

Title	2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon
Publisher	United States Department of State
Country	Cameroon
Publication Date	11 March 2008
Cite as	United States Department of State, <i>2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon</i> , 11 March 2008, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47d92c10dc.html [accessed 8 October 2009]

2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
March 11, 2008

Cameroon, with a population of approximately 18 million, is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. Despite the country's multiparty system of government, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. In October 2004 CPDM leader Paul Biya won reelection as president, a position he has held since November 1982. The election was flawed by irregularities, particularly in the voter registration process, but observers believed the election results represented the will of the voters. The July 2007 legislative and municipal elections were conducted with irregularities. International and domestic observers noted significant deficiencies in the electoral process, including substantial barriers to registration and insufficient safeguards against fraudulent voting.

The president retains the power to control legislation or to rule by decree. He has used his legislative control to change the constitution and extend the term of the presidency. Although civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, security forces sometimes acted independently of government authority.

The government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous human rights abuses. Security forces committed numerous unlawful killings. They engaged in torture, beatings, and other abuses, particularly of detainees and prisoners. Impunity was a problem in the security forces. Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening. Authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained anglophone citizens advocating secession, local human rights monitors and activists, and other citizens. The law provides for the arrest of homosexuals, as well as persons not carrying national, government-issued identification cards. There were reports of prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention and infringement on citizens' privacy rights. The government restricted citizens' freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and harassed journalists. The government also impeded citizens' freedom of movement. Other problems included official corruption; societal violence and discrimination against women; female genital mutilation (FGM); trafficking in persons, primarily children; discrimination against indigenous pygmies and ethnic minorities; and discrimination against homosexuals. The government restricted worker rights and the activities of independent labor organizations. Child labor, hereditary servitude, and forced labor, including forced child labor were problems.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed politically motivated killings; however, throughout the year security forces continued to commit unlawful killings, including killings resulting from beatings and other use of excessive force. There were fewer such reports than in the previous year, but the government rarely prosecuted officers responsible for using excessive force.

On January 1, a police officer shot and killed Michele Therese Sename Bella, a passenger in a taxi police were chasing. Police maintained they were shooting at the tires of the taxi, but inadvertently shot Bella instead. Police authorities arrested the two officers, detained and subsequently suspended them, and forwarded the case to the courts. Action was pending at year's end.

On January 20, police officer William Etenga of the Bafoussam Special Police Precinct shot and killed a taxi driver following an altercation between the two men. The police officer subsequently committed suicide.

On October 16, in Bamenda, taxi drivers who claimed that the police were harassing them attempted to burn down a police station. Police reportedly fired at the drivers and killed two individuals. Six police officers were injured. An administrative investigation was pending at year's end.

In August a Garoua nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported that gendarmes shot and killed three M'Bororo men for allegedly stealing 90 head of cattle; although evidence subsequently proved that the cattle belonged to the men. Some observers believed that the Lamido (local chief) was responsible for the killings because the cattle were recovered on his property. An investigation was pending at year's end.

Police used excessive force to disperse demonstrators resulting in killings and injuries.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of prisoners dying in custody due to security force abuse.

There were no new developments in the February 2006 police killing of Elvis Ndengue, or the May 2006 violence that resulted in the death of Gregoire Diboule.

There were no new developments in the 2005 police killings of Denis Serge Etoundi, Aurelien Mayouga Noundou, Elvis Sigala Tasama, or Claude Obam Ndoum.

In August 2006 the Yaounde district attorney charged Ni John Fru Ndi, chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), with the murder of Gregoire Diboule. Authorities accused Fru Ndi of being responsible for the violence that resulted in Diboule's death. The charges against Fru Ndi were still under investigation at year's end.

During the year societal violence and summary justice against persons suspected of theft and the practice of witchcraft continued to result in deaths and serious injuries. In 2006 the press reported 43 deaths from beatings and burning.

The practice of witchcraft continued to result in deaths and serious injuries. On October 17, the press reported that approximately 30 high school girls at College de la Maturite in Douala fell into a trance. Word spread quickly among parents and neighbors, who blamed the school founder and responded violently, including by inciting vandalism and burning buildings, attacking school children and the founder, and throwing equipment from school windows. The police were unable to control the mob of more than 5,000. The school's founder had previously been accused of sorcery when widespread reports of school-age children falling into trances began to appear around the country in Yaounde, Douala, and the North and East provinces.

Mob violence was attributed in part to public frustration over police ineffectiveness and

the release without charge of many individuals arrested for serious crimes.

On January 2, an angry mob beat and burned Walters Akwafe to death in Mambanda, in the South West Province. On January 1, Akwafe stabbed a friend to death following a dispute over a cigarette.

There were no new developments in the following 2006 mob violence and summary justice-related cases: the January beating and burning death of Fon Vugah Simon II; the March burning deaths of Jean-Pierre Onguene, Serge Toussaint Awa Amougou, and Joseph Cyrille Meba'a; the burning deaths of Jean Bape, Daniel Fotie, and Clovis Koagne.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices; however, there were credible reports that security forces continued to torture, beat, and otherwise abuse prisoners and detainees. The government rarely investigated or punished any of the officials involved.

There were reports that security forces detained persons at specific sites where they tortured and beat detainees. Security forces also reportedly subjected women, children, and elderly persons to abuse.

Numerous international human rights organizations and some prison personnel reported that torture was widespread; however, most reports did not identify the victims because of fear of government retaliation against either the victim or the victim's family or because of ignorance of, or lack of confidence in, the judicial system.

In Douala's New Bell Prison and other nonmaximum security penal detention centers, prison guards inflicted beatings, and prisoners were reportedly chained or at times flogged in their cells. Authorities also administered beatings in temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities. An NGO in Garoua reported that six prisoners were suspended upside down in the Garoua prison.

Security forces reportedly continued to subject prisoners and detainees to degrading treatment, including stripping them, confining them in severely overcrowded cells, denying them access to toilets or other sanitation facilities, and beating them to extract confessions or information about alleged criminals. Pretrial detainees reported that they were sometimes required, under threat of abuse, to pay "cell fees," a bribe paid to prison guards to prevent further abuse.

In late October more than 100 persons were reportedly beaten after members of the Rapid Intervention Brigade arrested them in and around Maroua, in the Far North Province. The victims were detained for several days at Salack, where many of them were stripped naked, blindfolded and beaten, then held in a cell with water on its floor.

Police use of force to disperse demonstrators resulted in injuries.

Little action was taken against security forces that used excessive force in 2006 and 2005.

For example, in 2006 the Garoua High Court in the North Province prosecuted Immigration Police Commissioner Magloire Enguene for use of excessive force, which resulted in injuries during the arrest and sequestration of a citizen whose name was not mentioned in the report. The case was still pending at year's end.

Security forces physically abused and harassed journalists during the year.

Illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Chad reported that they were subjected to harsh treatment and imprisonment.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Prisons were seriously overcrowded and unsanitary, especially outside major urban areas. The government did not provide funds to improve serious deficiencies in food, health care, and sanitation, which were common in almost all prisons, including private prisons operated by traditional rulers in the north. Prisoners were kept in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons, where the number of inmates was four to five times the intended capacity. Overcrowding was exacerbated by the large number of long pretrial detentions. There were confirmed reports that government officials accused of corruption were held in separate quarters and received special treatment.

Health and medical care were almost nonexistent in prisons and detention cells located in gendarmeries and police stations. There were reports that prisoners died due to a lack of medical care.

For example, on January 5, Patrick Herve Essama and Alexandre Wamba Kamteu, two prisoners from the Yaounde Kondengui Prison died from drug poisoning and illness, respectively, after their transfer to the local hospital, according to the Ministry of Justice. An investigation concluded that the two men died due to ingesting liquid from the infirmary after it had been ransacked.

Prisoners' families were expected to provide food for their relatives in prison. Douala's New Bell Prison contained seven water taps for a reported 3,500 prisoners, contributing to poor hygiene, illness, and death.

Corruption among prison personnel was widespread. Prisoners sometimes could bribe wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom.

There were two separate prisons for women. There were also a few pretrial detention centers for women; however, women routinely were held in police and gendarmerie complexes with men, occasionally in the same cells. The secretary of state in charge of penitentiary administration acknowledged this was a serious problem. Mothers sometimes chose to be incarcerated with their children or babies while their children were very young or if they had no other child care option.

Juvenile prisoners were often incarcerated with adults, occasionally in the same cells or wards. There were credible reports that adult inmates sexually abused juvenile prisoners.

Pretrial detainees routinely were held in cells with convicted criminals.

Some high-profile prisoners were separated from other prisoners and enjoyed relatively lenient treatment.

Authorities held adult men, juveniles, and women together in temporary detention centers where detainees usually received no food, water, or medical care. 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. Detainees whose families were informed of their incarceration relied on their relatives for food and medical care.

In the North and Extreme North provinces, the government continued to permit traditional chiefs, or Lamibe, to detain persons outside the government penitentiary system, in effect creating private prisons. Many citizens turned to the Lamibe for dispute resolution. Within the palaces of the traditional chiefdoms of Rey Bouba, Gashiga, Bibemi, and Tcheboa, there were private prisons that had reputations for

serious abuse.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that detainees in temporary detention centers in Garoua were beaten or subjected to other forms of physical abuse.

There was a report that a Lamibe used law enforcement to extort money and confiscate cattle from citizens. Authorities held these citizens without access to an attorney for days or weeks, and then sent them to trial in Garoua, where the charges would routinely be dismissed. The government permitted international humanitarian organizations access to prisoners. Both the local Red Cross and the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) made infrequent, unannounced prison visits during the year. The government continued to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisons.

In 2005 the prison administrator of the Douala New Bell prison told diplomatic observers that the prison, built to hold 700 inmates, held 3,194. Of these, 2,300 were pretrial detainees who were not held separately from convicted prisoners. During a similar visit to the Yaounde Kondengui Prison, the same observers learned that the prison, built for 800 inmates, held 3,521. In 2004 a senior official estimated that 1,600 out of 1,800 inmates in Bafoussam Prison were pretrial detainees.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued to arrest and detain citizens arbitrarily.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police, the National Intelligence Service (DGRE), the gendarmerie, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the army's military security department, the army, the minister of defense, and, to a lesser extent, the Presidential Guard are responsible for internal security; the national police and gendarmerie have primary responsibility for law enforcement. The Ministry of Defense, including the gendarmerie, national police, and DGRE, are under an office of the presidency, resulting in strong presidential control of security forces. The national police include the public security force, judicial police, territorial security forces, and frontier police. In rural areas, where there is little or no police presence, the primary law enforcement body is the gendarmerie.

Police were ineffective, poorly trained, underpaid, and corrupt. Impunity was a problem.

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.

Citizens viewed police as ineffective, which frequently resulted in mob justice (see section 1.a.). Due to the continual rise in crime, police opened new stations in Yaounde and Douala.

During the year Mebe Ngo'o, the general delegate for National Security, created new mobile police units and precincts in Yaounde and Douala to improve professionalism and increase police visibility. In 2006 the Center Province purchased 150 police vehicles to improve police effectiveness. In 2005 Mebe Ngo'o activated the "police of the police," an internal affairs unit of undercover agents that had been dormant for many years. During the year the special unit investigated at least five cases, which resulted in sanctions against several police officers.

During the year Mebe Ngo'o also sanctioned eight police officers who violated laws and regulations, including those on corruption.

On January 11, Mebe Ngo'o suspended three Abong-Mbang based police officers for three

months without pay for failure to follow orders and for corruption. On September 20, he also suspended a Yaounde-based police commissioner for three months without pay for aggravated corruption pending legal action.

In 2006 courts convicted at least seven police and gendarmerie officers for human rights abuses.

In 2006 the government took actions to reform the security forces, including the police and gendarmerie. Several gendarmes and police officers completed a four-week training seminar on order preservation, with an emphasis on citizens' rights, human rights, and individual freedoms. The government also sent law enforcement personnel to attend police training at the International Law Enforcement Academy.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires police to obtain an arrest warrant except when a person is caught in the act of committing a crime; however, police often did not respect this right in practice. The law provides that detainees must be brought promptly before a magistrate; however this frequently did not occur. Police legally may detain a person in connection with a common crime for up to 24 hours and may renew the detention three times before bringing charges. While this provision was generally respected, persons reported that police occasionally violated it.

In January the Criminal Procedure Code entered into force, standardizing procedures in both the anglophone and francophone provinces of the country and tightening arrest provisions, ostensibly to combat banditry and maintain public order. The law permits detention without charge by administrative authorities such as governors and senior divisional officers for renewable periods of 15 days. The law also provides for access to counsel and family members. Persons taken into detention frequently were denied access to both legal counsel and family members. The law permits bail, and allows those arrested and held for investigation immediate access to a lawyer. The law also allows citizens the right to appeal a detention decision and the right to sue for unlawful arrest.

Police and gendarmes often arrested persons on spurious charges on Fridays at mid-day or in the afternoon. While the law provides for judicial review of an arrest within 24 hours, the courts did not convene on weekends, so individuals arrested on a Friday typically remained in detention until Monday at the earliest. Police and gendarmes made such "Friday arrests" after accepting bribes from persons who had private grievances. There were no known cases of policemen or gendarmes being sanctioned or punished for this practice. Security forces and government authorities reportedly continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, often holding them for prolonged periods without charges or trial and, at times, incommunicado. However, there were fewer cases reported than in 2006.

Police also arrested persons during unauthorized demonstrations, generally releasing them within a few hours unless they engaged in violence.

In 2006 security forces preemptively arrested approximately 70 leaders, members, and supporters of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an anglophone group the government considers illegal because it advocates secession.

There were no developments in the April 2006 case of gendarmes arresting and detaining Suzanne Binyom and Felicite Atchang for 24 hours at the request of Ernest Oloume, the ruling party deputy from the locality. Oloume told the gendarmes that the women looked suspicious; they in turn filed a complaint for unlawful arrest and detention.

There were also no developments in the September 2006 case of Conrad Mongue-Din, a lawyer who was arrested and detained by Police Commissioner Mve of the Douala judicial police office for trying to visit a client in the judicial police office.

Police arbitrarily arrested persons without warrants during neighborhood sweeps for criminal and stolen goods. Police frequently arrested persons without identification during sweeps. Citizens are required to carry identification with them at all times.

Prolonged pretrial detention was a serious problem. On occasion, persons were held incommunicado for months or years. In 2005 in Douala's New Bell Prison and Yaounde's Kondengui Prison, 5,300 of the 6,715 persons incarcerated were in pretrial detention. This high number was due to many factors, including the complexity of cases, staff shortages, and corruption. The average pretrial detention period ranged from one to five years. Longer detention periods were often linked to the loss of a file and the absence of a lawyer to follow up on the case.

In September at Bamenda prison in the North West Province, press reports indicated that 251 of the 431 inmates at the Bamenda prison in the North West Province had been awaiting trial for three to eight years.

There was no information available on Barnabe Atangana or Benoit Bilongo, who remained in pretrial detention at the end of the year after 22 years and nine years, respectively.

The law specifies that, after an investigation has concluded, juveniles should not be detained without trial for longer than three months; however, in practice the government detained juveniles for longer periods of time. An NGO reported that several juveniles were detained in the Yaounde Central Prison for between six months and one year.

In recent years there have been reports that some prisoners were kept in prison after completing their sentences or having been released under a court ruling. During a July 2006 visit to Douala, a Catholic prison chaplain told diplomatic observers that there were still many such cases. Authorities kept more than 100 prisoners in jail past their release dates due to the prisoners' inability to pay court fees or damages.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary remained highly subject to executive influence, and corruption and inefficiency remained serious problems. The court system was subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. A constitutional anomaly names the president as "first magistrate," thus "chief" of the judiciary and the theoretical arbiter of any sanctions against the judiciary, which could influence judicial action. In practice, however, the president has not filled this role. 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. However, the judiciary showed modest signs of growing independence. During the year the courts found the government liable for damages in a few human rights cases involving abuses by security officers. In November the Douala Higher Court found the government liable for approximately \$24,000 (12 million CFA francs) in damages in connection with the 2005 homicide case involving police officer Mpacko Dikoume.

The court system includes the Supreme Court, a court of appeals in each of the 10 provinces, and courts of first instance in each of the country's 58 divisions.

The legal system includes both national and customary law, and many criminal and civil cases can be tried using either one. However, criminal cases are generally tried in statutory courts, and customary court convictions involving witchcraft are automatically transferred to the statutory courts, which act as the court of first instance. The customary law, used in rural areas, is based upon the traditions of the ethnic group predominant in the region and is adjudicated by traditional authorities of that group. Customary law is deemed valid only when it is not "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience." However, many citizens in rural areas remained unaware of their rights under civil law and were taught that they must abide by customary laws. Customary law ostensibly provides for equal rights and status; however, men may limit

women's rights regarding inheritance and employment, and some traditional legal systems treat wives as the legal property of their husbands.

Customary courts served as a primary means for settling family-related civil cases, such as in matters of succession, inheritance, and child custody. Divorce cases can be brought to customary courts only if the government has not sanctioned the marriage through an official license. 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. Most traditional courts also permitted appeal of their decisions to traditional authorities of higher rank.

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. The government interpreted these guidelines broadly and sometimes used military courts to try matters concerning dissident groups who used firearms. Unlike in previous years however, military trials were not subject to irregularities and political influence.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair public hearing in which the defendant is presumed innocent. Within the past year, with the implementation of the criminal code, lawyers and the police have confirmed that persons are presumed innocent until proven guilty. There is no jury system. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. Defendants generally were allowed to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants also had access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Because appointed attorneys received little compensation, the quality of legal representation for indigent clients often was poor. The bar association and some voluntary organizations, such as the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists, offered free assistance in some cases. The Project for the Improvement of Conditions of Detention continued to engage lawyers to work on prison cases. Trials normally were public, except in cases judged by the Ministry of Justice to have political overtones or to be disruptive to social peace. In practice defendants enjoyed a presumption of innocence and exercised their right to appeal their cases.

Political bias by judges (often instructed by the government) often stopped trials or resulted in an extremely long process with extended court recesses. Many powerful political or business interests enjoyed virtual immunity from prosecution; some politically sensitive cases were settled through bribes.

Political Prisoners

There were reports of political detainees, which included anglophone citizens advocating secession through an illegal organization.

There were no developments in the case of 15 members of the secessionist group SCNC serving long prison sentences following their 1999 convictions in military trials. The prisoners maintained they were political prisoners; however, the government claimed they were imprisoned for acts of violence against government offices and officers. The government considered the SCNC an illegal organization and refused to register it as a political organization. The government permitted access to the prisoners on a regular basis by international humanitarian organizations.

On September 15, security forces preemptively arrested 11 SCNC activists in Bamendakwe, a locality of Mezam Division, in the North West Province.

During the year the government continued to detain two individuals widely considered by human rights NGOs to be political prisoners because of irregularities in their trials

and restricted access to counsel. Titus Edzoa, former minister of health and long-time aide to President Biya, and Michel Thierry Atangana, Edzoa's 1997 campaign manager, were arrested in 1997, three months after Edzoa resigned from government and launched his candidacy for president. They were convicted on charges of embezzling public funds and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

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

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

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

During the year police put the houses of SCNC officials and activists under surveillance, searched the houses of some SCNC leaders, and disrupted SCNC meetings in private residences.

An administrative authority may authorize police to conduct neighborhood sweeps without warrants. Such sweeps at times involved forced entry into homes in search of suspected criminals or stolen or illegal goods. Security forces sometimes sealed off a neighborhood, systematically searched homes, arrested persons, sometimes arbitrarily, and seized suspicious or illegal articles.

Unlike in 2005, there were no reports that security forces in Douala and Yaounde used sweeps as a pretext to loot homes and arbitrarily arrest persons for minor offenses, such as not possessing identity cards.

Citizens without ID cards were detained until their identity could be established and then released. Several complained that police arbitrarily seized electronic devices and cell phones. Some registered their complaints with the police.

There continued to be accusations, particularly in the North and Far North provinces, that traditional chiefs arbitrarily evicted persons from their land.

2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government continued to restrict these rights in practice. The government sometimes arbitrarily arrested journalists and at times reminded journalists about libel laws in an effort to warn them against printing false information or defaming individuals. Journalists, particularly broadcast journalists, at times practiced self-censorship as a result.

Individuals generally were able to criticize the government publicly and privately without being subjected to government reprisal; however, the government prohibited advocacy or public discussion of secession, which resulted in numerous arrests of SCNC members during the year. Nonetheless, the independent print media continued to report on SCNC activities.

The government published the daily newspaper the *Cameroon Tribune*. The newspaper did not report extensively on protests or political parties critical of the government,

overtly criticize the ruling party, or portray government programs in an unfavorable light.

During the year approximately 200 privately owned newspapers were published; however, most appeared irregularly, primarily due to lack of funding. Only an estimated 25 were published on a regular basis. *Mutations*, *La Nouvelle Expression*, *Le Messager*, and the newly created *La Jour* were the only privately owned newspapers published daily. Newspapers were distributed primarily in urban areas, and most continued to criticize the government and report on controversial issues, including corruption, human rights abuses, homosexuality, and economic policies.

Newspaper distribution was difficult outside of major cities, mostly due to lack of infrastructure outside of the cities and transportation issues.

In 2004 the government established a special fund to support the development of the press, particularly newspapers, and funds were disbursed to some private newspapers and radio stations. The government continued to disburse such funds during the year. According to media reports, the government awarded funding very selectively.

The government continued to control the broadcast media. Radio remained the most important medium reaching most citizens. There were approximately 70 privately owned unofficial radio stations operating in the country, three-fourths of them in Yaounde and Douala. The state-owned CRTV broadcasts on both television and radio and was the only officially recognized and fully licensed broadcaster in the country until August 30 when the government issued the first licenses to two private televisions, STV and Canal 2 International, one private radio, Sweet FM, and one cable television network, TV+. The government levied taxes to finance CRTV programming, which allowed CRTV a distinct advantage over independent broadcasters.

Nonprofit rural radio stations were required to submit an application to broadcast but were exempt from paying licensing fees. Potential commercial radio and television broadcasters must submit a licensing application and pay an application fee when the application is submitted. Once the license is issued, stations must then pay an annual licensing fee, which was expensive for some stations. Although the government did not issue new broadcast licenses until August, companies operated without them.

During the year the National Communications Council (NCC), whose members were appointed by the president, continued to review all broadcasting license applications, the first step in issuing licenses. A technical committee composed of government-appointed members – including government officials, journalists, and jurists – continued to review the NCC's decisions.

There were several low-power, rural community radio stations with extremely limited broadcast range that were funded by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and foreign countries. The government prohibited these stations from discussing politics.

The law permits broadcasting by foreign news services but requires them to partner with a national station. The BBC, Radio France International, and other foreign services broadcast in partnership with state-owned CRTV.

Television was less pervasive but more influential than print media. The five independent television stations largely avoided criticizing the government, although their news broadcasts sometimes focused on poverty, unemployment, and poor education, pointing to the role of government neglect and corruption.

Like the *Cameroon Tribune*, CRTV provided broad reporting of CPDM activities, while giving relatively little attention to the political opposition. During the year CRTV management continued to instruct staff repeatedly to ensure that government views prevailed at all times.

Security forces, usually acting under the command of local provincial government officials, reportedly continued to restrict press freedom by arresting, detaining, physically abusing, threatening, and otherwise harassing journalists.

On January 29, gendarmes raided the Ocean City Radio studio, a private radio station in Kumba, in the South Province. The gendarmes assaulted the director and several other employees before leaving the station. At the time the station was presenting a program called "20/20" which exposed corruption in the gendarmerie and poor detention conditions in gendarmerie facilities. Following a complaint filed to the gendarmerie chief by a local human rights NGO, the gendarmerie company commander apologized for his subordinates' behavior.

On April 7, the police arrested Georges Gilbert Baongla, publisher of the weekly *Le Dementi*, a Yaounde-based private newspaper, for publication of obscene materials, public contempt of morals, and contempt of decency. The charges stemmed from a March 27 report regarding an alleged homosexual scandal involving an unidentified government minister. The Yaounde prosecutor formally charged Baongla and transferred him to the Yaounde Central Prison. In May a Yaounde court gave Baongla a suspended six-month prison sentence and fined him \$1,000 (500,000 CFA francs).

According to the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists, in April 2006 Eric Motomu, editor of *The Chronicle*, was beaten unconscious by the bodyguard and driver of opposition leader John Fru Ndi. Motomu said he was treated for head and chest injuries. Earlier, Motomu had been summoned by police in Bamenda in connection with a defamation case brought against him by Fru Ndi. However, Motomu was not formally charged.

No arrests had been made by year's end in connection with the November 2006 attack by unknown intruders of Sweet FM radio presenter Agnes Taile.

The government was the largest advertiser in the country, and could choose in which media outlets to place advertising. It continued to have a certain degree of influence over media outlets.

The government prosecuted its critics in the print media through criminal libel laws. 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. Local leaders in particular abused this law to keep local journalists from reporting on corruption and abusive behavior. In 2006 various government members and senior government officials filed nine libel suits against journalists.

In August former Minister of Finance, Polycarpe Abah Abah, filed a libel suit against Peter William Mandio and Henriette Ekwe, the director and editor of *Le Front* newspaper, for publishing his name as one of the most corrupt officials in the country. In December they were found guilty and sentenced to four months in prison and a fine of \$16,000 (8 million CFA francs) each.

In 2005 the Union of Cameroonian Journalists created the Cameroon Media Council (CMC), an independent, self-regulating body of journalists aiming to promote press freedom, access to information, professionalism, and ethical reporting. The CMC, supported by the minister of communication, also had as part of its mission the goal of reviewing and disciplining media professionals and arbitrating complaints against journalists. Complaints included ethical breeches, such as the common practice of newspaper reporters and editors accepting payments from politicians and businessmen to write articles containing unsubstantiated allegations against their opponents and competitors.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. The Internet was available and used by citizens, although access was limited by cost and slow connections.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Although there were no legal restrictions on academic freedom, state security informants reportedly operated on university campuses. Professors said that participation in opposition political parties could adversely affect their professional opportunities and advancement.

During the year musical entertainers reported being harassed privately by security officials for singing songs that are derogatory to government officials.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly; however, the government restricted this right in practice.

The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or processions to notify officials in advance but does not require prior government approval of public assemblies and does not authorize the government to suppress public assemblies that it has not approved in advance. However, officials routinely have asserted that the law implicitly authorizes the government to grant or deny permission for public assembly. Consequently, the government often did not grant permits for assemblies organized by persons or groups critical of the government and repeatedly used force to suppress public assemblies for which it had not issued permits.

On numerous occasions throughout the year, authorities refused to grant the SCNC permission to hold rallies and meetings, and security forces arrested and detained some activists.

Security forces forcibly disrupted the demonstrations, meetings, and rallies of citizens, trade unions, and groups of political activists throughout the year; demonstrators were injured, arrested, and killed.

On January 20, the police arrested and detained Nfor Ngala Nfor, the national vice chairman of the illegal SCNC, and 13 other activists, for holding a press conference. The Bamenda prosecutor formally charged the 14 with felonies, namely secession, and detained them in the Bamenda prison. On March 13, the court released the 14 activists on bail, at \$2,000 each (one million CFA francs) pending trial.

On September 16, gendarmes stormed the SCNC secretariat in Bamenda, North West Province, to disrupt an unauthorized meeting. The gendarmes arrested six members, including Fidelis Chinkwo, Emmanuel Emi, Priscilla Khan, Elvis Bandzeka, and two other activists, but released them the same day.

On September 17, high school students Jean Jores Shimpe Pougou Zok and Marcel Bertrand Mvogo Awono in Abong-Mbang, East Province were shot and killed during a demonstration against a four-month absence of electricity in the town. Most eyewitnesses claimed that the senior divisional officer (prefet) and his second deputy fired the shots. The government promised an investigation.

On October 5, in the Mokolo Market in Yaounde authorities used force to quell a demonstration by vendors who were protesting the destruction of their unauthorized sidewalk booths by the Yaounde urban council. One vendor was seriously injured during

the incident.

No action was taken against security forces responsible for deaths and injuries as a result of the forcible dispersion of demonstrators. For example, in June 2006 Yaounde police dispersed a gathering from the University of Yaounde II and arrested 50 students. The students were released shortly after their arrest.

The trial continued during the year in the August 2006 case of four leaders of the Association for the Defense of Students' Interests, who were charged with rebellion and disturbance of public order.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association, but the government limited this right in practice.

The conditions for government recognition of a political party, a prerequisite for many political activities, precluded peaceful advocacy of secession. While more than 180 political parties, together with a large and growing number of civic associations, operated legally, the government continued to refuse to register the SCNC as a political party and harassed and arrested its leaders and members.

On March 14, the Sous-prefet of Yaounde III subdivision refused to allow the opposition SDF party to hold a press conference.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were a few exceptions.

Religious groups must be approved and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to function legally. Although there were no reports that the government refused to register any group, the process usually took several years, due primarily to administrative delays.

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the law; however, individuals generally were prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with another offense, such as murder. Witchcraft traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases of unknown cause.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There was one report of discrimination in Ngoundere by criminals against Christians and persons who practiced traditional indigenous religions.

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

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2007 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

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

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

Roadblocks and checkpoints manned by security forces proliferated in cities and on most highways, making road travel both time-consuming and costly. Extortion of small bribes

was commonplace at these checkpoints. Police frequently stopped travelers to check identification documents, vehicle registrations, and tax receipts as security and immigration control measures. However, there were credible reports that police arrested and beat individuals who failed to carry their identification cards as required by law.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not use it; however, some human rights monitors and political opponents who considered themselves threatened by the government left the country voluntarily and declared themselves to be in political exile.

In 2005 the government, the Nigerian High Commission to Cameroon, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary repatriation of 10,000 of the 17,000 Nigerian Fulani cattle breeders who fled their homes in 2001 to escape ethnic fighting. In 2006 a large number of Nigerians returned home.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

There were approximately 2,000 to 3,000 IDPs in the country. Thousands of people were displaced during the year due to the Bali/Bawock ethnic conflict over land disputes and as a result of an attack by the Oku tribe on the Mbessa tribe (see section 5).

In 2005 between 10,000 and 15,000 citizens in and around the Adamawa Province villages of Djohong and Ngaoui were displaced following attacks and looting by unidentified armed groups from the Central African Republic (CAR). During the year hundreds of IDPs remained.

During the year the government worked with the UNHCR to protect and assist IDPs.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system of providing protection to refugees. The government granted refugee status or asylum. In practice, the government provided protection against "refoulement," the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution.

The government also provided protection to certain individuals who did not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention and its 1967 protocol. However, some noncitizens claimed that refugee status was denied to long-term residents. At year's end the UNHCR estimated that the country provided temporary protection to approximately 41,440 refugees, of which 28,530 came from CAR.

The government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. During the year the government facilitated entry and provided assistance to some refugees from CAR and Chad.

On October 18, the joint task force against CAR and Chadian rebels disbanded. The task force included troops from the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (comprised of Cameroon, Gabon, CAR, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, and Chad), with logistical support from the French army. Despite the disbanding of this force, the country's unit continued to patrol the CAR border.

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

The law provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, dominance of the political process by the president and his party, as well as

electoral intimidation, manipulation, and fraud limited the ability of citizens to exercise this right in past elections.

Elections and Political Participation

In July 22 legislative elections the CPDM won a landslide victory with 140 out of 180 parliamentary seats and 310 out of 660 municipal councils. Observers witnessed poor supervision at the polling stations and, in some cases, lax application of the electoral law. An unnecessarily complex registration process effectively disenfranchised some voters because the government did not implement some electoral improvements previously accepted. For example, despite repeated public assurances, the government was unable to provide indelible ink – an internationally recognized safeguard against multiple voting – to many polling stations, which reduced the credibility of the electoral process.

The Supreme Court received over 130 complaints from political parties after the elections, but rejected the majority because of technicalities. However, the court ordered new elections in five constituencies for 17 parliamentary seats. On September 30, in the second round of voting the CPDM won 13 seats and the opposition four in an election which also had some irregularities and low voter turnout.

In 2004 President Biya, who has controlled the government since 1982, was re-elected with approximately 70 percent of the vote in an election widely viewed as freer and fairer than previous elections. Although the election was poorly managed and marred by irregularities, in particular in the voting registration process, most international observers agreed that it reflected the will of the voters. The Commonwealth Observer Group, however, maintained the election lacked credibility.

In December 2006 the National Elections Observatory published its assessment of the 2004 elections; the assessment cited electoral weakness in voter registration and report collection, recommended that the observatory assume control of voter registration, and called for an increased responsibility for the observatory in organizing elections. The government also passed a law establishing an independent electoral commission, although it had not been created by year's end.

Members of the Beti ethnic group, including the Bulu subgroup to which the president belongs, figured prominently in the government, civil service, and management of state-owned businesses.

The president's control over the country's administrative apparatus was extensive. The president appoints all ministers, including the prime minister, and also directly appoints the governors of each of the 10 provinces. The president has the power to appoint important lower level members of the 58 provincial administrative structures as well.

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

There were more than 180 registered political parties in the country. Fewer than 10, however, had significant levels of support, and only five had seats in the National Assembly. The ruling CPDM held an absolute majority in the National Assembly; opposition parties included the SDF, based in the anglophone provinces and some major cities. The largest of the other opposition parties were the National Union for Democracy and Progress, the Cameroon Democratic Union, and the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon. The Mouvement Progressiste won its first-ever parliamentary seat in the July elections.

The government considered the SCNC illegal because it advocates secession and authorities refused to register it as a political organization. On numerous occasions throughout the year, authorities refused to grant the SCNC permission to hold rallies and meetings. Security forces disrupted SCNC meetings, including those held in private residences. During the year security forces also preemptively arrested approximately 40 leaders, members, and supporters of the SCNC to prevent them from participating in unauthorized political meetings.

For example, on January 20, police arrested and detained 14 SCNC members for holding a press conference. The Bamenda prosecutor released all 14 on bail pending trial. On December 18, the 14 SCNC members were acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

On September 16, gendarmes raided an SCNC meeting in Bamenda, North West Province and arrested six members. All six members were released later that day.

In August 2006 SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi was accused of being responsible for violence that resulted in the death of Gregoire Diboule.

In September 2006 the Prefect of Mezam Division in the Northwest Province signed an order banning all public meetings, rallies, or gatherings of more than four persons and prohibiting access to electronic media for any SCNC official or sympathizer.

In advance of the annual celebration of Southern Cameroon "independence" on October 1, the government engaged in a campaign of closing down SCNC rallies and meetings.

Official sources reported that the government continued to hold some SCNC activists in temporary detention pending trials.

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

Pygmies were not represented in the National Assembly or the government.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's worldwide governance indicators reflected that corruption was a severe problem. The public perception was that judicial and administrative officials were open to bribes in almost all situations.

In January 2006 the government officially launched the National Agency for the Investigation of Financial Crimes to fight money laundering, corruption, and embezzlement. In March 2006 the president signed a decree creating the National Anticorruption Commission, which replaced the National Corruption Observatory. The commission is under the president's authority. Its leading mission was to monitor and evaluate the effective implementation of the government's anticorruption plan. It also gathered, centralized, and analyzed allegations and information regarding corrupt practices. Findings of the investigations conducted by the commission could lead to disciplinary or legal proceedings.

There were publicized prosecutions of government officials accused of corruption during the year. For example, the government sanctioned dozens of government employees. On December 13, the Douala and Yaounde High Courts convicted and sentenced four senior government officials, including a former minister of water and energy, to 10 to 30 years' imprisonment on corruption charges.

Although in April 2006 the National Assembly passed legislation requiring senior state administrators and managers to declare their assets after their appointment and again when they leave office, no assets had been declared by year's end.

On June 28, the Yaounde High Court sentenced Ondo Ndong to 50 years' imprisonment and damages of \$28 million (14.7 billion CFA francs), to be paid with his codefendants, the loss of his civic rights for 10 years, and the confiscation of his belongings. His 13 codefendants were sentenced to between 10 and 48 years' imprisonment and fined \$1.5 million (741 million CFA francs) each.

On September 27, the Yaounde High Court sentenced Gilles Roger Belinga, the former general manager of the Cameroon Real Estate Corporation, to 35 years in prison, a fine of \$5.4 million (2.7 billion CFA francs), the loss of his civic rights for 10 years, and the confiscation of his belongings. His nine codefendants were sentenced to between 15 and 25 years' imprisonment, fined four million dollars (two billion CFA francs), had their belongings confiscated, and lost their civic rights for 10 years.

During the year prosecution continued for the following 2006 high profile corruption cases: Joseph Edou, the general manager of Credit Foncier, a real estate funding company, and Andre Boto'o a Ngon, the former board chairman of the company and other employees; Alphonse Siyam Siwe, the former director of the Douala Port and Edouard Etonde Ekoto, the former board chairman of the Douala Port Authority.

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

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing findings on human rights cases; however, government officials repeatedly impeded the effectiveness of local human rights NGOs during the year by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, threatening violence, and using violence against NGO personnel.

The activities of virtually all of these groups were limited by a shortage of funds and trained personnel. Observers criticized the country's NGO laws for giving the government the power to deny NGOs authorization to operate and the ability to eliminate NGOs by decree.

Despite these restrictions, numerous domestic human rights NGOs operated in the country, including, among others, the National League for Human Rights, the Organization for Human Rights and Freedoms, the Association of Women against Violence, the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, and the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists. The government collaborated with domestic NGOs to learn about such issues as child labor, women's rights, and trafficking in persons and how to subsequently address them.

There were no reports that the government arrested NGO members.

The government cooperated with international governmental organizations and permitted visits by UN representatives and other organizations such as the ICRC.

While the NCHRF remained hampered by a shortage of funds, during the year it conducted a number of investigations into human rights abuses, visited prisons, and organized several human rights seminars for judicial officials, security personnel, and other government officers. Although the commission infrequently criticized the government's human rights abuses publicly, its staff intervened with government officials in specific cases of human rights abuses by security forces. During the year the NCHRF continued its efforts to stop "Friday arrests" (see section 1.d.) and sought to obtain medical attention for jailed suspects. Government officials also attended several

seminars organized by the commission. In September 2006 the president signed a decree appointing members to the commission and dismissing all incumbents except the chairman. The incumbents were appointed 15 years ago.

During the year the Ministry of Justice completed its own 2006 human rights report which was published in October.

5. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on race, language, or social status, but does prohibit discrimination based on gender and mandates that "everyone has equal rights and obligations." The government, however, did not enforce these provisions effectively. Violence and discrimination against women, trafficking in persons, discrimination against ethnic minorities, and discrimination against homosexuals were problems.

Women

The law prohibits rape, although police and the courts rarely investigated and prosecuted rape cases.

Domestic violence against women was common. While there were no reliable statistics, newspaper reports indicated that the problem was widespread. A 2005 survey cited by the *Cameroon Tribune* during the year indicated that 39 percent of women living with a man (married or unmarried) were victims of physical violence and 28 percent were victims of psychological violence.

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence. While assault is prohibited and is punishable by prison terms and fines, the government did not effectively enforce it in cases of assault on women. Women's rights advocates asserted that the law does not impose effective penalties against men who commit acts of domestic violence. Spousal abuse is not a legal ground for divorce. In cases of sexual assault, a victim's family or village often imposed direct, summary punishment on the suspected perpetrator through extralegal means, ranging from destruction of property to beating.

On March 2, the government, in cooperation with the United Nations Fund for Women, launched the Fund to Combat Gender-Based Violence.

In 2006 breast ironing emerged as another form of violence against women, practiced in an effort to protect prematurely well-developed young girls from predatory older men. NGOs lead public awareness campaigns to combat this practice during the year.

While the law prohibits prostitution, it was tolerated. Prostitution was practiced predominantly in urban areas and places frequented by tourists.

On June 4, the government signed the Anti-Sex Tourism Charter, which provides ethical guidelines for the tourism industry.

While the law prohibits sexual harassment, very few cases were reported or prosecuted during the year. The government did not conduct any public education campaigns on the subject and there were no statistics available on its occurrence.

Despite constitutional provisions recognizing women's rights, women did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. Some points of civil law were prejudicial to women.

The law allows a husband to oppose his wife's right to work in a separate profession if the protest is made in the interest of the household and the family; a husband may also end his wife's commercial activity by notifying the clerk of the commerce tribunal of his opposition based upon the family's interest.

Customary law is far more discriminatory against women, since in many regions a woman traditionally was regarded as the property of her husband. Because of the importance attached to customs and traditions, civil laws protecting women often are not respected. In the customary law of some ethnic groups, husbands not only maintain complete control over family property, but also can divorce their wives in a traditional court without being required to provide either verifiable justification or alimony. Polygyny is permitted by law and tradition. In cases of divorce, the husband's wishes determine the custody of children over the age of six. While a man may be convicted of adultery only if the sexual act takes place in his home, a woman may be convicted without respect to venue.

Traditional law normally governs the extent to which a woman may inherit from her husband in the absence of a will, and traditions varied from group to group. In many traditional societies, customs grant greater authority and benefit to male heirs than to female heirs. Women were also forced to marry and in some regions parents could, and did, give girls away in marriage without the bride's consent. Once a husband, who could be many years older than his bride, paid his wife's parents a dowry, the girl was considered the husband's property. When a married man died, his widow often was unable to collect any inheritance, since she herself was considered part of the man's property. Often the widow was forced to marry one of the deceased husband's brothers. If she refused, she had to repay the bride price in full and leave the family compound. In the northern provinces, some Lamibe reportedly prevented their wives and concubines from leaving the palace. The lack of a national legal code covering such family issues often left women defenseless against these male-oriented customs.

Children

During the year the government made some efforts to protect children's rights and welfare, including participation in seminars on children's rights. During the year the minister of social affairs made statements and presented government action plans regarding the improvement of the condition for children.

The law provides for a child's right to education, and schooling was mandatory through the age of 14 and free in public primary schools. Since parents had to pay uniform and book fees for primary school, and because tuition and other fees for secondary education remained costly, education was largely unaffordable for many children. The government took measures during the year to improve access to schools, such as the construction of new classrooms, recruitment of new teachers, and provision of water fountains.

On March 12, the Ministry of Basic Education signed a renewable three-year partnership agreement of three million dollars (1.5 billion CFA francs) with the NGO Plan International to construct and renovate schools, improve teacher competency, and provide instructional materials.

According to 2005 government statistics, 72.2 percent of girls between the ages of six and 14 were enrolled in school, compared to 81.3 percent of boys in the same age group. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the secondary school enrollment ratio (gross) was 36 percent for boys and 29 percent for girls. The low education rate continued to be attributed to high costs, socio-cultural prejudices, early marriage, sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancy, and domestic chores.

The government provided basic medical care through local clinics and hospitals as well as through a limited number of school doctors. Boys and girls had equal access to state-provided medical care.

The exact extent of familial child abuse was not known, although children's rights organizations targeted the problem. Newspaper reports often cited children as victims of kidnapping, mutilation, and even infanticide. There were several credible stories of mothers (usually young, unemployed, and unmarried) abandoning their newborns in streets, garbage cans, and pit toilets.

The law does not prohibit FGM, and it was not practiced widely; however, FGM continued to be practiced in isolated areas in three of the 10 provinces, including some areas of Far North, Eastern, and Southwest provinces.

Internal migration contributed to the spread of FGM to different parts of the country. The majority of FGM procedures were clitorectomies. The severest form of FGM, infibulation, was performed in the Kajifu region of the Southwest Province. FGM usually was practiced on infants and preadolescent girls. Public health centers in areas where FGM is frequently practiced counseled women about the harmful consequences of FGM; however, the government did not prosecute any persons charged with performing FGM. The Association of Women Against Violence continued to conduct a program in Maroua to assist victims of FGM and their families and to educate local populations.

On June 9-10, the International Federation of Red Cross Societies, in association with the Cameroon Red Cross, organized a seminar for perpetrators and victims of FGM, and educated them on the major risks and consequences of the practice.

While the minimum legal age for a woman to marry is 15, many families facilitated the marriage of young girls by the age of 12. Often these girls are not sent to school and had no education or means to support themselves. Early marriage was prevalent in the northern provinces of Far North, Adamawa, and North, but was particularly characteristic of the remote Far North Province, where many women as young as nine faced severe health risks from pregnancies. There were no statistics on the prevalence of child marriage.

Although exact numbers were unavailable, the country had a significant number of displaced or street children, most of whom resided in urban areas such as Yaounde and Douala. On May 14, the minister of social affairs launched an operation to rescue 150 children from the Yaounde streets and take them back to their families.

Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit all forms of trafficking in persons and there were reports that persons were trafficked to, from, and within the country. The law criminalizes child trafficking and slavery and prohibits slavery, prostitution, forced labor, and other crimes related to trafficking in persons.

A 2000 International Labor Organization (ILO) study conducted in Yaounde, Douala, and Bamenda, reported that trafficking accounted for 84 percent of child laborers in those three cities. Local NGOs believed this statistic was still accurate. In most cases, intermediaries presented themselves as businessmen, approaching parents with large families or custodians of orphans and promising to assist the child with education or professional training. The intermediary paid parents an average of \$12 (6,000 CFA francs) before transporting the child to a city where the intermediary would subject the child to forced labor with little remuneration. In four out of 10 cases, the child was a foreigner transported to the country for labor. The report also indicated that the country was a transit country for regional traffickers, who transported children between Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of the Congo, and the CAR for indentured or domestic servitude, farm labor, and sexual exploitation. Citizens also were trafficked to South Africa.

Women and children traditionally have faced the greatest risk of trafficking and have been trafficked most often for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Most trafficking in children occurred within the country's borders, while most trafficked women were transported out of the country. According to anecdotal evidence from the NCHRF, women often were "hired" into hubs of prostitution, often in Europe. The method for trafficking women usually involved a marriage proposition by a foreign businessman. The woman was inducted into servitude upon arrival at a foreign destination. Girls were internally trafficked from the Adamawa, North, Far North, and Northwest provinces to Douala and Yaounde to work as domestic servants, street vendors, or prostitutes.

Slavery is illegal in the country and the law provides punishment of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment for persons accused of both slavery and trafficking in persons. However, there were credible reports of hereditary servitude by former slaves in some chiefdoms in the North Province. For example, there were reports that the Lamido (the traditional Muslim chief) of Rey Bouba in the North Province had hereditary servants inside his compound. Although the Lamido was replaced by his son in 2004, these hereditary servants have remained (they are reportedly free to leave but choose not to).

The law provides that any person who engages in crimes often associated with trafficking in persons shall be punished by prison terms of between six months and 20 years.

Although statistics were unavailable because traffickers could be prosecuted under various sections of the penal code, the government reportedly prosecuted trafficking cases during the year.

The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance was primarily responsible for fighting trafficking; however, the ministry was severely underfunded.

The government continued to fight trafficking through the use of an interagency committee and a program to find and return trafficked children. In addition, the government cooperated with Gabon, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin in fighting trafficking through the exchange of information and preparation of common legislation on trafficking.

The government continued to work with local and international NGOs to provide temporary shelter and assistance to victims of trafficking. Catholic Relief Services worked to combat corruption in local schools that led to child prostitution. UNICEF was also actively engaged in combating girls' prostitution throughout the year.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides certain rights to persons with disabilities, including access to public buildings, medical treatment, and education, and the government was obliged to provide part of the educational expense of persons with disabilities, to employ them where possible, and to provide them with public assistance when necessary. Access to public secondary education is free for persons with disabilities and children born of poor parents with disabilities. In practice, there were few facilities for persons with disabilities and little public assistance; lack of facilities and care for persons with mental disabilities was particularly acute. Society largely tended to treat those with disabilities as outcasts, and many felt that providing assistance was the responsibility of churches or foreign NGOs. On June 20, during the second edition of the National Solidarity Action Day, the Ministry of Social Affairs sponsored an exhibition at the National Museum that allowed persons with disabilities to exhibit their expertise. For example, blind persons exhibited woven chairs.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population consists of more than 200 ethnic groups, among which there were frequent and credible allegations of discrimination. Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Members of the president's Beti/Bulu ethnic group from southern parts of the country held key positions and were disproportionately represented in government, state-owned businesses, the security forces, and the ruling CPDM party. For example, the minister of defense, the delegate general for national security, and the minister of communication were all from the South Province, the former two being from the same division as the president.

There were reports during the year that Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, a wealthy businessman with ties to the government, deceived M'Bororo women into sexual

situations, forcibly displaced the M'Bororo and seized their land and cattle, and used his money and influence with the government to order the beating and false imprisonment of members of the M'Bororo. There were unconfirmed reports during the year concerning the whereabouts of some M'Bororo men who protested Danpullo's actions in front of a foreign embassy.

According to the governor of Adamawa Province, during the year bandits targeted M'Bororo cattle herders, kidnapping them and demanding ransom due to the group's perceived wealth.

On February 13, police arrested two persons over a land dispute between the Oku and the Mbessa tribes in both Bui and Boyo divisions in the North West Province. The Bui Oku burned dozens of Mbessa houses, displacing more than 500 persons. The Oku claimed that the Mbessa were farming on their land. They also accused them of having caught and raped Oku women, a charge disputed by local authorities. The government established a commission to demarcate the borders between the two divisions.

Northern areas of the country continued to suffer from ethnic tensions between the Fulani (or Peuhl) and the Kirdi. The Kirdi remained socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged relative to the Fulani in the three northern provinces. Traditional Fulani rulers, called Lamibe (for plural and Lamido for singular), continued to wield great power over their subjects, often including Kirdi, sometimes subjecting them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of slavery were reported, largely Fulani enslavement of Kirdi.

Natives of the North West and South West provinces tended to support the opposition party SDF and consequently suffered disproportionately from human rights abuses committed by the government and its security forces. The anglophone community was underrepresented in the public sector. Although citizens in certain francophone areas – the East, Far North, North, and Adamawa provinces – voiced similar complaints about under-representation and government neglect, anglophones said they generally believed that they had not received a fair share of public sector goods and services within their two provinces. Some residents of the anglophone region sought greater freedom, equality of opportunity, and better government by regaining regional autonomy rather than through national political reform, and have formed several quasi-political organizations in pursuit of their goals.

Police and gendarmes subjected illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Chad to harsh treatment and imprisonment and often targeted Nigerian and Chadian communities when seeking to identify illegal immigrants. During raids, members of the security forces extorted money from those who did not have regular residence permits or who did not have valid receipts for store merchandise. Some members of the country's large community of Nigerian immigrants complained of discrimination and abuse by government officials. Authorities repeatedly announced crackdowns on undocumented Nigerian immigrants, and illegal immigrants were subject to harassment on some occasions, although at a lower level than in previous years.

Indigenous People

Approximately 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, Bakola, and Bagyeli (Pygmies) primarily resided (and were the earliest known inhabitants) in the forested areas of the South and East provinces. While no legal discrimination exists, other groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices. Baka reportedly continued to complain that the forests they inhabit were being logged without fair compensation. Some observers believed that sustained logging was destroying the Baka's unique, forest-oriented belief system, forcing them to adapt their traditional social and economic systems to a more rigid modern society similar to their Bantu neighbors.

Local Baka along the path of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline continued to complain that they were not compensated fairly for their land or had been cheated by persons posing

as Baka representatives. In June 2006 the committee in charge of the follow-up on the pipeline organized an evaluation seminar to determine compensation for the Bakola and Bagyeli. The committee agreed that despite improved access to education and healthcare, much remained to be done to improve living conditions for the pygmies. No further developments were reported during the year.

An estimated 95 percent of Baka did not have national identity cards; most Baka could not afford to provide the necessary documentation to obtain national identity cards, which were required to vote in national elections. In 2004 Plan International and another NGO launched a program to educate Bakas about their political rights, which included the construction of a communal radio in the region of Abong-Mbang in Upper Nyong Division, East Province.

In 2005 the Ministry of Social Affairs launched the Project to Support the Economic and Social Development of Bakas in South Province. The mission of the three-year project was to allow the issuance of birth certificates and national identity cards to 2,300 Bakas, as well as to help register hundreds of students in school.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Homosexual activity is illegal, with a possible prison sentence of six months to five years and a possible fine ranging from approximately \$40 to \$400 (20,000 to 200,000 CFA francs). While prosecution under this law was rare, homosexuals suffered from harassment and extortion by law enforcement officials. In addition, false allegations of homosexuality were used to harass enemies or to extort money.

On August 29, gendarmes arrested and detained three young homosexuals in the Douala neighborhood of Bonapriso after neighbors called the gendarmes to report a fight over a sexual transaction. The three were scheduled for trial on November 7 and the trial continued at year's end.

In October the Bonanjo High Court refused to release six Douala men held in New Bell Prison on charges of homosexuality. The Douala High Court formally charged them with homosexuality and the trial was pending at year's end.

In June 2006 the administration of the Douala-based Eyengue Nkongo College, a private high school, expelled 34 students (including 12 women), alleging they were homosexuals. One female student was arrested upon her expulsion. One woman who lived near the school and two former schoolmates were also arrested. On July 7, the Douala First Instance Court released them after giving them a suspended three-year prison term and a fine of \$50 (25,000 CFA francs) on homosexuality charges.

6. Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join trade unions. However, the government imposed numerous restrictions. 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, even closely related, sectors.

The law requires that unions register with the government, permitting groups of no less than 20 workers to organize a union by submitting a constitution, bylaws, and nonconviction certifications for each founding member. The law provides for prison sentences and fines for workers who form a union and carry out union activities without registration. Government officials stated that the government provided union certification within one month of application. However, independent unions, especially in the public sector, have found it difficult to register. On November 28, police disrupted a demonstration by the Central Union for Public Service Employees in front of

the national assembly. The government considered the demonstration illegal because it had not received formal legal recognition. The government also alleged that the union did not follow the regulations governing public gatherings.

Registered unions were subject to government interference. The government chose the unions with which it would bargain; some independent unions accused the government of creating small nonrepresentative unions amenable to government positions and with which it could negotiate more easily. Some sections of labor law have no force or effect because the presidency had not issued implementing decrees.

The constitution and law prohibit antiunion discrimination and employers guilty of such discrimination were subject to fines of up to approximately \$2,000 (one million CFA francs). However, employers found guilty were not required to compensate the workers for discrimination or to reinstate fired workers. The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance did not report any complaints of antiunion discrimination during the year, although there were credible press reports of union leader harassment.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

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. There are no export processing zones. On March 15, the minister of labor, the hydro-carbon employees' union, and the hydro-carbon employers' organization signed a collective bargaining convention in the hydro-carbon sector. In October the government and the Yaounde press resumed negotiations to finalize a convention that would govern the press sector. Negotiations were ongoing at year's end.

When labor disputes arose, the government chose the labor union with which it would negotiate, selectively excluding some labor representatives. Once agreements were negotiated, there was no mechanism to enforce implementation; some agreements between the government and labor unions were ignored by the government.

The labor code explicitly recognizes workers' right to strike, but only after mandatory arbitration, and workers exercised this right during the year. Arbitration decisions are legally binding, but often unenforceable because the parties refused to cooperate. It was not uncommon for such decisions to be overturned or simply ignored by the government or employers. The provision of the law allowing persons to strike does not apply to civil servants, employees of the penitentiary system, or workers responsible for national security. Instead of strikes, civil servants were required to negotiate grievances directly with the minister of the appropriate department in addition to the minister of labor.

In early January wardens of the Yaounde Central Prison conducted a sit-in strike over a salary dispute, which subsequently spread to other prisons, including Douala and Bafoussam. The strike erupted into violence when prisoners and detainees rebelled. On January 2, the deputy prime minister and minister of justice ordered the arrest and detention of 71 strikers who were held for 11 days under harsh conditions at the Secretariat of State for Defense. On January 13, the strikers were released pending disciplinary and legal action against them.

In March workers of the ailing national airlines Camair, went on strike to demand guarantees for their future. In October nurses from government health facilities went on strike to demand that the government pay the benefits it had promised to give them one year earlier. During the same time period, newly trained primary education teachers conducted a strike to demand more transparency in the recruitment of those who would be integrated in the public service.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit forced or compulsory labor, including by children;

however, there were reports that such practices occurred. Authorities continued to allow prison inmates to be contracted out to private employers or used as communal labor for municipal public works. Money generated from these activities was usually pocketed by prison administrators and not given to detainees.

Hereditary servitude occurred in the Northern provinces.

In the South and East provinces, some Baka, including children, continued to be subjected to unfair and exploitative labor practices by landowners, including work on the landowners' farms during harvest seasons without payment.

The government expressly prohibits forced and compulsory labor by children, but these practices occurred.

d. 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; however, child labor remained a problem. The government specifically prohibits forced and compulsory labor by children, but there were reports that it occurred in practice.

The law sets a minimum age of 14 for child employment, which is inconsistent with the age for completing educational requirements.

The law also bans night work and enumerates tasks that children under the age of 18 cannot legally perform. These included moving heavy objects, dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, and prostitution. The law also states that a child's workday cannot exceed eight hours. Employers were required to train children between the ages of 14 and 18, and work contracts must contain a training provision for minors. The prohibition against night work was not effectively enforced.

Child labor existed chiefly in urban areas and in the informal sector such as street vending, car washing, agricultural work, and domestic service. Many urban street vendors were less than 14 years of age. Children worked as household help, and some children were involved in prostitution. In the north there were credible reports that children from needy homes were placed with other families to do household work for pay. In Yaounde, Douala, and Bamenda, the ILO estimated that 40 percent of employed children were girls, of whom 7 percent were less than 12 years of age, and 60 percent had dropped out of primary school.

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

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

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance were responsible for enforcing existing child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses; however, the government did not allocate sufficient resources to support an effective inspection program. Moreover, the legal prohibitions do not include family chores, which in many instances were beyond a child's capacity. In 2005 the government employed 58 general labor inspectors to investigate child labor cases.

The ILO continued to work with specific contact persons in various ministries and agencies involved in antitrafficking activities; it also conducted nationwide investigations and cooperated with local organizations.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage was approximately \$47 (23,514 CFA francs) per month and was applicable in all sectors. The minimum wage did not provide for a decent standard of living for an average worker and family. The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance was responsible for enforcing the minimum wage nationally.

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

The government sets health and safety standards. Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance inspectors and occupational health physicians were responsible for monitoring these standards; however, they lacked the resources for a comprehensive inspection program. The law does not provide workers with the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their continued employment.
