



2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon

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Cameroon is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. The country has a multi-party system of government, but the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. In practice the president retains the power to control legislation. In April 2013 the country conducted the first Senate elections in its history, which were peaceful and considered generally free and fair. In September 2013 simultaneous legislative and municipal elections were held and considered by most observers to be free and fair. In 2011 CPDM leader Paul Biya was re-elected president, a position he has held since 1982, in a flawed election marked by irregularities, but observers did not believe these had a significant impact on the outcome of the election. Authorities failed at times to maintain effective control over the security forces.

The government stepped up security measures in response to repeated attacks from Boko Haram, leading to human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests.

The most important human rights problems in the country were security force torture and abuse, particularly of detainees and prisoners; denial of fair and speedy public trial; and life-threatening prison conditions.

Other major human rights abuses included arbitrary arrest and detention, prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention, and infringement on privacy rights. The government harassed journalists, restricted freedoms of speech and press, and impeded freedom of movement. Corruption was pervasive at all levels of government. Gender-based violence occurred, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Trafficking in persons and discrimination against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community were problems. Discrimination against persons with albinism occasionally occurred, and hereditary servitude remained a problem. The government restricted the activities of independent labor organizations. Child labor was a problem.

Although the government took some steps to punish and prosecute officials who committed abuses in the security forces and in the public service, these actors were often still able to act with impunity.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

In January, Christiane Soppo Mbango was killed in her Yaounde residence. Soppo had been a close aide to Marafa Hamidou Yaya, who was a former government minister, a close aide to President Biya, and was arrested on corruption charges and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in 2012. Soppo was believed to be one of the few who assisted Marafa as he served his prison term. Her close ties with Marafa, the violent circumstances of her death, and the lackluster police investigation afterwards fueled speculation the killing was politically motivated. In June Rwandan-born Victor Muvandimwe, a secondary school student in Yaounde, was arrested in connection with the killing after he was found in possession of a telephone that belonged to Mbango. After four months in prison, he was released and three suspects who allegedly gave Muvandimwe the telephone were arrested.

At year's end legal proceedings continued at the Kribi High Court for three members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) for beating a man to death in September 2013. Government sources stated the case was being handled by the ordinary law court and not by the military tribunal, given the seriousness of the case.

Boko Haram killed at least 200 individuals in the Far North Region during the year. In May, in the town of Limani, in the Mayo Sava Division of the Far North Region, Nigerian Boko Haram militants shot and killed Tchari Boukar in his home. They accused him of collaborating with security forces. On June 30, alleged members of Boko Haram killed the chief of Magedme, whom they also accused of collaborating with security forces. On July 27, they launched a cross-border attack on Kolofata, killing more than a dozen persons.

b. Disappearance

There were no reported cases of politically motivated disappearance during the year, but in September the international media reported the 2013 abduction and execution of Captain Guerandi Goulongo Mbara. In its September 15 edition, the weekly news magazine *Jeune Afrique* reported that Mbara was abducted by Cameroonian intelligence agents near the border with the Central African Republic. Mbara had been living in exile in Burkina Faso since a 1984 coup attempt against President Biya. Radio France Internationale subsequently reported that Mbara was executed in January 2013 in Cameroon. The government had not responded to the allegations by year's end.

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

Although the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were reports that security forces tortured, beat, harassed, or otherwise abused citizens.

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).

In December 2013, in Bagante, West Region, elements of the Territorial Gendarmerie Brigade arrested and reportedly beat Franklin Mowha, president of the human rights organization Frontline Fighters for Citizens Interest. Mowha had repeatedly denounced human rights abuses against local farmers and the Bororos community allegedly committed by administrative and traditional authorities and was inquiring about the situation of other detained civil society members. Gendarmes reportedly transferred him to Bafoussam Central Prison, where he was awaiting trial by the military tribunal on charges of destroying public property and contempt of government.

As of July, according to government sources, the 11 soldiers from the 11th motorized infantry battalion in Ebolowa, South Region, who were accused of attacking and sexually assaulting civilians in September 2013, had not been subject to disciplinary measures.

The Adamaoua Court of Appeal in Ngaoundere delivered its verdict on the case against a subdivisional officer and three accomplices who gang-raped a woman in Meiganga, Adamaoua Region, in April 2013. The court sentenced the subdivisional officer to six months' imprisonment plus a fine, a decrease from the three-year sentence initially decided by the lower court. The case was being appealed to the Supreme Court.

Security forces harassed, obstructed, and abused journalists and members of the LGBT community during the year.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening due to gross overcrowding and inadequate food, sanitary conditions, and medical care.

Physical Conditions: Overcrowding was pervasive in most prisons, especially in major urban centers. Officials held prisoners in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons, where the number of inmates was as much as four to five times the intended capacity. Sanitation, food, and medical care were wholly inadequate.

In December 2012 the country's 77 functional prisons, which had an intended capacity of 16,995 inmates, held 25,337 prisoners and detainees, including 515 women and 865 juveniles, according to the Justice Ministry's 2012 human rights report. Of these prisoners, 15,756 were awaiting trial and 9,881 had been convicted. According to the report of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF), in May, Yaounde Kondengui Central Prison, built to hold 1,500 inmates, held 3,886 prisoners, the majority of whom were in pretrial detention. In October 2013 Douala's New Bell Prison, designed for 800, held 2,800 to 3,000 inmates. As of October 6, the Bamenda Central Prison in the Northwest Region, built to house 350 prisoners, held more than 600. There were approximately 100 prisoners for each toilet, which also doubled as a shower. The Bafoussam Central Prison in the West Region, built to house 600 prisoners, held 912 prisoners, 574 of whom were in pretrial detention.

According to government sources, 51 of 77 functional prisons had sections for women and 36 had sections for minors. Additionally, there were two separate prisons for women and a few pretrial detention centers for women, but officials routinely held women in police and gendarmerie complexes with men, occasionally in the same cells. In Yaounde, for instance, the Mendong and Tsinga gendarmerie brigades had only one detention cell each, so men and women were held in the same space. Conditions for male and female inmates were equally poor. Authorities often incarcerated juvenile prisoners with adults, occasionally in the same cells or wards.

Deaths from illness, malnutrition, and lack of medical care occurred. Deficiencies in health care and sanitation remained significant problems. Disease and illness were widespread, and sick inmates were not systematically and promptly separated from the general population. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, and numerous other untreated conditions, including infections, parasites, dehydration, and chronic diseases, were rampant. Doctors and medicine were inadequate. Many convicts spent their sentences moving between the prison yard and the hospital ward, as they were infected and re-infected with illnesses. Potable water was inadequate, and officials expected prisoners' families to provide food for their family members.

Prisoners generally had one meal a day, with a daily food allocation of less than 250 CFA francs (\$0.50). Corruption among prison personnel was widespread. In 2013 pretrial detainees reported

that prison guards sometimes required them, under threat of abuse, to pay "cell fees" – money paid to prevent further abuse. There were, however, no such reports in 2014. Prisoners bribed wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom, beds, and transfer to less-crowded areas of the prisons. Due to their inability to pay fines, some prisoners remained in prison after completing their sentences or receiving court orders of release.

In temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities, officials held adult men, juveniles, and women together. Detainees usually received no food, water, or medical care. Detainees whose families knew 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 for dispute resolution. The government claimed there were no private prisons in the country. According to credible nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), however, some traditional leaders continued to detain persons illegally within their palaces, especially in the country's Far North, North, and Adamaoua regions. During the year the Lamido of Godala, near Maroua, reportedly detained a man and his son for two days before releasing them after pressure from human rights organizations. The victims filed a complaint with the authorities, and the case was in progress at year's end. There continued to be reports of private detention facilities with reputations for serious abuse, which allegedly operated within the palaces of the traditional chiefdoms of Rey Bouba, Gashiga, Bibemi, and Tcheboa. The government conducted an investigation and was unable to identify any private prisons.

Administration: Recordkeeping on prisoners was inadequate, although the NCHRF reported improvements in a few prisons. In 2013 the NCHRF proposed alternatives to detention, such as community labor, but the government had adopted no changes to sentencing guidelines by year's end. Authorities allowed prisoners access to visitors and religious observance. Prisoners and detainees could submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship. The country had no prison ombudsman.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted international humanitarian organizations access to prisoners. The NCHRF and the NGO Commission for Justice and Peace made infrequent, unannounced prison visits during the year. The government continued to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit prisons, and the organization conducted visits. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that human rights activists attempting to visit prisoners were required to pay bribes to prison officials.

Some human rights activists attempting to visit prisoners reported they were unable to obtain the necessary permits. For example, NGOs reported they were unsuccessful in their attempts to meet with Aboubakar Sidiki, president of the Mouvement Patriotique du Salut Camerounais political party, who was arrested in his office in Douala on August 9 and was being held at DGRE headquarters without visitation rights or legal representation (also see section 7.d.).

Improvements: The government reported significant efforts aimed at humanizing detention conditions, including the provision of bedding, medical, and educational books for infirmaries and schools in the central prisons (the prisons located in the 10 regional capitals); improvement of access to water and energy, by constructing 22 hand-pumped wells and developing biogas systems; and the acquisition of new vehicles to improve the escort and transportation of detainees. The government also reported an increase in funding for sanitation and health care in the year, including allocations of CFA 48,600,000 (\$96,000) for sanitation, CFA 507,900,000 (\$1,000,000) for rehabilitation, and CFA 150,000,000 (\$300,000) for health coverage. These sums and their actual disbursement to prisons could not be independently confirmed.

Following inspection visits to prisons and detention centers in Douala and Yaounde, respectively, in January and May, the NCHRF reported some improvements in hygiene and sanitation conditions, especially at the Kondengui central and Secretary of State for Defense secondary prisons, compared with previous years. The NCHRF claimed minimum detention conditions were being respected, especially with record keeping, including the identification of detainees, reasons for detention and the authority that decided the detention, and the expected release date. The NCHRF noted that prisoners were separated by category, distinguishing men, women, minors, detainees with a contagious disease, persons with mental disabilities, and prisoners sentenced to death.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. The law states that, except in the case of an individual discovered in the act of committing a felony or misdemeanor, the person making the arrest shall disclose his identity and inform the person arrested of the reason. The law also provides that any person arrested shall be given reasonable facilities to be in contact with his family, obtain legal advice, and arrange for his defense. The government occasionally did not respect these provisions. On August 9, plainclothes security forces abducted Aboubakar Sidiki from his office in Douala and took him to DGRE headquarters in Yaounde without informing him of the charges against him. On August 26, Abdoulaye Harissou, a notary who had worked with high-profile statesmen, was also arrested in Maroua and transferred to the DGRE in Yaounde, where he was detained alongside Sidiki. During their detention at the DGRE, both were reportedly denied access to family members and legal assistance. On September 26, they were transferred to Yaounde's Kondengui prison.

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. While the army is responsible for external security, the national police and the gendarmerie have primary responsibility for law enforcement. 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 of National Security (DGSN) under the direct authority of the presidency.

The government took some steps to hold police accountable for abuses of power. Police remained ineffective, poorly trained, and corrupt, however. Impunity continued to be a problem.

Civilian authorities maintained some control over the police and gendarmerie, and the government has somewhat effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. The DGSN investigates reports of abuse and forwards cases to the courts that it concludes merit prosecution. Lesser sanctions are handled internally. According to the Justice Ministry's 2013 human rights report, law enforcement officials were sanctioned, including military (police, and gendarmes). Infractions included arbitrary arrest, violence and assault, torture, irregular use of weapons, abuse, negligence resulting in the death of a detainee, and extortion of money on the highway. Sanctions ranged from warnings to three-month suspensions without pay. Military tribunals prosecuted gendarmes for violating the right to life, freedom, and security and the right not to be subjected to torture. Sentences ranged from fines to months or years in prison.

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

sanctioned abusers. The minister-delegate of defense refers cases involving aggravated theft, criminal complicity, murder, and other major offenses to the military courts for trial.

Unlike in previous years, the BIR did not punish officers implicated in violence against civilians during the year.

Foreign military personnel provided training to security forces on civil-military relations, including rules of engagement, escalation of force, and human rights.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that security forces failed to prevent or immediately respond to societal violence.

On February 18, President Biya issued a decree to commute and remit sentences, reducing a number of death sentences, to lifelong incarceration, and pardoning some convicted persons. At least 500 prisoners were released immediately, and thousands more were released during the year.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires that police obtain a warrant for an arrest, except when a person is caught in the act of committing a crime, but police often did not respect this requirement. The law provides that detainees be brought promptly before a magistrate, although this often 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 charges are brought. Nevertheless, police reportedly often 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 police frequently denied detainees access to both. The law prohibits incommunicado detention, but it occurred. 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: Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of "Friday arrests," where individuals arrested on a Friday typically remained in detention until at least Monday unless they paid a bribe to be released early. Security forces and government authorities reportedly continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily, often holding them for prolonged periods without charge or trial and, at times, incommunicado.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that police arbitrarily arrested persons during neighborhood sweeps for criminals and stolen goods or arrested persons without identification.

In June the NGO Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme (NDH) announced the provisional release of Theodore Wamba and his family, including his wife, his 10-month-old infant, nine-year-old son, and the pregnant widow of his brother. They had been incarcerated for more than three months at the Mbouda Central Prison, West Region. According to NDH, authorities arrested Wamba and his family in March after he requested information about the death of his elder brother, whom a private self-defense militia member shot and killed. A former local parliamentarian and members of the militia accused Wamba of highway robbery and drug trafficking. The court ordered a new investigation into the case. No results were reported as of September 15.

In November 2013 security forces arrested Celestin Yandal, in Ngaoundere, Adamaoua Region. A gendarmerie official in civilian clothes reportedly approached Yandal and claimed a relative at the Ngaoundere police station wanted to see him. Upon Yandal's arrival at the station, gendarmes immediately detained him and held him without charge for more than 28 hours. Police subsequently transferred Yandal to Garoua Central Prison, North Region, where he was awaiting

trial. There were no legal proceedings by year's end. Human rights organizations alleged authorities were deliberately delaying the hearing process as a way of prolonging Yandal's imprisonment.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that police or gendarmes harassed immigrants.

In the North and Far North regions, the government reportedly continued to permit traditional chiefs to detain temporarily persons outside the government penitentiary system, in effect creating private detention facilities, until the chiefs transferred them to the police or gendarmerie and the judicial system. While authorities officially banned this practice, they did not take steps to deter it.

Pretrial Detention: The law provides for a maximum of 18 months' detention before trial, but many detainees waited years for a date in court. Following visits to prisons and detention centers in January and May, the NCHRF found the majority of inmates in Yaounde central prison were in pretrial detention. The NCHRF attributed the increase in prison population to administrative and judicial bottlenecks, including factors such as errors in drafting judicial documents, disappearance of documents from case files, and corruption.

On May 8, Henri Engoulou, the former minister-delegate in charge of the budget, died from typhoid fever after more than four years in pretrial detention in Yaounde Central Prison on embezzlement charges. The court had yet to start hearings on his case at the time of his death.

In Bafoussam, West Region, five persons arrested in connection with the February 2008 riots remained in pretrial detention. Donfack Yannick Romain, Noumbo Bertrand, Tsafack Eric, Kenfack Fomete William, and Tsafack Jean Pierre were arrested between March and May 2008 in the aftermath of that February's riots. They were accused of setting fire to a poultry farm during the riots and remanded in custody in Bafoussam pending trial by the military tribunal. In December 2012, four years after the alleged events took place, the military tribunal declined jurisdiction. The plaintiffs filed an appeal, and on June 27, the Court of Appeals reversed the decision and declared the military court competent to hear the case. As of September the five accused remained in custody, and the court had not opened the case.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary. While the judiciary often demonstrated impartiality and independence, it remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to political influence. Individuals reportedly accused innocent persons of crimes as retribution or to solve personal disputes. There were reports that authorities often did not respect court orders.

As of September 30, the mayor of Douala III council, Theophile Job Lwapnang, had not complied with a 2012 decision of the Littoral Court of Appeal ordering the mayor to pay the benefits due to Jean Fotso, a former employee of the Douala III council. After 11 years of employment with the Douala III municipality, Fotso was dismissed without cause, with several months of salary arrears. Fotso sued in court and won. The Littoral Court of Appeals ordered the mayor to pay the complainant CFA 1,553,240 (\$3,100), representing arrears, severance, vacation and termination pay, and damages. Despite various reminders from regional administrative authorities, the mayor had not complied.

In September the Maroua military tribunal ordered the release of Gambo Ema and Mahamat Abdoulaye, who were arrested in February 2013 in connection with the 2011 killing of Gueime Djime, a local human rights activist who had challenged the appointment of two local traditional rulers in the Far North Region. The court found the two men not guilty. Observers believed they were arrested to lead the investigation away from the actual perpetrators. The investigation into the killing was reportedly continuing.

The court system is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. The constitution designates the president as "first magistrate," thus "chief" of the judiciary, making him the legal 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.

The legal system includes 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 alleged witchcraft are automatically transferred to the statutory courts, which act as the courts of first instance. The law provides for sentences of between two and 10 years' imprisonment and fines of between 5,000 CFA (\$10) and 100,000 CFA (\$200). There were no arrests or trials for alleged witchcraft reported during the year.

Customary law is deemed valid only when it is not "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience," but 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. Customary law practiced in rural areas is based upon the traditions of the ethnic group predominant in the specific region and is adjudicated by traditional authorities of that group. Some traditional legal systems regard wives as the legal property of their husbands.

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, without undue delay, in which the defendant is presumed innocent, but authorities did not always respect the law. Defendants have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges, with free interpretation as necessary. 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. Authorities generally allowed defendants to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense and not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases, although in some cases the government did not make the evidence available in timely fashion. Defendants may appeal a conviction. The law extends these rights to all citizens.

Because appointed attorneys received little compensation, the quality of legal representation for indigent clients was often poor. Despite a law providing for attorneys for indigent defendants at public expense, lawyers often refused to defend such clients, claiming the government's compensation was inadequate. Human rights organizations such as the Network of Defenders of Human Rights in Central Africa (REDHAC) and voluntary organizations such as the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists and Lawyers without Borders helped provide legal assistance in some cases, but defendants in courts of first instance and high courts were often prosecuted

without being offered legal counsel. Generally, only defendants who run the risk of a life sentence or death penalty are systematically provided legal assistance. The law extends these rights to all citizens.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

No statistics were available on the number of political prisoners. Political prisoners were detained under heightened security, often within the Secretariat of State for Defense. Some detainees were held within the General Delegation of External Research under high security, and the government did not permit access to such persons on a regular basis, or at all, depending on the case.

Former minister of state for territorial administration Marafa Hamidou Yaya, convicted in 2012 on corruption charges and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in a trial that featured little hard evidence, remained in detention. During the year the government reportedly refused to issue the necessary permit to allow NGOs regular access to the prisoner.

In February French national Thierry Michel Atangana, who was convicted in 2012 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for embezzlement of public funds, was released following a February 18 decree by President Biya to commute and remit his sentence. Human rights defenders considered Atangana's arrest and conviction politically motivated.

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 arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, 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, monitored private communications, and opened or seized mail with impunity. 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. An administrative authority, including a governor or senior divisional officer, may authorize police to conduct neighborhood sweeps without warrants.

Security forces sometimes sealed off a neighborhood, systematically searched homes, arrested persons, sometimes arbitrarily, and seized suspicious or illegal articles. Police detained citizens without identification cards until identity could be established. There were several complaints that police arbitrarily confiscated electronic devices, including cell phones.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press but also criminalizes media offenses, and the government restricted speech and press, although there were fewer reports during the year.

Freedom of Speech: 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. Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately sometimes faced reprisals. The government sometimes used the law requiring notification of public protests to stifle discourse before it could begin. The government attempted to impede criticism by monitoring political meetings.

Press Freedoms: Approximately 650 newspapers published at least once during the year, according to government sources, but only an estimated 25 had sufficient funds to publish regularly. The government continued to disburse official funds to support private press outlets, although, unlike in previous years, there were no reports of disbursing funds selectively to outlets less critical of the government and with instructions to provide reporting favorable to the government. Government officials sometimes used expansive libel laws to arraign journalists who criticized them and to suspend newspapers. There continued to be fewer reports than in the past, however, and some criticism of government officials appeared on private media outlets. The government claimed that all media had access to the presidency and were invited to take part in the head of state's official trips. In practice authorities did not accredit privately owned media with the president's or prime minister's offices and did not permit private media to accompany the president on official trips.

The daily newspaper *Le Messager* reported on May 22 that journalists working for the media outlets accredited to cover the May 20 Unity Parade in the Littoral Region were summoned to the Military Security (SEMIL) headquarters in Douala, where they were required to provide information about their civil status, including domicile, employment status, legal status, ethnicity, as well as diagrams for the location of their homes. The Regional Delegation of Communication, according to the same source, explained that such events required SEMIL approval for journalist accreditations.

Approximately 200 radio stations officially operated in the country, including 50 community radio stations and 150 commercial radio stations, with three-fourths of them in Yaounde and Douala. Two television stations were officially licensed to operate; approximately 20 others broadcast under the government's policy of "administrative tolerance." A cable distributor also had an official license to broadcast, and many others broadcast programs through cable networks without official authorization. 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 and thereafter pay a renewable five-year annual licensing fee. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports the government prohibited rural community radio stations from discussing politics.

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 an advantage over independent broadcasters.

During the year the National Communication Council (NCC) meted out sanctions ranging from warnings to temporary suspensions of up to six months. On May 30, the NCC issued a decision suspending the periodical *La Scene*, along with its publisher, Christian Emok, for a period of six months, reportedly for unethical practices following the publication on May 15 of information deemed defamatory against Affoussiato Bamba Lamine, the Ivoirian minister of communication. The NCC issued another decision warning the publisher of the newspaper *Emergence*, Magnus Biaga, reportedly for unethical conduct following the publication of information concerning Cava Yeguie Djibril, speaker of the National Assembly.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces detained, arrested, and abused journalists during the year. There were several cases of arrest and detention of journalists and several cases of journalist mistreatment. On July 22, the newspaper *La Nouvelle Expression* reported elements of the

Groupement Mobile d'Intervention, a branch of the national police, beat Yannik Kenne, a young reporter working with the media outlet as an intern. After a soccer match between Cameroon and Burkina Faso, Kenne was interviewing a player when a group of police officers grabbed his microphone and beat him.

On October 24, Rodrigue Tongue, head of the political desk of *Le Messager*; Felix Ebole Bola, secretary general of the daily newspaper *Mutations* and president of the Trade Union of Cameroon Journalists; and Baba Wame, a lecturer at the Advanced School of Mass Communication, were summoned before a military tribunal. On October 28, the examining magistrate at the military court opened a criminal investigation and officially notified the accused of the charges brought against them, including failing to report sensitive information vital to national defense, and threatening the stability of the state. Tongue and Ebole Bola were accused of allegedly receiving a "contentious" document from Wame for publication. There was no further information about the content of the document, and it was unclear whether the recipients knew the origin or if they actually used the document for any purpose. The journalists were placed under house arrest pending trial and remained under house arrest at year's end.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The NCC is empowered to ensure that all printed media comply with the 1990 Law on Social Communication and its article 13 requirement that editors in chief deposit copies of each newspaper edition with the Prosecutor's Office for scrutiny two hours prior to publication. Journalists and media outlets also practiced self-censorship. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that government officials promised or threatened to withhold advertising to influence reporting of the government's activities.

Libel Laws/National Security: Press freedom is constrained by strict libel laws that may suppress criticism. Any citizen may file lawsuits against media organs for defamation of character. 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. The government contended maintaining libel laws in the penal code is aimed at safeguarding the rights of other citizens, whose reputations can be permanently damaged by defamation. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that government officials abused the laws to keep local journalists from reporting on corruption and abusive behavior.

The Foundation for Human Rights and Development reported in April the publisher of *The Monitor* newspaper, Amungwa Tanyi Nicodemus, was arrested in Soa and transferred to Bamenda, Northwest Region, where he was detained on March 31. The arrest followed a judgment in absentia on March 10 by the Bamenda Court of First Instance condemning Amungwa to four months' imprisonment for publishing articles deemed defamatory against the director of the Cameroon Cooperative Credit Union League, whom he had reportedly been investigating for corruption. Amungwa completed his prison term, yet he remained in prison because his fine was converted into an additional two-year sentence.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. The International Telecommunication Union reported that 5 percent of individuals used the internet and 3 percent of households had access to the internet in 2012. According to an independent market research company, internet penetration increased to 5.7 percent during the year.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Although there were no legal restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events, state security informants reportedly operated on university campuses. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports from professors that participation in opposition political parties or public criticism of the government could affect their professional opportunities. In August the Ministry of Higher Education expelled two members of the Association for the Defense of Students' Rights from all universities for a period of two academic years because they wrote a petition asking that Yaounde I university authorities issue biometric identity cards to all students regardless of their ability to pay an extra fee. The cards would enable students to access the full gamut of academic and other services provided by the university. In the decision expelling the students, one was accused of failing to respect administrative authorities, distributing tracts, and inciting students to disobey authorities. The other student was accused of cheating on his exams, although this claim was brought only after the petition was circulated. Both addressed a memo to the minister on September 29, calling on him to reverse the decision. At year's end they remained expelled from the entire higher education system.

Although the law provides for freedom of assembly, the government restricted this right. 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. Nevertheless, 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 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.

Security forces forcibly disrupted meetings and demonstrations of citizens, trade unions, and political activists throughout the year. On March 5, police used tear gas to disperse workers of Sitrafer, a Cameroon Railways Company subcontractor, who were demanding payment of their salary arrears.

On August 12, the Divisional Officer (DO) for Douala I prohibited Ndema Alexis Same, president of the executive bureau of one of the conflicting factions of the opposition party UPC, from hosting a party convention that had been scheduled for August 14-16. The DO argued a UPC congress had already been held in Yaounde on June 6-7. Despite the prohibition UPC officials opened their convention on August 14 as planned, at the Hotel Beausejour. A few hours later, the DO arrived with a squad of police officers to disperse the convention, and participants moved to the party's headquarters.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of security forces disrupting student activities.

b. Freedom of Association

The constitution and law provide for freedom of association, but the law also places limits on this right. The minister of territorial administration may, on the proposal of the senior divisional officer, suspend the activities of an association for three months, on the grounds that the association is disrupting public order. The minister may also dissolve an association if its activities are deemed to constitute a threat to the security of the state. In September 2013, in Nguti, Southwest Region, the local administration revoked the charter of the NGO Nature Cameroon for the repetitive holding of public meetings. According to local groups, the NGO's activities were suspended as a result of pressure from Herakles Farms, a firm with a planned palm oil project in the region. Nature Cameroon claimed the law permitted only a suspension for up to three months and that all their activities, not just their public meetings, were suspended.

While national associations may acquire legal status by declaring themselves in writing to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the ministry must explicitly register foreign associations and religious groups, and the law imposes heavy fines for individuals who form and operate any such association without prior authorization. The law prohibits organizations that advocate a goal contrary to the constitution, laws, and morality, as well as those that aim to challenge the security, territorial integrity, national unity, national integration, or the republican form of the state.

The conditions for government recognition of political parties, NGOs, or associations were complicated, involved long delays, and were unevenly enforced. The process resulted in associations operating in legal uncertainty, their activities tolerated but not formally approved.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's [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 internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, these rights sometimes were impeded. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and asylum seekers.

In-country Movement: Security forces at roadblocks and checkpoints in cities and on most highways often 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 harassed individuals who failed to carry their identification cards as required by law.

On August 7, the governor of the Far North Region, Midjiyawa Bakary, issued a decision prohibiting motorbike traffic in rural areas throughout the day and another decision prohibiting the use of vehicles between urban centers after 6 p.m. in an effort to protect against Boko Haram attacks. The decisions followed an attack on the village of Zigague in the Logone and Chari Division. A few months earlier, the governor's predecessor took a similar decision to regulate the use of motorbikes in the regional capital of Maroua.

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

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Several thousand persons abandoned their homes in some villages on the Nigerian border and fled to cities in the Far North Region as a result of frequent attacks from Boko Haram. Most of them left from the Far North Region localities of Kerewa, Greya, and Kolofata and found refuge in classrooms or churches, or camped outdoors in the Mayo, Sava, Logone, and Chari divisions. The government generally provided protection and assistance to IDPs. Both the president and the president of the National Assembly provided aid.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: 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 UNHCR continued to play an important role in providing documentation and assistance to the refugee population.

The country continued to host nearly 286,900 refugees. As of October 17, 135,350 new refugees from Central African Republic (CAR) had been registered since late 2013, 60,400 of whom lived in refugee camps, 67,000 outside of refugee camps, and 7,900 in urban areas. Of the new refugees from CAR, less than 50 percent were in refugee camps, while the others were receiving humanitarian assistance from local families and the UNHCR in approximately 300 villages in the Adamaoua and East regions. The UNHCR registered more than 44,000 Nigerian refugees during the same period; 15,335 lived in the Minawao Camp. In October there were reports that in the Far North Region the military considered all Nigerian refugees not in Minawao to be active Boko Haram members.

Durable Solutions: Between January and August, 347 refugees voluntarily returned to their respective countries, while 118 settled in Cameroon.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees, extending this protection to 100,000 individuals during the year.

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

The law provides citizens with the ability to change their government through free and fair elections, which they exercised through elections based on universal suffrage. President Biya and CPDM members, however, controlled key aspects of the political process, including the judiciary.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In April 2013 the country held its first Senate elections. The ruling CPDM won 54 of the 70 elected seats; an additional 30 senators were appointed by the president, in accordance with the constitution. The elections were peaceful and generally free and fair. In June 2013 the Senate elected a president, Marcel Niat Njifenji, who is the designated successor to the president of the country in case of a vacancy.

In September 2013 the country held simultaneous legislative and municipal elections, with 29 legislative and 35 municipal parties participating. The CPDM party won 148 of 180 parliamentary seats and 305 of 360 municipal council positions, representing gains for opposition parties, compared with the parliament elected in 2007. In preparation Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), whose members were appointed by the president, recompiled voter rolls using biometric technology and issued biometric voter identification cards that were required at polling booths. Despite irregularities such as the inconsistent use of identification cards due to lack of expertise of local polling officials, opposition parties generally accepted the results. The high voter turnout (70 percent) and ELECAM's administration of the election were viewed as major improvements over previous elections.

In October 2011 President Biya was re-elected in a flawed poll marked by irregularities.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The country had 296 registered political parties. Membership in the ruling political party conferred significant advantages, including in the allocation of key jobs in state-owned entities 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 generally represent CPDM interests in the regions. The president has the power to appoint important lower-level members of the 58 regional administrative structures as well. The

government pays the salaries of (primarily nonelected) traditional leaders, which creates a system of patronage.

In the three elections held in 2013, the ruling CPDM was the most popular party in most regions except in the Northwest, where it faced strong competition from the Social Democratic Front. Many residents of the Anglophone regions sought greater freedom, equality of opportunity, and better government by demanding regional autonomy rather than national political reform, and they formed several quasi-political organizations in pursuit of their goals.

Authorities sometimes refused to grant opposition parties permission to hold rallies and meetings.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women held 20 of 100 Senate seats, 56 of 180 seats in the National Assembly, nine of 66 cabinet posts, 30 of 360 mayoral positions, and one of eight university rector positions. Ten women were centrally appointed local officials. Women also held a few higher offices within the army, police, and major political parties, including the CPDM. The minority Baka people took part as candidates in the municipal and legislative elections but were not represented in the Senate, National Assembly, or the higher offices of government.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively or uniformly, and corruption was pervasive at all levels of government. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's 2013 Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption was a severe problem.

Corruption: During the year the government sanctioned government employees for corruption, embezzlement, and mismanagement. On August 14, the Special Criminal Court (TCS) opened hearings on the embezzlement case against businessman Patrice Tsimi Enyegue and his three codefendants. Enyegue, the principal defendant and representative of a service provider at the Douala port, was accused of fraudulently obtaining or retaining the sum of 458,420,345 CFA (\$93,000) from the Port of Douala with the complicity of his codefendants.

On August 26, the TCS opened hearings on the embezzlement case against Iya Mohamed, the former president of the Cameroon Football Federation and general manager of the Cameroon Cotton Development Corporation (SODECOTON), who was incarcerated in June 2013 following an audit report. Iya and his codefendants, Henri Clavier, Minlend Jerome, Fotso Lucien, Pierre Kaptene, Mahamat Karagama, and Christophe Mbaïougam, were being prosecuted for diversion of public funds. The loss suffered by the parastatal institution was estimated at more than 11 billion CFA (\$21 million).

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

Judicial corruption also was a problem. According to 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 occasionally were settled through bribery.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) receives and investigates allegations of corruption; however, it has no prosecutorial authority and must refer credible claims of corruption to the relevant ministry for administrative action or to the Ministry of Justice for judicial action. The vast majority of corruption allegations received and transmitted by CONAC resulted in administrative penalties including reprimand, suspension from 10 to 90 days, delays in promotions, removal from office, and outright dismissal. As of October 10, CONAC had not released its 2013 annual report.

The National Financial Investigations Unit (ANIF) is a separate financial intelligence unit that tracks money laundering and terrorist finance. Like CONAC it can carry out its own investigations but has no prosecutorial authority.

The Supreme State Audit Office (SSAO) audits public services, regional and local entities, public and semipublic enterprises and organizations, and associations that receive financial assistance from the state. The SSAO monitors the execution of the state budget and externally funded projects, and it contributes to sanctions against officers and managers of public funds in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. By direction of the president, the SSAO may also perform audits on any companies or organizations deemed strategically important.

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

Public Access to Information: There are no laws providing citizens with access to government information, and such access was difficult to obtain. The National Institute of Statistics developed a website where some statistical data may be accessed. Most government documents, however, such as statistics, letters exchanged between various administrations, draft legislation, and investigation reports, remained unavailable to the public and 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 impeded the effectiveness of many local human rights NGOs by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel. Human rights defenders and activists received anonymous threats by telephone, text message, and e-mail. The government took no action to investigate or prevent such occurrences.

Despite these restrictions, numerous independent domestic human rights NGOs continued operations, including the Cameroon Network of Human Rights Organizations, Organization for Human Rights and Freedoms, Association of Women Against Violence, Movement for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, Mandela Center Ouest, and Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of government arrests of human rights activists.

The pattern of government intimidation of Maximilienne Ngo Mbe, leader of the REDHAC, continued. REDHAC issued several statements informing the public of threats and harassment against Ngo Mbe, including tapped telephones and anonymous telephone threats. During the night of June 2, unknown individuals broke into her office, stole computer equipment, and destroyed office furniture and tables.

Government Human Rights Bodies: By year's end the independent NCHRF had neither released its 2013 report on human rights nor published its 2013 activity report. It was, nevertheless, considered effective, albeit inadequately resourced. The National Assembly's Constitutional Laws, Human Rights and Freedoms, Justice, Legislation, Regulations, and Administration Committee was adequately resourced and effective in reviewing the constitutionality of proposed legislation, although it approved most ruling party legislation and was not an effective check on ruling party initiatives.

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

The constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination. It states that a human being, without distinction as to race, religion, sex, or belief, possesses inalienable rights. Although the government made some efforts to enforce these principles, violence and discrimination against women and girls and vulnerable communities persisted.

Protection of Refugees

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape and provides penalties of between five and 10 years' imprisonment for convicted rapists, but police and courts rarely investigated or prosecuted rape cases. The law does not address spousal rape. NGOs reported cases of rape, mostly associated with Boko Haram insurgents. NGOs reported that law enforcement generally was not effective. The Cameroon Network of Human Rights Organizations (RECODH) reported in August that on June 28, two women and three teenagers were raped in refugee camps and that the alleged perpetrators had not been questioned. RECODH also reported that many cases of rape and attempted rape on minors were recorded in Limani, Mayo Sava Division, in the Far North Region.

The Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), in conjunction with local NGOs, continued their campaign to raise awareness of rape and educate citizens on penal provisions against rape.

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, although assault is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment and fines.

In June MINPROFF representatives told parliamentarians, based on the most recent Demography and Health Survey by the National Institute of Statistics (2011), that 55 percent of women experienced physical violence by the age of 15, 20 percent were forced to have sex, 30 percent were sexually abused by the age of 13, and 4 percent of victims suffered injuries resulting from violence.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law provides for physical and bodily integrity of persons and prohibits "aggravated assault to organs." It does not explicitly address FGM/C. Unlike in previous years, there were no credible reports of women ages 18 and above being subjected to FGM/C (see section 6, Children).

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The practice of widow rites remained a problem in some areas, especially in the southern region of the country. The practices varied from area to area but generally entailed families forcing new widows to remove all hair using a razor blade, spend the night sleeping on the floor, and forgo bathing and other hygiene practices for extended periods of time. Widows were also sometimes forcibly married to one of the deceased husband's relatives.

Sexual Harassment: The law does not prohibit sexual harassment, and observers believed it was 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. In its 2013 Statistical Yearbook, MINPROFF reported that in 2011, 84.7 percent of women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) received prenatal care from a qualified health worker and that 65.8 percent delivered with assistance from qualified birth attendants.

Prenatal care, skilled attendance during childbirth, and postpartum care remained unavailable to many women, particularly to those living in rural areas. Based on the 2011 Demography and Health Survey, the Ministry of Public Health estimated the maternal mortality rate at 782 per 100,000 births and the contraceptive prevalence rate at 14.2 percent. Maternal mortality remained high due to lack of access to medical care, the lack of trained medical personnel, and the high cost of prenatal care, hospital deliveries, and postpartum care. The low rate of contraception use was largely due to the lack of available products. The Ministry of Public Health provided counseling services to women during prenatal visits, promoting the concept of responsible parenthood and encouraging 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. Emergency health care was available in most health facilities, although patients' access to health care remained a problem for those who could not afford treatment. The Yaounde Gynecology and Obstetrics Hospital and the Yaounde Central Hospital were staffed to provide a range of emergency care, including services for complications arising from abortion.

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 (see section 7.d.). For example, the law allows a husband to deny his wife the ability to work outside the home, and a husband may also end his wife's ability 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 is regarded as the property of her husband. Because 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.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from 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 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, as birth certificates were required to register children for school or to obtain a national identification card. The government continued its program begun in 2005 to issue birth certificates to Baka, most of whom did not have birth certificates. The program also assisted Baka in registering for school. During the year the domestic NGO Plan Cameroon, in partnership with local councils in the East Region, started a project to issue birth certificates. The same organization also worked with the UNHCR to issue birth certificates for refugee children.

Education: The law provides that primary education is compulsory but does not set an age limit. Children were generally expected to complete primary education at age 12, or at ages 13-14 if they had to repeat classes. Although parents did not pay tuition for primary school, they 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 claimed that the gross enrolment rate for primary education was close to 100 percent. MINPROFF's 2013 Statistics Yearbook, however, stated the primary school enrollment rate among children ages six to 11 was approximately 78 percent between 2010 and 2011. Secondary school enrolment during the same period for children ages 12 to 18 dropped from 49.3 percent in 2010 to 45.9 percent in 2011 and stood at 44.9 percent for girls, against 46.9 percent for boys.

While schools located in urban centers had a relatively high teacher-to-student ratio, those in rural areas were understaffed and more often relied on parent-recruited teachers. In previous years parent-teacher associations (PTAs) raised money to provide additional funding for teachers and educational materials. The government banned the payment of PTA fees, but the practice continued at many schools.

For the 2014-20 school years, the government adopted a program to improve school access by creating new schools, building new classrooms, and recruiting new teachers. The government launched a three-year recruitment campaign for 9,000 new teachers in primary and prekindergarten education, including 3,060 for the 2014-15 school year.

Child Abuse: Child abuse remained a problem. Children continued to suffer corporal punishment, both within families and in the school environment. According to a 2011 survey, 76 percent of children reported being hit frequently at home, and 10 percent of those between six and 15 years old reported sexual abuse. Newspaper reports often cited cases of children abandoned, thrown in the trash, or as victims of kidnapping and mutilation.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for men, although many families reportedly tried to marry off their girls before the age of 12. Early marriage was prevalent in the regions of Adamaoua, North, and particularly 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. The government conducted education campaigns as a means to combat early marriages. With support from United Nations Population Fund and the Norwegian Hospital in Ngaoundere, the government also provided medical support and reintegration services to victims.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law protects physical and bodily integrity of persons but does not specifically address FGM/C. Children were reportedly subjected to FGM/C in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest regions, within the Choa and Ejagham tribes. MINPROFF estimated the prevalence of FGM/C at 1.4 percent nationwide and 20 percent in the most affected communities. Excision was the most common type of FGM, and the age at which FGM was practiced varied from one region to another and from a few days after birth up to the age of 15 or beyond. In general the procedure was performed before puberty, with half of the girls being five to nine years old, and a fifth 10 to 14 years old.

The government took steps to combat the practice and reported it succeeded in reducing FGM/C prevalence. In 2011 the government adopted a national action plan, and the MINPROFF established local FGM committees in areas where FGM was most prevalent, particularly in the Far North Region. The committees networked with former excision practitioners and traditional and religious leaders to reduce the practice.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: There were rare reports of breast ironing, a procedure to flatten a young girl's growing breasts with hot stones, cast-iron pans, or bricks. The procedure was considered a way to delay a girl's physical development, thus limiting the risk of sexual assault and teenage pregnancy. The procedure has harmful physical and psychological consequences, which include pain, cysts, abscesses, and physical and psychological scarring.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Penalties for the sexual exploitation of children include imprisonment of 15 to 20 years and a fine of 100,000 to 10 million CFA (\$200 to \$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 from five to 10 years and fines of five million to 10 million CFA (\$10,000 to \$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 exploited in prostitution, and the problem was believed to be pervasive, although no statistics were available.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: There were credible reports of mothers (usually young, unemployed, and unmarried) abandoning their newborns in streets, latrines, or garbage cans. The law criminalizes infanticide and provides penalties ranging from five years imprisonment to the death sentence. During the year the government organized education campaigns on responsible parenthood.

Displaced Children: Approximately 2,000 children lived on the streets of major urban centers. The Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children, a governmental project in partnership with NGOs, continued to gather information on street children and offer health care, education, and psychological care. The country also hosted a large population of refugee children from the CAR and Nigeria and internally displaced children, the result of Boko Haram activity in the Far North.

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 [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

Persons with Disabilities

The law does not specifically address discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, although the constitution explicitly forbids all forms of discrimination, providing that "everyone has equal rights and obligations," and the government made efforts to enforce this effectively with regard to 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 is tuition free for persons with disabilities and children born of parents with disabilities, and initial vocational training, medical treatment, and employment must be provided "when possible," and public assistance "when needed." Children with disabilities attended mostly mainstream schools, although some specialized schools existed for children with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities.

Societal discrimination continued against persons with disabilities, especially persons with albinism and individuals with dwarfism or similar conditions resulting in short stature. Such discrimination occurred less frequently than in previous years, but employment opportunities for persons with albinism remained limited, especially in the private sector (see section 7.d.).

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

There is no legal framework for the protection of persons with albinism. Although, due to the prevalent discrimination experienced by persons with albinism, the government considers albinism to fall under the legislative framework protecting persons with disabilities. The government reported that persons with albinism benefitted from free medical consultations in dermatology, oncology, and ophthalmology, although this could not be independently verified.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population consists of an estimated 286 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 (see section 7.d.). 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. Traditional Fulani rulers 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 (see section 7.b.).

Indigenous People

An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, including Bakola and Bagyeli, resided primarily (and were the earliest known inhabitants) in the forested areas of the South and East regions. While no legal discrimination existed, other groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices (see section 7.d.). The Bororos, itinerant pastoralists mostly present in the North, East, Adamaoua, and Northwest regions, did not face active discrimination but experienced conflicts over ownership of land and access to water. While the government did not effectively protect the civil or political rights of either group, it implemented a number of initiatives to promote the rights of the Baka people under the National Plan for the Empowerment of the Baka People. Programs during the year included training Baka and Bororos on agricultural and animal husbandry techniques, including follow-on support for projects initiated after completion of training, and recruiting Baka and Bororos to attend teacher training colleges. Baka and Bororos communities complained about being marginalized, forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, and denied access to water.

The Ministry of Social Affairs continued efforts begun in 2005 to provide birth certificates and national identity cards to Baka. Most Baka, however, did not have birth certificates or identity cards, and efforts to reach Baka were impeded by the difficulty in accessing their homes deep in the forest.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses 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 (\$40 to \$400). Government officials defended the law publicly by claiming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights state that countries may limit freedoms in the interests of preserving public order and that individuals have the duty to preserve African values and morals.

Although reports of arrests dropped dramatically, authorities continued to arrest and try alleged LGBT individuals. LGBT individuals continued to face social stigmatization, harassment, and

discrimination. There were increasing reports that both police and civilians extorted money from presumed LGBT individuals by threatening to expose them.

On January 10, LGBT activist Jean-Claude Roger Mbede died in his hometown of Ngoumou, after he left the hospital because he lacked the necessary resources for continued medical care. Mbede was found guilty of "homosexuality and attempted homosexuality" and sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 2011. He was released following a successful appeal in July 2012. Human rights activists believed Mbede became ill during his incarceration and that his family may have at one point denied him access to medical care.

On May 24, Cameroon Athletics Federation National Technical Director Michel Nkolo announced before an audience of more than 1,000 athletes and coaches that the federation was suspending Thierry Essamba due to rumors he was homosexual. Essamba, an internationally competitive runner in the 110-meter hurdles who won a gold medal for Cameroon in the 2013 Central African Championships in Brazzaville, was excluded from the national team and banned from any competition organized by the Cameroon Athletics Federation, effectively ending his athletic career. Essamba's parents reportedly expelled him from the family home after the suspension.

On October 1, in Yaounde, elements of the Nkolemesseng gendarmerie brigade detained six persons whom they accused of prostitution and homosexuality. The gendarmes kept the detainees in custody for three days and then referred them to the Ekounou Court of First Instance for prosecution. The State Counsel at the Yaounde Ekounou Court of First Instance ordered the release of the detainees on October 8, stating there was not enough evidence to prosecute them for homosexual acts.

There were no developments in the July 2013 killing of LGBT activist Eric Lembembe Ohena, executive director of the Cameroonian Foundation against AIDS (CAMFAIDS), who was strangled to death at his home in Yaounde.

Although authorities claimed an investigation was in progress, CAMFAIDS accused the government of failing to investigate the killing properly. The organization raised the concern that this lack of punishment sent a signal that crimes against LGBT individuals could be committed with impunity. Members of Lembembe's family reported harassment from police officials.

Suspected members of the LGBT community received anonymous threats by telephone, text message, and e-mail. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that LGBT individuals who sought services or protection from the authorities were regularly rebuffed, extorted, or arrested. LGBT organizations also were targeted.

Despite the cultural environment, various human rights and health organizations continued to advocate for the LGBT community by defending LGBT individuals being prosecuted, promoting HIV/AIDS initiatives, and working to change laws prohibiting consensual same-sex activity.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Persons infected with HIV or AIDS often suffered social discrimination and were isolated from their families and society due to social stigma and lack of education about the disease. In the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey for Cameroon, 88 percent of women and 81.3 percent of men reported having discriminatory attitudes towards those living with HIV. There were no specific reports of discrimination in employment, housing, or access to education or health care.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There were no reliable reports of other types of discrimination or incidents of mob violence against members of any groups. Unlike in previous years, there were no reported cases of vigilante or mob violence.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Statutory limitations substantially restricted these rights. 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 closely related sectors. The law requires that unions register with the government, permitting groups of no fewer than 20 workers to organize a union by submitting a constitution and bylaws, and nonconviction certifications for each founding member. The law provides for heavy fines for workers who form a union and carry out union activities without registration. 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 or lockouts may be called only after conciliation and arbitration procedures have been exhausted. 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 Security at the local, regional, and ministerial levels. Only if mediation fails at all three levels can workers formally issue a strike notice and subsequently strike. The provision of 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 are required to negotiate grievances directly with the minister of the appropriate department in addition to the minister of labor and social security.

The constitution and law prohibit antiunion discrimination, and employers guilty of such discrimination are subject to fines of up to approximately one million CFA (\$2,060). Nevertheless, employers found guilty are not required to compensate workers for discrimination or 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 foreign workers.

The government did not effectively enforce the applicable law, however. Although there were ministries tasked with upholding the labor laws, there were inadequate resources to support their mission. Penalties for violations were so rarely enforced that they were useless as a deterrent. Administrative judicial procedures were infrequent and subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Although the government made some efforts to respect workers' rights, state-owned enterprises often violated these rights and interfered with union activities. Some sections of the law had no force or effect because the presidency had not issued implementing decrees.

More than 100 trade unions and 12 trade union confederations operated in the country, including one public sector confederation. During the year the general manager of the National Social

Insurance Fund (CNPS) excluded one of its largest trade unions from staff representatives' elections. CNPS' leadership barred the Union of Staff Members of Banks and Financial Institutions of Cameroon (Snegcbef-Cam), apparently disregarding a government order allowing all active and registered unions to participate in the elections. Union leaders claimed the general manager's intention was to ensure a victory for only those representatives he could easily manipulate.

Collective bargaining was effective in many sectors, resulting in the signing of four collective agreements as of September 15. The agreements covered dockworkers, oil and gas workers, the shippers and retailers of petroleum products, and insurance sector workers.

A number of strikes were announced, some of which were called off after successful negotiation, while others were carried out. Workers' grievances generally included poor working conditions, improper implementation of collective agreements, nonpayment of salaries arrears, a lack of salary increases, and failure of employers to properly register employees and pay the employer's contribution to the CNPS, which provides health and social security benefits. Union representatives claimed the surge in strikes was the result of the government's strategy of defusing tension through last-minute fixes instead of finding concrete and lasting solutions to genuine problems.

On March 4, workers of La Societe Industrielle des Travaux Ferroviaire (SITRAFER), a railways maintenance company subcontracting with the rail transport company, launched a strike. Workers blocked the rail line between the capital city of Yaounde and Ngaoundere in the Adamaoua Region for several hours. Health sector unions went on strike on April 21, only providing minimal service in emergency situations, and secondary school teachers held a strike from April 28 to May 2. On August 25, health workers from some hospitals, including the Yaounde Gynecology, Pediatrics, and Obstetrics Hospital, staged another strike. The strikes were settled with temporary solutions that did not address the root causes.

Arbitration decisions are legally binding but were often unenforceable when parties refused to cooperate. Antiunion discrimination occurred. The blacklisting of union members, unfair dismissal, creation of employer-controlled unions, and threats against workers trying to unionize were common practices.

During the year union leaders were charged with disturbing public order after they destroyed ballot boxes and ballot papers, as members of Snegcbef-Cam staged a demonstration at the CNPS headquarters to have their lists included for staff representatives' elections. They were striking to protest against the exclusion of their lists by the CNPS leadership. On May 2, the general manager issued a series of decisions suspending the staff representatives with half pay for a period of two months. Union representatives claimed the move was an attempt to sidestep the minister of labor who, in December 2013, refused a request to lay off 26 workers for addressing a memorandum to the government. The union claimed that most of the staff representatives suspended on May 2 were part of the 26 workers proposed for layoffs in 2013.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit all forms of forced and compulsory labor. The law prohibits slavery, exploitation, and debt bondage and voids any agreement in which violence was used to obtain consent. A 2011 law extends antitrafficking provisions to all persons regardless of age or gender. Violations of the law are punishable by prison terms of five to 20 years and fines ranging from 10,000 CFA to 10 million CFA (\$20 to \$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. The government continued to make efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor and collaborated with the regional office of the

International Labor Organization (ILO) to draft a national plan of action. Although the national plan of action was officially adopted during the year, it was not yet operational since the associated budget had not been approved by the executive power. The government did not enforce the law effectively, due to lack of resources limiting labor inspection and remediation.

The government placed renewed emphasis on street children, considered most vulnerable to child labor, including forced labor.

There were credible reports of hereditary servitude imposed on former slaves in some chiefdoms in the North Region. Many Kirdi, whose tribe had been enslaved by Fulani in the 1800s, continued to work for traditional Fulani rulers for compensation, while their children were free to pursue schooling and work of their choosing. 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 viable options.

Prison labor 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. Prison administrators usually kept money generated from these activities.

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 farms during the harvest seasons.

Also see the Department of State's [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 18 cannot legally perform, including moving heavy objects, undertaking 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. The government, however, did not effectively enforce these provisions of law, due to lack of resources limiting labor inspection and remediation. There was not sufficient information to determine whether penalties for violations were sufficient to deter violations. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security were responsible for enforcing existing child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses. Although inspections occurred sporadically during the year, the government did not allocate sufficient resources to support an effective inspection program. The government employed 74 general labor inspectors, whose responsibilities included investigating child labor.

The use of child labor, particularly in informal sectors, remained rampant. According to ILO's 2012 survey, 40 percent of children between the ages of six and 14 were engaged in economic activity; 89 percent of working children were employed in the agricultural sector, 5 percent in commercial activities, and 6 percent in either industry or domestic work. Children working in agriculture frequently were involved in clearing and tilling the soil and harvesting crops, such as banana and cocoa. In the service sector, children worked as domestic servants and street vendors. Children worked in artisanal mining sites under dangerous conditions. Children were also used as beggars.

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 school. In rural areas many children began work at an early age on family farms. The cocoa industry and cattle-rearing sector also employed child laborers. These children originated, for the most part, from the three northern and the Northwest regions.

Also see the Department of Labor's [*Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*](#).

d. Discrimination with respect to Employment or Occupation

The constitution and labor laws do not explicitly prohibit discrimination in employment or occupation based on race, religion, gender, disability, or belief. The constitution does not protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, other communicable diseases, or social status. The constitution states that all individuals have the right and the obligation to work.

The government generally attempted to enforce these legal requirements, but the large percentage of the population employed in the informal sector made effective enforcement difficult. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation.

Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Traditional Fulani rulers continued to have great power over their subjects, and sometimes subjected them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of hereditary servitude were alleged, largely Fulani pressure of the ethnic group known as the Kirdi. Elsewhere in the country, especially in the South and East regions, other ethnic group members often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitive labor practices. There were reports that persons with disabilities, including albinism, found it difficult to secure employment.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage in all sectors was raised to 36,270 CFA (\$74) per month, up from 28,246 CFA (\$58). The law establishes a standard workweek of 40 hours in public and private nonagricultural firms and a total of 2,400 hours per year, with the maximum limit of 48 hours per week in agricultural and related activities. There are exceptions for guards and firefighters (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 the amount of overtime and whether it is weekend or late-night overtime. There is a prohibition on excessive compulsory service.

The law mandates paid leave at the employer's expense at the rate of one and one-half working days for each month of actual service. A maximum of 10 days per year of paid special leave, not deductible from annual leave, is granted to workers on the occasion of family events directly concerning their own home. For persons under the age of 18, the leave accrues at the rate of two and one-half days per month of service. For mothers the leave is increased by either two working days for each child under six years of age on the date of departure on leave, where the child is officially registered and lives in the household, or one day only if the mother's accrued leave does not exceed six days. The leave is increased depending on the worker's length of service with the employer by two working days for each full period whether continuous or not of five years of service. For mothers, this increase is in addition to the one described above.

The government sets health and safety standards in the workplace. The minister in charge of labor establishes the list of occupational diseases in consultation with the National Commission on

Industrial Hygiene and Safety. These laws were not enforced in the informal sector. The labor code also mandates that every enterprise and establishment of any kind, whether public or private, lay or religious, civilian or military, including those belonging to trade unions or professional associations, provide medical and health services for their employees. This stipulation was not enforced. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security is responsible for national enforcement of the minimum wage and work-hour standards. Ministry inspectors and occupational health physicians are responsible for monitoring health and safety standards, but the ministry 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, as well as in the domestic work sector.

By law workers can remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively protect employees in these situations.

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