



Amnesty International Report 2015/16 - Cameroon

Publisher [Amnesty International](#)

Publication Date 24 February 2016

Cite as Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2015/16 - Cameroon*, 24 February 2016, available at:
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/56d05b6b6.html> [accessed 2 January 2017]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Republic of Cameroon

Head of state: **Paul Biya**

Head of government: **Philémon Yang**

The armed group Boko Haram disrupted the lives of thousands of people in northern Cameroon, committing crimes under international law including unlawful killings, attacks against civilian objects, misappropriation of property and assets, looting and abductions. In an attempt to prevent Boko Haram from capturing territory, security forces carried out arbitrary arrests, detentions, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions of suspected members of the group. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic continued to live in precarious conditions. Freedoms of expression, association and assembly continued to be restricted. Human rights defenders were intimidated and harassed, including by government agents. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people continued to face discrimination, intimidation and harassment, although arrests and prosecutions declined from previous years. An anti-terrorism law promulgated on 23 December 2014 infringed basic rights and freedoms, and extended the scope of the death penalty to a broader set of crimes.

BACKGROUND

There was continuing instability in the country as a result of violence in the Central African Republic, in southeastern Cameroon, and of armed conflict between Boko Haram and security forces in the Far North. A significant deployment of security forces in the Far North prevented Boko Haram from taking control of Cameroonian soil. However, security forces at times failed to protect the civilian population from attacks and themselves committed crimes under international law and human rights violations.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS

Boko Haram committed crimes under international law and human rights abuses, including suicide bomb attacks in civilian areas, summary executions, torture, hostage taking, abductions,

the recruitment of child soldiers, looting and destruction of public, private and religious property. These crimes appear to be part of a systematic attack against the civilian population across both northeastern Nigeria and the Far North in Cameroon. According to the UN, 770 civilians were killed and some 600 women and girls abducted by Boko Haram in Cameroon since 2013. Many schools were also targeted, leaving 35,000 children without access to education since 2014.

On 4 February, Boko Haram attacked the village of Fotokol, killing at least 90 civilians and 19 soldiers, and set dozens of buildings alight. On 17 April, it attacked the village of Bia, killing at least 16 civilians, including two children, and burned over 150 houses. In Maroua, between 22 and 25 July, three suicide attacks in crowded civilian areas killed at least 33 people and wounded more than 100. At least 23 suicide bombings carried out between July and December 2015 resulted in the deaths of about 120 civilians. Boko Haram used girls as young as 13 to carry out the attacks.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Security forces arrested at least 1,000 people accused of supporting Boko Haram in the Far North, including in mass cordon and search operations where dozens of men and boys were rounded up and arrested. During such operations, security forces used excessive force and committed human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests, unlawful killings – including of a seven-year-old girl – and destruction of property. Other violations include enforced disappearances, deaths in custody and mistreatment of prisoners.

Eighty-four children were detained without charge for six months in a children's centre in Maroua, following a raid on Qur'anic schools in the town of Guirvidig on 20 December 2014.

Journalists continued to be arrested and detained without charge by security forces, as part of their operation against Boko Haram. Simon Ateba, a Cameroonian journalist, was arrested on 28 August at the Minawao refugee camp and held by Cameroonian officials for four days. He had travelled to Minawao to investigate the living conditions of Nigerian refugees, but was accused of spying on behalf of Boko Haram. Radio France Internationale correspondent Ahmed Abba was arrested in Maroua on 30 July and was held incommunicado for over three months before being charged with "inciting or justifying terrorism".

On 27 April, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that the detention of Franco-Cameroonian lawyer Lydienne Yen Eyoun was arbitrary.

DEATHS IN CUSTODY AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Over 200 men and boys were arrested on 27 December 2014 in a cordon and search operation in the villages of Magdeme and Doublé. At least 25 men died during the night of their arrest in a makeshift cell, while 45 others were taken to Maroua prison the following day. At least 130 people therefore remain unaccounted for and are presumed to be victims of enforced disappearance, with evidence suggesting more may have died in custody. An internal investigation has yet to identify those victims, reveal the location of their bodies, and interview key witnesses.

PRISON CONDITIONS

Prison conditions remained poor: chronic overcrowding, inadequate food, limited medical care, and deplorable hygiene and sanitation. The wave of arrests of individuals suspected of supporting Boko Haram further aggravated these conditions. Maroua prison houses 1,300 detainees, more than three times its intended capacity (350), and over 40 detainees died between March and May. The population of the central prison in Yaoundé is approximately 4,100, for a maximum capacity of 2,000. The main factors of recent prison overcrowding, in addition to the wave of arrests of Boko Haram suspects, included the large number of detainees held without charge and the

ineffective judicial system. In response, the government has provided funding to build more cells at Maroua prison, and committed to building new prisons across the country.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

At least 180,000 refugees from the Central African Republic lived in harsh conditions in crowded camps along bordering areas of southeastern Cameroon. Since the escalation of violence in northeastern Nigeria in 2013, hundreds of thousands of people have fled across the border into Cameroon. The Minawao refugee camp in the Far North hosted over 50,000 refugees as of December, 75% of whom were between eight and 17 years of age. There were concerns that, contrary to the provisions of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the Cameroonian military deported Nigerians who had long resided in Cameroon back to Nigeria, accusing them of supporting Boko Haram.

RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE

Discrimination, intimidation, harassment and violence against LGBTI people remained a concern, although the number of arrests and prosecutions reduced from previous years. The continued criminalization of same-sex sexual activity still led to individuals being harassed and blackmailed, including by security forces, because of their suspected sexuality. Two people remain in prison on charges – one of whom is awaiting trial – relating to their sexual identity. A peaceful demonstration organized by an LGBTI organization to commemorate the death of LGBTI activist Eric Lembembe and call for a thorough investigation was held on 14 July.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders continued to be victims of intimidation, harassment and threats. In February, following a statement by the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (REDHAC) on the alleged death in custody of more than 50 people in Maroua, executive director Maximilienne Ngo Mbe and president Alice Nkom received death threats on TV and in the press. Ngo Mbe has been the target of repeated threats because of her human rights-related work.

Alhadji Mei Ali, head of human rights organization Os-Civile, was repeatedly threatened by state agents since July. This followed his campaign against the impunity surrounding the killing of a human rights defender who had challenged the appointments of two traditional leaders in 2011.

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Perceived or actual opponents of the government were denied the right to organize peaceful activities and demonstrations. On 15 September, five members of Dynamique Citoyenne, a platform regrouping several civil society organizations, were arrested while holding a seminar on electoral governance and democratic change. They were held in custody for seven days without charge.

Journalists reported practising self-censorship to avoid repercussions for criticizing the government, especially on security matters. The National Communication Council sanctioned more than 20 media outlets during the year and some of its decisions were contested by the Journalism Trade Union. At the end of the year, journalists Rodrigue Tongué, Felix Ebole Bola and Baba Wamé still faced charges in front of a military tribunal for the "non-denunciation" of sources.

Copyright notice: © Copyright Amnesty International

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Cameroon](#)

Topics

- [Abduction](#)
- [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#)
- [Armed groups / Militias / Paramilitary forces / Resistance movements](#)
- [Death in custody](#)
- [Death penalty](#)
- [Disappeared persons](#)
- [Extrajudicial executions](#)
- [Freedom of assembly and association](#)
- [Freedom of expression](#)
- [Human rights activists](#)
- [Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex \(LGBTI\)](#)
- [Migrant rights](#)
- [Prison or detention conditions](#)
- [Refugees](#)
- [Threats / Intimidation](#)