

United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Cameroon: Information on Ambazonia, Cameroon Democratic Party, Social Democratic Front (SDF), and Anti-Gang [Brigade]

Query:

Please provide information on the following Cameroonian organizations: Ambazonia, Cameroon Democratic Party, Social Democratic Front, and Anti-Gang [Brigade], such as information about the formation, purpose, membership, composition, current status and activities, and current relationship to the ruling party in Cameroon of each organization. Also, please indicate if there is any information that any of these organizations were implicated in the persecution of others during the period of 1989-1992.

Response:

AMBAZONIA

Ambazonia is the name of a Cameroonian organization that seeks independence for Southern Cameroons, i.e., the Anglophone North West [Nord-Ouest] and South West [Sud-Ouest] provinces of the Republic of Cameroon that were known under colonial rule as British Southern Cameroons. It is also the name used by some militant elements of the Anglophone movement in Cameroon for a new nation that would result from the dissolution of the 1961 union of the Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon and the creation of a new independent state (Krieger 1994, 617; Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002).

According to Cameroon specialist Milton Krieger, the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) that gathered 5,000 people at the city of Buea in Cameroon in April 1993 for the first All-Anglophone Conference, included moderates who sought a return to the federal structure that had operated between 1961 and 1972, and militants who sought secession and an independent state of Ambazonia (Krieger 1994, 616-617). The more mainstream Social Democratic Front (SDF), led by John Fru Ndi, distanced itself from the CAM and sought decentralization and devolution of powers to the regions rather than independence for the Anglophone provinces (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 159; Krieger 1994, 616-617).

The website of a group called the Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration, which states its goal is "to gain control of the colonized territory of the Southern Cameroons," provides information on the goals, objectives, strategies, and grievances of those seeking independence for the

Anglophone provinces of Cameroon (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002). Regarding the name Ambazonia, they note:

"The word Ambazonia comes from the two words 'Ambas' (the coastal peoples of Southern Cameroons) and 'Zone'. The word was reportedly coined by the late Professor Bernard Fonlon as an alternative appellation to the Southern Cameroons to avoid confusion with the South Province of La Republique du Cameroun. This appellation was later adopted by one of the groups that has consistently demanded the independence of the Southern Cameroons from as far back as 1985. The Ambazonia group was initially reluctant to come under the SCPC [Southern Cameroons Peoples Conference] (formerly AAC [All-Anglophone Conference]) umbrella, when the SCPC agenda still pushed for a return to the 1961 federal structure. Ambazonia is currently under the SCPC umbrella and strongly supports the push for Southern Cameroons independence" (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002).

According to the Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration, the "Southern Cameroons Peoples Conference (SCPC) is the umbrella organization for all groups fighting for Southern Cameroons independence. The strongest of the groups within the SCPC umbrella are CAM [Cameroon Anglophone Movement], Ambazonia, the Southern Cameroons Youth League [SCYL], and the Free West Cameroon Movement" (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002). In response to a question whether the SCPC was buying weapons to engage in armed struggle for independence for Southern Cameroons, the website states: "We have never advocated violence" (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002). The statement acknowledges, "there are some who see Southern Cameroons independence as ours by right and [who] prefer that we take up arms and then declare our independence. Unfortunately the SCPC does not believe this is the right approach, and fortunately for us, the Southern Cameroonians in favor of the violent approach are in the minority" (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002).

According to the Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration, "On December 30, 1999, the country declared its independence from La Republique du Cameroun and is currently working to establish effective control over its territories. The ruling authority in the country is the British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration, created in Washington, DC on June 17, 2001, from a coalition of various liberation movements including the SCNC [Southern Cameroon National Council], SCARM [Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement] and Ambazonia" (Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration 2002).

CAMEROON DEMOCRATIC PARTY

There does not appear to be a party called Cameroon Democratic Party, though there is a Cameroonian Party of Democrats (Parti des Democratres Camerounais, PDC), as well as more than twenty parties with some version of "democrat" or "democracy" in their name. "The PDC is Cameroon's member of the Christian Democratic International [a global network of Christian Democratic parties]. One of its leaders, Louis Tobie Mbida, was instrumental in launching an antigovernment coalition, the National Convention of the Cameroonian Opposition (Convention Nationale de l'Opposition Camerounaise [CNOC], in early 1992" (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 160). PDC leaders include Adalbert Atangana Mbarga (President), Louis-Tobie Mbida, and Gaston Bikele Ekami (Secretary General) (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 160).

ANTI-GANG [BRIGADE]

In its 2000 annual report, Amnesty International highlighted significant human rights abuses committed by an anti-gang brigade that appears to have been formed in 1998 to combat armed robberies in northern Cameroon:

"Extrajudicial executions of criminal suspects in North [Nord], Far-North [Extrême-Nord] and Adamawa [Adamaoua] Provinces continued during operations to combat armed robbery by a joint unit of the army and gendarmerie (the paramilitary police), known as the brigade anti-gang. Since March 1998, when the unit was deployed, some 700 people were reported to have been extrajudicially executed. In late April or early May 1999, 15 people were reported to have been extrajudicially executed by the brigade anti-gang on the road to Kossa, north of Maroua, Far-North [Extrême-Nord] Province, and their bodies abandoned by the roadside. While killings were reported to have continued throughout 1999, the practice of abandoning unburied bodies decreased and it became more difficult to establish the numbers killed. The fate of Alioum Aminou, a photographer who had distributed photographs of victims of extrajudicial executions, remained unknown. He had been arrested by the brigade anti-gang in October 1998 in Maroua" (AI 2000).

"Members of a non-governmental organization, the Mouvement pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des libertés (MDDHL), Movement for the Defence of Human Rights and Liberties, were repeatedly threatened because of their exposure of extrajudicial executions by the brigade anti-gang" (AI 2000).

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who visited Cameroon in May 1999, reported on the activities of the anti-gang brigade in Maroua:

"Before his mission...and when in Maroua, the Special Rapporteur received information about a special anti-gang unit led by a Colonel Pom which is responsible for combating the armed highway robbers who attack, rob and kill travelers in the north of the country. The anti-gang unit is apparently arbitrarily detaining, torturing and summarily executing people suspected of being highway robbers or of having information about highway robbers. In certain cases, there also seem to be a settling of personal scores and false denunciations; according to the information, the anti-gang units show little concern for investigations and lack of evidence. The special unit was reportedly sent to the Nord [North] and Extrême-Nord [Far-North] provinces in March 1998, composed of some 40 members of the army and the gendarmerie, dressed in civilian clothing and heavily armed; it is active in the three northernmost provinces. The unit allegedly acts outside the law and with total impunity. Moreover, there appears to be a climate of fear in the region, which explains the fact that relatives of victims do not dare complain for fear of reprisals. The regional governor and the military commander of the Extrême-Nord [Far-North] region have reportedly stated on several occasions that they have no authority over Colonel Pom and his men. The staff of the main NGO at Maroua, which collects information on the unit's exactions, have allegedly been subjected to threats and intimidation by anti-gang personnel on several occasions" (UN 11 Nov 1999).

"According to the Secretary of State for National Defence with responsibility for the gendarmerie, the activities of the Maroua anti-gang unit, which belongs to the so-called 'ministerial reserve' or the multi-disciplinary gendarmerie intervention group (GPIG), is [sic], although under his administrative authority, supervised directly by the Minister of State for Defence and the President

of Cameroon. This 'ministerial reserve', based in Yaoundé, has the role of reinforcing the forces of law and order when public disturbances outstrip local capacity, as is the case in the north of the country because of the presence of the highway robbers" (UN 11 Nov 1999).

A Danish Immigration Service (DIS) fact-finding mission to Cameroon, which visited the country in early 2001, compared the anti-gang brigade to the Commandement Operationnel (CO), "a particularly notorious police corps":

"According to Kanga [a human rights leader], the anti-gang unit was not identical with the CO. The anti-gang unit, which was part of the gendarmerie, operated outside the law as did the CO, but, unlike the CO, was a permanent unit. The CO had been established on a temporary basis to reinforce efforts against organised and serious crime. The anti-gang unit, which was controlled directly by the President, did not need to record those it detained. Its head was regarded as a sort of deputy minister who reported directly to the President. Kanga explained that the anti-gang unit had been set up several years ago, and that it was the head of that force who was in practice responsible for the arrest of political prisoners. Former Minister for Public Health Titus Edzoa was currently being held by the anti-gang unit and thus not in a normal prison" (DIS Feb 2001).

In a March 2000 statement to the United Kingdom Parliament, Peter Hain, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, reported:

"There is widespread use of torture and detention without charge [in Cameroon]. A special Government unit, the Brigade Anti-Gang, is responsible for hundreds of extra-judicial killings in the north—where there should have been another trial of 76 north-west detainees, who have been detained without charge for two years, and of whom seven have died in detention" (UK Parliament 14 Mar 2000).

According to a recent United Kingdom Home Office report, the anti-gang unit has been responsible for a large number of extrajudicial killings since 1998:

"Credible reports by the press and the Maroua-based Movement for the Defence of Human Rights and Liberties [MDDHL or MDHRTL], describe a large but undetermined number of extrajudicial killings perpetrated by a special anti-gang gendarmerie unit, known as 'Operation Octagon', tasked with combating highwaymen. This unit was created under the direct authority of the Minister of Defence and operates outside the normal chain of command for law and order units. While some armed suspects were killed in firefights with security forces, there were credible reports that others caught in dragnet operations were executed summarily. Families of the deceased and human rights NGOs have accused the head of this unit, Colonel Pom, of extrajudicial killings of civilians. The MDHRTL estimates that up to 1,000 persons have been killed since the beginning of 1998" (IND Apr 2002).

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT (SDF)

Reportedly, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) is "by far the largest and most significant opposition party [to the ruling Democratic Rally of the Cameroon People (Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais, RPDC)] in Cameroon" (DIS Feb 2001). The SDF was formed in March 1990 in the town of Bamenda in western Cameroon. John Fru Ndi, an Anglophone bookstore proprietor who had run for parliament as a member of President Biya's ruling party, the Cameroon People's

Democratic Movement (CPDM), in 1988, made the call for a new party. In May 1990, government forces fired on a large but peaceful SDF rally and killed six young Cameroonians. The killings generated public outrage that led to strikes, rallies and public boycotts of the regime known as *villes morts*/ghost towns (Krieger 1994, 608-610).

The Biya regime accepted party pluralism in December 1990, when the National Assembly amended the constitution to allow for a multi-party system. Some 50 political parties were formed following this political opening. But the opening of the political process was accompanied by repression in response to growing public opposition to the incumbent regime (Krieger 1994, 608-610).

Legislative elections were held in March 1992, but these were boycotted by the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF). In presidential elections held in October 1992, Biya was re-elected with 39.9 percent of the vote. John Fru Ndi of the SDF won 35.9 percent and Bello Bouba Maigari of the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) won 19.2 percent. Fru Ndi protested the results and was arrested. In the presidential elections, Fru Ndi won 68 percent of the votes in two populous Francophone provinces, Littoral and West [Ouest], demonstrating support beyond his Anglophone base. He also won as much as 39 percent of the votes in the Biya regime's core area, Mfoundi (Yaoundé), as opposed to Biya's 52 percent. Fru Ndi fared poorly, however, in the three northern Muslim provinces, which remained a stronghold of the UNDP (Krieger 1994, 614-615).

While the SDF extended its influence beyond the Anglophone North West [Nord-Ouest] and South West [Sud-Ouest] provinces, it "remained an Anglophone force, and was far more popular in the North West than the South West province," according to Milton Krieger, winning 86 percent of votes in the former and only 52 percent in the latter province (Krieger 1994, 612). Internal divisions in the mid- and late-1990s also weakened the party. In May 1994, "(then) Secretary General Assanga was dismissed by the party's disciplinary council for making approaches to the government on possible SDF participation in a government of national unity" (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 159). In July 1998, "the SDF suffered its most traumatic infighting since 1995, as 10 of the parties' 43 legislators resigned from the party to protest Fru Ndi's leadership, which they reportedly characterized as □authoritarian.' Subsequently, Fru Ndi ousted Souleimane Mahamad, theretofore SDF Vice-Chairman, in October after Mahamad convened an extraordinary Anti-Fru Ndi forum" (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 159).

In legislative elections held in May 1997, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) won 109 seats, the SDF 43 seats, and the UNDP 13 seats. The opposition parties protested and called for the elections to be annulled. Opposition leaders were detained and charged with inciting revolt. "In late March 1997," Amnesty International reported, "seven weeks before the elections, violence occurred in the English-speaking North-West [Nord-Ouest] Province, a stronghold of opposition. This resulted in the arrest of between two and three hundred opposition supporters, predominantly of the SDF" (AI 16 Sep 1997).

The main opposition parties□the SDF, UNDP and the Democratic Union of Cameroon (UDC)□boycotted presidential elections, held in October 1997. Biya won with 92 percent of the vote. In January 1998, a government of national unity was formed that included the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), the UNDP and smaller parties (POLITICAL HANDBOOK OF THE WORLD 1999, 159).

SDF party members have been major targets of human rights abuses carried out by the Biya regime. In a 1997 report on human rights in Cameroon, Amnesty International stated:

"Hundreds of critics and opponents of the government, in particular members and supporters of opposition political parties, journalists, human rights activists and students, have been harassed and assaulted, arrested and imprisoned. Torture and ill-treatment by the security forces of both political detainees and common-law prisoners is routine. Some victims have died as a result of injuries inflicted while in custody" (AI Sep 1997).

The UN Special Rapporteur to Cameroon in his 1999 report stated that he had received allegations "about arrest and ill-treatment of a number of members of opposition parties during the presidential elections in October 1992 and 1997 and the general elections of March 1992 and May 1997 which brought the Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais (RPDC) to power. Followers of the two main opposition parties in the two English-speaking provinces of the Nord-Ouest [North-West] and Sud-Ouest [South-West] and the Extrême-Nord [Far-North] province, namely the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès (UNDP) are said to have been particularly targeted by the mass arrests and ill-treatment" (UN 11 Nov 1999).

Human rights abuses directed against the SDF and its members have continued. The U.S. Department of State in its 2001 country report on human rights in Cameroon highlighted human rights violations directed against the party and its members. In April 2001, 15 SDF party members were arrested during a demonstration and accused of participating in an illegal march. They were later released for lack of evidence. According to the report, "Police detained SDF leader John Fru Ndi on several occasions to prevent him from reaching the city to join in the marches." In January 2001, security forces dispersed an opposition demonstration that was protesting a new National Election Observatory that would supervise elections. The demonstration was also attacked by a ruling party-affiliated youth organization. John Fru Ndi and twenty SDF supporters were detained along with leaders of other parties (USDOS 4 Mar 2002).

The report also points to restrictions on the freedom of the SDF to organize politically and use the media to broadcast their views:

"CRTV television and radio programming include a weekly program, Expression Directe, which ostensibly fulfills the Government's legal obligation to provide an opportunity for all political parties represented in the National Assembly to present their views. However, CRTV continued to restrict the opposition SDF party's freedom of speech through that program, occasionally censoring and significantly shortening proposed SDF programming (USDOS 4 Mar 2002).

In a telephone interview in October 2002, a Cameroon specialist at Western Washington University stated that divisions between Francophone and Anglophone political forces appeared to have grown deeper. He said that among Anglophones the momentum for separatism seems to be growing and that separatist organizations are gaining ground at the expense of the more moderate SDF. Violations of human rights against both SDF and SCNC members and supporters—mainly consisting of harassment—continue (Professor of Liberal Studies 3 Oct 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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