union, and the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon.

Membership in the ruling political party conferred significant advantages, including in the allocation of key jobs in parastatals and the civil service. The president appoints all ministers, including the prime minister, and also directly appoints the governors of each of the 10 regions who also serve as CPDM officials. The president has the power to appoint important lower level members of the 58 regional administrative structures as well. Onerous requirements for registration of parties and candidates restricted political activity.

In 2008 the National Assembly passed a constitutional amendment that removed presidential term limits and added provisions for presidential immunity. Although considerable national discussion of the proposal ensued, the National Assembly ultimately passed the revisions in a manner that allowed no debate and underscored the CPDM's unfettered control of all government branches. Neither the electorate nor its elected representatives had an opportunity to affect the outcome of the constitutional exercise.

Residents of the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions tended to support the opposition SDF party and consequently claimed to suffer disproportionately from human

rights abuses committed by the government and its security forces. The Anglophone community complained of being underrepresented in the public sector. Although citizens in certain Francophone areas – the East, Far North, North, and Adamawa regions – voiced similar complaints about under-representation and government neglect, Anglophones claimed they had not received a fair share of public sector goods and services within their two regions. Many residents of the Anglophone regions sought greater freedom, equality of opportunity, and better government by regaining regional autonomy rather than through national political reform, and have formed several quasi-political organizations in pursuit of their goals.

Authorities sometimes refused to grant opposition parties permission to hold rallies and meetings and arrested SCNC activists for participating in SCNC activities. The government considered the SCNC illegal because it advocates secession and has never registered as a political party or organization.

On February 9, gendarmes from Bali subdivision, Mezam Division, Northwest Region, arrested and detained for five days Chief Ayamba Ette Otun and two other SCNC members for circulating tracts calling for the independence of Southern Cameroon and warning the government against the mistreatment of Southern Cameroonians.

On October 1, the anniversary of the unification of Anglophone and Francophone regions of Cameroon, security forces disrupted SCNC meetings and protest rallies in Limbe, Tiko, Buea, Bamenda, and Kumbo. Security forces also sealed off the residences of several SCNC leaders and arrested and detained SCNC activists in Limbe, Buea, and Tiko.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women held 23 of 180 seats in the National Assembly, six of 61 cabinet posts, and a few of the higher offices within the major political parties, including the CPDM.

Pygmies were not represented in the National Assembly or in the higher offices of government.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and corruption was pervasive at all levels of government. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and the World Bank's most recent Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption was a severe problem. The public perception was that judicial and administrative officials were open to bribes in almost all situations. In June the National Institute of Statistics published a study, indicating that 87 percent of Cameroonian households considered corruption a major issue in the country.

During the year the government sanctioned hundreds of government employees for corruption, embezzlement, and mismanagement.

According to the *Report by the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2010*, authorities investigated 20 cases of corruption and 235 cases of embezzlement of public funds in 2010; the courts heard 16 cases of corruption and 231 cases of embezzlement of public funds.

The National Anticorruption Commission (CONAC) is the country's principal independent anticorruption agency; however, it was subservient to the president and lacked autonomy. Between January 2008 and December 2010, CONAC received 723 petitions regarding corruption, of which 132 involved embezzlement and 41 involved tender violations. CONAC recommended prosecution for all cases received.

In 2010 the National Financial Investigations Unit (ANIF), a separate financial intelligence unit that tracks money laundering, referred to judicial authorities 35 of the 124 reports received of suspicious transactions. Between its creation in May 2005 and 2010, the ANIF referred to judicial authorities 139 of 450 reports received of suspicious transactions. The ANIF has been informed of no trials or hearings addressing any of the 139 reports it has referred.

Police were corrupt. Individuals reportedly paid bribes to police and the judiciary to secure their freedom. Police demanded bribes at checkpoints, and influential citizens reportedly paid police to make arrests or abuse individuals involved in personal disputes.

Police were sanctioned for corruption during the year. Some officers convicted of corruption were relieved of their duties but retained their jobs.

For example, in March the DGSN relieved of their functions Victor Hugo Mbarga Mbarga, the inspector general of the DGSN, and Ayafor Bernard Tangye, the DGSN west regional delegate, for aggravated corruption.

On October 13, the secretary of state in charge of the gendarmerie ordered the arrest of 13 gendarmes caught extorting money from truck drivers on the Ebolowa-Ambam-Kye-Ossi highway. The 13 remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end.

Judicial corruption was a problem. According to several press reports, judicial authorities accepted illegal payments from detainees' families in exchange for a reduced sentence or the outright release of their relatives. Judges were susceptible to executive influence and often stopped or delayed judicial proceedings in response to governmental pressure. Many powerful political or business interests had virtual immunity from prosecution, and politically sensitive cases sometimes were settled through bribes.

There were no developments in the 2010 transfer to the judiciary of 47 corruption cases involving agriculture officials.

In October 2010 the Wouri High Court opened hearings in the trial of Paul Ngamo Hamani, former general manager of Cameroon Airlines, who was arrested in March 2009 for embezzlement. The trial continued at year's end.

On March 21 and April 25, the Douala High Court held hearings in the 2009 arrest and detention of Jean-Baptiste Nguini Effa, former general manager of the government-owned National Petroleum Distribution Company, and six of his close collaborators, all of whom were charged with embezzlement. The trial continued at year's end.

The constitution and law require senior government officials, including members of the cabinet, to declare their assets; however, the president had not issued the requisite decree to implement the law by year's end.

There are no laws providing citizens with access to government information, and such access was difficult. Most government documents, such as statistics, letters exchanged between various administrations, draft legislation, and investigation reports, were not available to the public or the media.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Although a number of domestic and international human rights groups investigated and published findings on human rights cases, government officials repeatedly impeded the effectiveness of many local human rights NGOs during the year by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening and using violence against NGO personnel.

Despite these restrictions, numerous independent domestic human rights NGOs operated, including the National League for Human Rights, the Organization for Human Rights and Freedoms, the Association of Women against Violence, the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, and the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists.

The government collaborated with domestic NGOs to address child labor, women's rights, and trafficking in persons.

The government arrested human rights activists during the year.

For example, on February 11, in Douala, gendarmes of the Littoral gendarmerie legion in the Bonanjo neighborhood arrested and detained Mboua Massock, a political and human rights activist who was distributing tracts calling for popular resistance against the Biya

government. Massock, who was arrested in 2009 and 2010 for similar activities, was interrogated and released 10 hours later.

Since February 2010 authorities have harassed and conducted surveillance on Maximilienne Ngo Mbe, secretary general of Solidarity for the Promotion of Human Rights and Peoples and executive director of the Network of Human Rights Defenders of Central Africa. In February 2010 Ngo Mbe presented a report on the human rights situation in the country at the fifth platform for human rights defenders in Dublin, Ireland. She subsequently received a threat letter for "tarnishing the image of the president of the republic" and was the victim of repeated thefts. During the year Ngo Mbe was followed by a car with no registration plates, her telephone was tapped, and her computer, mobile phone, and wallet were stolen.

Although the NCHRF remained hampered by a shortage of funds, during the year it conducted a number of investigations into human rights abuses, visited prisons, sought to obtain medical attention for jailed suspects, and organized several human rights seminars for judicial officials, security personnel, and other government officials. Although the commission rarely criticized the government's human rights abuses publicly, its staff intervened with government officials in specific cases of human rights abuses by security forces. During the year the commission hosted a seminar on lessons learned during the presidential election.

During the year the NCHRF continued its efforts to stop "Friday arrests" (the practice of detaining individuals on Friday to prolong the time before court appearance). On January 26, the NCHRF published a report in which it characterized administrative detentions as a "lethal weapon" in the hands of some administrative authorities.

In June, in Yaounde, the NCHRF participated with other sub-regional national human rights institutions in a workshop organized by the UN Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

UN and Other International Bodies: Although it impeded the efforts of local NGOs, the government cooperated with international governmental organizations and permitted visits by UN representatives and other organizations, including the ICRC.

In February the government facilitated the visit of a delegation from the African Union's Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was investigating conditions of detention and other issues.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The National Assembly's Constitutional Laws, Human Rights and Freedoms, Justice, Legislation, Regulations, and Administration Committee reviews human rights legislation submitted by the government and was instrumental in the National Assembly's November 29 passage of a law criminalizing the trafficking of adults.

On December 6, the government released the *Report by the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2010*, which focused primarily on government actions to address human rights issues, such as judicial and disciplinary action taken against officials accused of corruption or other inappropriate conduct. The report documented hundreds of investigations, disciplinary actions, and prosecutions in 2010 (see sections 1.c., 1.d., and 4).

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on race, language, or social status, but does prohibit discrimination based on gender and mandates that "everyone has equal rights and obligations." The government did not enforce these provisions effectively, and violence and discrimination against women, trafficked persons, ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and suspected witches were problems. The law prohibits homosexual acts.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Although the law criminalizes rape and provides penalties of between five and ten years' imprisonment for convicted rapists, police and the courts rarely investigated or prosecuted rape cases. The law does not address spousal rape. A study conducted in 2009 reported the rapes of hundreds of thousands of girls and women between 1970 and 2008 (see section 6, Children). Due to social taboos associated with sexual violence, the great majority of rapes went unreported. For example, the media reported on only four rape cases during the year – one in Buea, Southwest Region and three in Yaounde. Although the investigation did not result in an arrest in the Buea case, police arrested the three suspected Yaounde perpetrators, who were charged with rape and remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end.

The German Agency for International Cooperation, in collaboration with local NGOs, continued its campaign to raise awareness of rape and educate citizens on penal provisions against rape. Campaign activities included the distribution of leaflets and T-shirts bearing messages, conferences in schools and women's associations, and radio broadcasts.

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, although assault is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment and fines. In 2008 a study from La Maison des Droits de l'Homme, a Douala-based NGO, reported that approximately 39 percent of women suffered from physical violence. Women's rights advocates asserted that penalties for domestic violence were insufficient. Spousal abuse is not a legal ground for divorce.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Women over 18 were subjected to FGM in isolated areas of Far North, East, and Southwest regions; however, most FGM victims were children (see section 6, Children).

Sexual Harassment: The law does not prohibit sexual harassment. The government did not conduct any public education campaigns on the subject, and there were no statistics available on its occurrence, although it was thought to be widespread.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of children, but societal pressures continued to reinforce taboos on discussing contraception and all other sex-related issues, particularly in northern rural areas. Prenatal care, skilled attendance during childbirth, and postpartum care were not available to many women, particularly to those living in rural areas. According to 2008 statistics, the maternal mortality rate was estimated at 1,000 per 100,000 births. In cooperation with NGOs, the government conducted programs to educate couples, especially men, on responsible spacing between childbirths. The Ministry of Public Health produced radio and televised information programs on responsible parenthood and encouraged couples to use contraception to space the timing of their children. Couples were also encouraged to get HIV/AIDS testing prior to conception, and efforts continued to increase HIV/AIDS testing for pregnant women at health clinics. Women were equally diagnosed and treated for sexually transmitted infections, and all government and civil society campaigns against the disease targeted both men and women.

Discrimination: Despite constitutional provisions recognizing women's rights, women did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men, and some provisions of civil law were prejudicial to women. For example, the law allows a husband to deny his wife's right to work, and a husband may also end his wife's right to engage in commercial activity by notifying the clerk of the commerce tribunal. Customary law imposes further strictures on women since in many regions a woman was regarded as the property of her husband. Because of the importance of custom and tradition, civil laws protecting women often were not respected. For example, in some ethnic groups women were precluded from inheriting from their husbands. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family worked with other government agencies to promote the legal rights of women.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from the parents, and it is the parents' responsibility to register births. Parents must obtain a birth declaration from the hospital or health facility in which the child was born and complete the application. The mayor's office subsequently issues the birth certificate once the file is completed and approved.

Because many children were not born in formal health facilities, and many parents were unable to reach local government offices, many births were unregistered. Statistics on unregistered births were unavailable. In recent years the government created special civil status centers in remote areas to enable rural residents to register their children. Citizens unable to avail themselves of these resources often turned to a thriving industry for fabricated birth certificates, which were required to register children for school or obtain a national identification card. The government continued its program begun in 2005 to issue birth certificates to Baka (Pygmies), most of whom did not have birth certificates (see section 6, Indigenous People). The program also assisted Baka in registering for school.

Education: Schooling is mandatory through the age of 14, but parents had to pay uniform and book fees for primary school students and tuition and other fees for secondary school students, rendering education unaffordable for many children. The government continued its three-year program to improve school access by building new classrooms, recruiting new teachers, and providing water fountains.

According to *Jeune Afrique's* September report on Investing in Cameroon, 47.7 percent of girls and 56.7 percent of boys attended primary school. The low school enrollment rate was attributed to cost, with girls' participation further reduced by early marriage, sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancy, prejudice, and domestic responsibilities.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was a major problem, although no statistics were available. Newspaper reports often cited children as victims of kidnapping, mutilation, and even infanticide. There were credible stories of mothers (usually young, unemployed, and unmarried) abandoning their newborns in streets, garbage cans, and pit toilets.

On February 2, the minister of social affairs in partnership with UNICEF launched a nationwide campaign to sensitize the public on child abuse, including sexual abuse, child labor, and child trafficking.

A 2009 study conducted by the German development organization GTZ reported that an estimated 432,000 women and girls have been raped in the past 20 years: 20 percent of rapes were perpetrated by family members, and the average age of victims was 15 years. According to Flavien Ndonko, the head of GTZ's HIV/AIDS program, rape has steadily increased, and only about one in 20 rapists was convicted.

Child Marriage: While the minimum legal age for a woman to marry is 15, many families tried to marry their female children before they turned 12 years old. Early marriage was prevalent in the northern regions of Adamaoua, North, and particularly the remote Far North, where many girls as young as nine faced severe health risks from pregnancies. There were no statistics on the prevalence of child marriage, but the courts heard one forced marriage case in 2010.

Harmful Traditional Practices: The law does not prohibit FGM, which was practiced in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest regions. Statistics on its prevalence were unavailable. Internal migration contributed to the spread of FGM to different areas. The majority of FGM procedures were clitorectomies. The severest form of FGM, infibulation, was performed in the Kajifu area of the Southwest Region. FGM usually was practiced on infants and preadolescent girls. Public health centers in areas where FGM was frequently practiced counseled women about the harmful consequences of FGM. According to the Association to Fight Violence against Women, FGM practitioners frequently conducted secret, rather than open, ceremonies following the subsection of a girl to FGM.

In February the government disclosed an action plan to prevent FGM and to draft legislation to end the practice. Until legislation has passed, the plan provides for government collaboration with civil society organizations to care for victims and prevent new cases. In February, in the Briqueterie neighborhood of Yaounde, the minister of women's empowerment and the family held meetings with Muslim civil society organizations to assess the FGM zero-tolerance program in which they had been involved in previous years. Similar assessment meetings were held in Kousseri, Logone and Chari Division, Far North Region, where the Ministry of Social Affairs cooperated with two NGOs to eliminate FGM.

Breast ironing, a procedure to flatten a young girl's growing breasts with hot stones, was perpetrated on many girls, according to press reports. The procedure was considered a way to delay a girl's physical development, thus limiting the risk of sexual assault and teenage pregnancy. Girls as young as nine were subjected to the practice, which resulted in burns, deformities, and psychological problems.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The penalties for the sexual exploitation of children include imprisonment from 15 to 20 years and a fine of from 100,000 CFA francs (\$200) to ten million CFA francs (\$20,000). The law does not specifically provide a minimum age for consensual sex. The law prohibits the use of children for the production of pornography and provides for prison terms of from five to ten years and fines of from five million CFA francs (\$10,000) to 10 million CFA francs (\$20,000) for perpetrators who use any electronic system to forward child pornography or any document that could harm the dignity of a child. Children under the age of 18 were engaged in prostitution, and the problem was believed to be pervasive, although no statistics were available.

Displaced Children: Approximately 2,000 children lived on the streets of the major urban centers. The Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children, a governmental project in partnership with NGOs, gathered information on street children and offered healthcare, education, and psychosocial care. The project also bolstered the intake capacities of specialized centers. In 2010 the Ministry of Social Affairs reunited five street children with their families and placed 82 in institutions.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community was very small, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's [2011 Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

Persons with Disabilities

Due in part to the scarcity of facilities for persons with disabilities and lack of public assistance, the president in April 2010 promulgated a law to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. The law requires that both new and existing government and private buildings be designed to facilitate access by persons with disabilities; secondary public education be tuition-free for persons with disabilities and children born of parents with disabilities; and initial vocational training, medical treatment, employment be provided "when possible," and public assistance be provided "when needed." During the year the government implemented the educational provisions of the law.

Societal discrimination continued against persons with albinism. Such discrimination occurred less frequently than in previous years, but employment opportunities for persons with albinism remained limited, although at least one such individual occupied a senior position in the government. In early August the Cameroon-based World Association for the Defense of the Interests and Solidarity of Albinos held its 13th National Week of Albinos. The organization called on the government to provide reduced healthcare costs, better access to education, and equal employment opportunities for persons with albinism.

Society largely treated those with disabilities as outcasts, and many felt that providing assistance was the responsibility of churches or foreign NGOs.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population consists of more than 250 ethnic groups, among which there were frequent and credible allegations of discrimination. Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Members of the president's Beti/Bulu ethnic group from southern areas held key positions

and were disproportionately represented in the government, state-owned businesses, security forces, and the ruling CPDM party.

Northern areas continued to suffer from ethnic tensions between the Fulani (or Peuhl) and the Kirdi, who remained socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged relative to the Fulani in the three northern regions.

Traditional Fulani rulers, called lamibe, continued to wield great power over their subjects, who often included Kirdi, and sometimes subjected them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of hereditary servitude were alleged, largely Fulani enslavement of Kirdi. Many Fulani hired Kirdi at exploitive wage levels to perform tasks that the Fulani considered menial and beneath them.

Vigilante violence against persons suspected of theft resulted in at least two deaths during the year. Public frustration over police ineffectiveness and the release without charge of many individuals arrested for serious crimes contributed to vigilante violence.

For example, on March 4, inhabitants of the Makepe neighborhood of Douala burned to death two thieves, who allegedly stole the motorbike of an elderly inhabitant of the neighborhood. An investigation was ongoing at year's end.

Indigenous People

An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, including Bakola and Bagyeli (Pygmies), resided primarily (and were the earliest known inhabitants) in the forested areas of the South and East regions. While no legal discrimination exists, other groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices. The government did not effectively protect their civil and political rights. Some observers believed that sustained logging was destroying the Baka's unique, forest-oriented belief system, forcing them to adapt their traditional social and economic systems to a more rigid modern society similar to their Bantu neighbors.

Local Baka along the path of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline continued to complain that they were not compensated fairly for their land and had been cheated by persons posing as Baka representatives. In July the NGO Réseau Africain pour les Droits Environnementaux echoed Baka allegations, which three other local NGOs had reported in 2010. At its inception in 2000, the Cameroon Oil Transportation Company (COTCO), which manages the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, established a system for adjudicating compensation and any other claims, using a committee with representatives from COTCO, local communities, NGOs, and the government. The committee paid almost \$12 million in claims in Cameroon since the project's inception, including \$12,000 in the 12-month period ending in July 2011. The committee held thousands of meetings with local citizens over the years, including more than 400 during the year in Cameroon. The committee finished adjudicating active compensation claims during the year and began shifting resources toward eradicating malaria and conducting other corporate social responsibility projects affecting populations along the pipeline. Some local Baka continued to claim that they were not fairly compensated.

The Ministry of Social Affairs continued efforts begun in 2005 to provide birth certificates and national identity cards to Baka; however, 95 percent of Baka did not have identity cards at year's end. Ministry teams reported that efforts to reach Baka were impeded by the difficulty in accessing their homes deep in the forest, but that slow progress was being made. During the year ministry teams located dozens of Baka to assist them with registration and voting.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by a prison sentence of six months to five years and a fine ranging from 20,000 to 200,000 CFA francs (\$40 to \$400). During the year 10 persons were arrested for suspected homosexual activity, although most were not engaged in homosexual acts at the time of arrest.

Gay men and lesbians generally kept a low profile because of the pervasive societal stigma, discrimination, and harassment as well as the possibility of imprisonment. Gay men and lesbians suffered from harassment and extortion by law enforcement officials. According to one human rights NGO, government officials and private citizens sometimes conspired to make false allegations of homosexuality to harass enemies or extort money.

In March Jean-Claude Roger Mbede was sentenced to three years in jail by the Yaounde lower court for homosexual activity.

On July 25, police detained three men returning from a bar in Yaounde because two of the men appeared effeminate, according to the Association for the Defense of Homosexuality and Human Rights Watch. The three were jailed for one week before being charged, and the two who appeared effeminate were beaten on the soles of their feet until they confessed to being gay, according to a civil society group working on their behalf; the third man was released. After repeated postponements, a trial was held on September 26, at which the two men who confessed to being gay were sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of 200,000 CFA francs (\$400). An arrest warrant was issued for the third man, who was convicted and sentenced in absentia to the same punishment.

On January 13, following the EU decision to finance the Project to Provide Assistance and Guidance to Sexual Minorities, the then minister of external relations Henri Eyebe Ayissi convoked Raul Mateus Paula, the EU ambassador, to convey the government's opposition to the decision, noting that the law criminalizes homosexuality.

Several lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organizations operated in the country. There was a pattern of discrimination against members of such groups, although no official cases were available for citation.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons infected with HIV/AIDS often were discriminated against and isolated from their families and society due to the societal stigma and lack of education about the disease.

Discrimination against persons suspected of practicing witchcraft was a problem in rural areas. Suspected witches were shunned and forced to travel to neighboring villages to buy food or maintain garden plots. Women whose children died at birth, for example, were suspected of selling their newborns to mystic forces in exchange for living a long life.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law allows workers to form and join trade unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively, but the government imposed numerous restrictions in law and in practice. The law does not permit the creation of a union that includes both public and private sector workers or the creation of a union that includes different or even closely related sectors. The law requires that unions register with the government, permitting only groups of no fewer than 20 workers to organize a union by submitting a constitution, bylaws, and nonconviction certifications for each founding member. The law provides for prison sentences and heavy fines for workers who form a union and carry out union activities without registration. Such penalties are in breach of International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions. Trade unions or associations of public servants may not join a foreign occupational or labor organization without prior authorization from the minister responsible for "supervising public freedoms."

The constitution and law provide for collective bargaining between workers and management as well as between labor federations and business associations in each sector of the economy. The law does not apply to the agricultural or other informal sectors, which included the majority of the workforce.

Legal strikes may be called only after mandatory arbitration. Workers who ignore procedures to conduct a legal strike can be dismissed or fined. Before striking, workers must seek mediation from the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance (MINLESI) at the

local, regional, and ministerial levels. Only if mediation fails at all three levels can workers formally issue a strike notice and subsequently go on strike. The provision of the law allowing persons to strike does not apply to civil servants, employees of the penitentiary system, or workers responsible for national security, including police, gendarmerie, and army personnel. Instead of strikes, civil servants were required to negotiate grievances directly with the minister of the appropriate department in addition to the minister of MINLESI.

The constitution and law prohibit antiunion discrimination, and employers guilty of such discrimination were subject to fines of up to approximately one million CFA francs (\$2,000). However, employers found guilty were not required to compensate workers for discrimination or to reinstate fired workers.

Industrial free zones are subject to labor law, except for the following provisions: the employers' right to determine salaries according to productivity, the free negotiation of work contracts, and the automatic issuance of work permits for expatriate workers.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not always respected in practice, and the government interfered with union activities. The government applied the law inconsistently, and some sections of labor law had no force or effect because the presidency had not issued implementing decrees. Government interference reportedly took various forms, including selectively recognizing certain trade unions and inconsistently applying the laws. Government officials stated that the government provided union certification within one month of application; however, independent unions, especially in the public sector, found it difficult to register. Some independent unions accused the government of creating small non-representative unions amenable to government positions and with which it could negotiate more easily. The government also bribed union leaders to call off strikes. For example, transportation union strikes scheduled for early October were allegedly called off after union leaders received personal compensation from the government. Arbitration decisions are legally binding but were often unenforceable when the parties refused to cooperate. It was not uncommon for such decisions to be overturned or simply ignored by the government or employers.

There were a couple of collective bargaining agreements signed during the year. Once agreements were negotiated, however, there was no mechanism to enforce implementation, and the government ignored some of its agreements with labor unions.

Security forces arrested union leaders. In March gendarmes of Bamenda, Mezam Division, Northwest Region, arrested and detained for several hours union leaders who conducted a legal strike at the Ayaba Hotel to demand that hotel workers be paid several months of salary arrears. The union leaders were charged with disturbing public order.

Information surfaced during the year that in November 2010 police in Yaounde dispersed a rally organized by members of the Public Sector Central Trade Union (CSP) to demand improved working conditions. Although the CSP had notified authorities in advance of the rally, the deputy prefect (who had no authority to ban demonstrations) banned the rally on the grounds that "public demonstrations of a vindictive and/or protest nature are and shall remain prohibited throughout the entire department of Mfoundi." Police subsequently arrested CSP president Jean-Marc Bikoko, CSP accountant Eric Nla'a, Maurice Angelo Phouet Foe (secretary general of the Autonomous National Education and Training Trade Union), Joseph Ze (secretary general of the Unitary National Union of Teachers and Professors – SNUIPEN), Theodore Mbassi Ondo (executive secretary of the Federation of Education Trade Unions of Cameroon), and two SNUIPEN members. Accused of holding an "illegal demonstration" and "disturbing public order," the trade unionists were brought before the public prosecutor without having an opportunity to consult a lawyer. The public prosecutor ordered their provisional release the same day, and they remained awaiting trial at year's end.

Antiunion discrimination occurred. The blacklisting of union members, unfair dismissal, creating employer-controlled unions, and threats against workers trying to unionize were common practices. The government has often created or used fake trade unions to counter strikes, especially in the transportation sector.

Information surfaced during the year that in January 2010, management at Orange Telecom suspended five workers in retaliation for a strike.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit forced labor. On December 14, the president signed the Law Project Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery, which repeals the 2005 law against child trafficking but extends its antitrafficking provisions to all persons regardless of age or gender. The new law also prohibits slavery, exploitation, and debt bondage and voids any agreement in which violence was used to obtain consent. Violations of the law are punishable by prison terms of five to 20 years and fines ranging from 10,000 CFA francs (\$20) to 10,000,000 CFA francs (\$20,000). In cases of debt bondage, penalties are doubled if the offender is also the guardian or custodian of the victim. The law also extends culpability for all crimes to accomplices and corporate entities.

There were credible reports of hereditary servitude imposed on former slaves in some chiefdoms in the North Region. Many Kirdi people, whose tribe had been enslaved to the Fulani people in years past, continued to work for traditional Fulani rulers for some compensation, while their children were free to pursue schooling and work of their choosing. Fulani often hired Kirdi at exploitive wage levels to perform tasks that the Fulani considered menial and beneath them. Kirdi were also required to pay local chiefdom taxes to the Fulani, as were all other subjects. The combination of low wages and high taxes, although legal, effectively constituted forced labor. While technically free to leave, many Kirdi remained in the hierarchical and authoritarian system because of a lack of other options.

The new law does not cover the use of prison labor, which occurred and is permitted by prison regulation. Prison authorities continued to arrange for prison inmates to be contracted out to private employers or used as communal labor for municipal public works without the informed or formal consent of the prisoner. Money generated from these activities was usually pocketed by prison administrators and not given to detainees.

In the South and East regions, some Baka, including children, continued to be subjected to unfair labor practices by Bantu farmers, who hired the Baka at exploitive wages to work on their cocoa farms during the harvest seasons.

The government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor and collaborated with the regional office of Interpol. According to the *Report by the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2010*, MINLESI removed approximately 1,500 children from cocoa farms and plantations. The report also noted the removal of one adult victim of forced labor in 2010. During the year authorities arrested four traffickers, two of whom were convicted, and two of whom remained in pretrial detention at year's end.

Also see the Department of State's [2011 Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law generally protects children from exploitation in the workplace and specifies penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for infringement. The law sets a minimum age of 14 for child employment, prohibits children from working at night or longer than eight hours a day, and enumerates tasks that children under the age of 18 cannot legally perform, including moving heavy objects, dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, and prostitution. Employers were required to train children between the ages of 14 and 18, and work contracts must contain a training provision for minors. These provisions of the law were not adequately enforced.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and MINLESI were responsible for enforcing existing child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses; although sporadic inspections occurred during the year, the government did not allocate sufficient resources to support an effective inspection program. Moreover, the legal prohibitions do not include family chores, which in many instances were beyond a child's capacity. The

government employed 58 general labor inspectors, whose responsibilities included investigating child labor.

The use of child labor, particularly in informal sectors, remained rampant. According to ILO's 2008 survey, 51 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 years were engaged in work; 41 percent of children between five and 17 years old also worked.

According to 2008 government statistics on child labor, 85.2 percent of working children were employed in the agriculture sector, either on family subsistence plots or on cocoa, tea, banana, and palm oil plantations, and fisheries. In the urban informal sector, children worked as street vendors, car washers, and domestic workers. Some children also worked in mines and quarries. Many urban street vendors were less than 14 years of age. Children worked as household help, and some children were involved in prostitution. In the North there were credible reports that children from needy homes were placed with other families to do household work for pay, which normally went to the child's family.

There were reports that some parents gave their children to "marabouts" (traditional religious figures) in Maroua in the Extreme North, to learn the Qur'an and to prepare them to become marabouts themselves. However, there were reports that some of these children were kept in leg chains and subjected to forced labor.

Parents viewed child labor as both a tradition and a rite of passage. Relatives often employed rural youth, especially girls, as domestic helpers, and these jobs seldom allowed time for the children to attend school. In rural areas, many children began work at an early age on family farms. The cocoa industry also employed child laborers. These children originated, for the most part, from the three northern and the Northwest regions.

The ILO continued to work with various ministries and agencies involved in antitrafficking activities. It also conducted nationwide investigations and cooperated with local organizations.

Also see the Department of Labor's *2010 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage in all sectors was 28,246 CFA francs (\$56) per month. MINLESI was responsible for enforcing the minimum wage nationally.

The law establishes a standard workweek of 40 hours in public and private nonagricultural firms and 48 hours in agricultural and related activities. There are exceptions for guards and firemen (56 hours a week), service sector staff (45 hours), and household and restaurant staff (54 hours). The law mandates at least 24 consecutive hours of weekly rest. Premium pay for overtime ranges from 120 to 150 percent of the hourly pay depending on amount and whether it is for weekend or late-night overtime. There is a prohibition on excessive compulsory service. MINLESI inspectors were responsible for monitoring these standards.

The government sets health and safety standards. MINLESI inspectors and occupational health physicians were responsible for monitoring these standards. The National Commission on Health and Safety in the Workplace established the list of occupational diseases. The law does not provide workers with the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their continued employment.

These laws did not apply to the informal sector or to some domestic workers. The MINLESI lacked the resources for a comprehensive inspection program.

Despite the minimum wage law, employers often negotiated with workers for lower salaries, in part due to the high rate of unemployment in the country. Salaries lower than the minimum wage were prevalent in the public works sector, where many positions required unskilled labor.

During the year the minister of MINLESI traveled to help settle employer-employee disputes on violations of collective bargaining conventions, including in the naval industries and ports. On December 14, the president ratified ILO's Convention 144 on International Labor Norms and ILO's Convention 155 on Workers' Security and Health.
