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Cameroon: Civil registration and civil certificates

Introduction

The following note describes birth, marriage and death certificates issued by civil registration offices in Cameroon.

The note will also touch upon changes made to the administrative structure in Cameroon affecting the layout of the document and competency to attest civil events. For a detailed description of the administrative structure and organisation at the civil registration offices in Cameroon, see the note '*Cameroon: Administrative structure and civil status registrations*' published by the Danish National ID Centre.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Cameroon in March 2019 and is one out of several notes focusing on Cameroon.

Civil registrations in Cameroon

Civil registrations such as birth registrations may take place in one of three types of administrative offices. They may take place in a main centre, a secondary centre or at a Cameroonian diplomatic mission abroad.¹ As of April 2019, Cameroon has 2,406 secondary centres, 420 main centres and 45 diplomatic missions abroad with civil status registries.² All three types of administrative offices will be referred to as civil status registries in this note.

Civil status registrars have competence to sign civil status certificates at the civil status registries. At main centres, the civil status registrars are the government delegates in city councils and their assistants as well as mayors and their assistants. At Cameroonian diplomatic missions abroad, the civil status registrars are the heads of diplomatic missions and consular posts as well as those assuring interim.³

¹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

² General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

³ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

Regarding secondary centres, registrars are appointed by the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development.⁴ Civil status registrars of secondary registries are assisted by clerks appointed by a territorially competent senior divisional officer. They jointly sign civil status certificates.⁵

Birth, marriage and death certificates in Cameroon

The civil registration offices are supplied with blank certificates for birth, marriage and death certificates, which bear the same layout all over Cameroun. The certificates include a header, a title, a serial number, personal information and footer.⁶

All information regarding place of issue, the registered event and the personal information and attestation are manually filled in in several copies.⁷

The layout of a birth certificate from 2019 can be seen on page 3.

⁴ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

⁵ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

⁶ Main Center Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019; Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁷ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019; Secondary Centre, Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

REPUBLICQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix - Travail - Patrie

REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace - Work - Fatherland

REGION
DEPARTEMENT
ARRONDISSEMENT

REGION
DIVISION
SUBDIVISION

CENTRE D'ETAT CIVIL / CIVIL STATUS REGISTRATION CENTRE
de - of
Centre d'état civil de rattachement (pour les centres secondaires)
Main Civil Status Registry of Attachment (for secondary civil status registry)

ACTE DE NAISSANCE / BIRTH CERTIFICATE
N° : / /

Nom de l'enfant :
Surname of the child
Prénoms de l'enfant :
Given name of the child
Né le - Born on the
A - At
De sexe - Sex
De - Of
Né à - Born at
Le - On the
Domicilié à - Resident at
Profession - Occupation
Nationalité - Nationality
Document de référence - Reference document
(Numéro de la Carte Nationale d'Identité, ou références de l'acte de naissance, ou références du document prouvant la nationalité)
(National Identity Card Number, or references of the Birth Certificate, or References of the Document attesting the Nationality)
Et de - And of
Née à - Born at
Le - On the
Domiciliée à - Resident at
Profession - Occupation
Nationalité - Nationality
Document de référence - Reference document
(Numéro de la Carte Nationale d'Identité, ou références de l'acte de naissance, ou références du document prouvant la nationalité)
(National Identity Card Number, or references of the Birth Certificate, or References of the Document attesting the Nationality)
Dressé le - Drawn up on the
Sur la déclaration de - In accordance with the declaration of

Lesquels ont certifié la sincérité de la présente déclaration,
Who attested to the truth of this declaration,
Par Nous, - By Us,
d'état civil - Civil Status Registrar
Assisté de - In the presence of
d'état civil - Secretary
Le - On the
Le Secrétaire d'état civil
Secretary
Signature de l'Officier d'état civil
Signature of Civil Status Registrar

Header indicating place of issuance of the document

Title indicating the type of document and the document number

Personalisation of document. Information related to the registered civil event is recorded here

Footer with space for attestations

Image 1: Cameroonian birth certificate. The left margin appears slanted due to the picture being taken at an odd angle. (NIDC reference material)

Official languages

Both English and French are official languages spoken in Cameroon. As such, legally valid documents may be completed in either English or in French, depending on the decision of the officer registering the event. Typically, the certificates are completed in English in Anglophone regions in Cameroon, while they are completed in French in the Francophone regions.⁸

The pre-printed text on the certificates is in both French and English.

⁸ Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

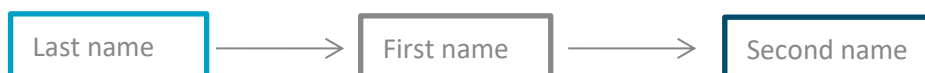
The fact that certificates may be filled in using either of the two languages also accounts for a few smaller variations in the tactical examinations, which will be addressed in the sections below.

However, it should be noted, that there appears to be (and have been) certain procedures for recording of names that previously differed in French and in English. In English, a name would be recorded with the first name first, followed by second and last names. In French, it would be written in the opposite order, meaning that the last name was recorded first, followed by the first name and second name. Presently, it appears recording of names follows the structure from English in both the French and English documents.⁹

Previous modus for recording of names in English



Previous modus for recording of names in French



Current modus for recording names in French or English



Although this seems to be the modus, it is not possible to rule out other variations in terms of recording names.

Changes in civil status certificates since 2011

According to several sources interviewed in Cameroon in March 2019, new legislation was implemented in 2011 affecting public administration.¹⁰ In order to reflect the legislative changes, parts of the civil status certificates were changed while new information was also introduced. The new certificates contain nationality, occupation, ID card number of the parents and a matriculation code instead of a serial number.¹¹

Header

The document header indicates where the document was issued, by tracing administrative layers down to the main or secondary centre in question. The header indicates that the document is from Cameroon and then the civil officer will record which region, division and subdivision the centre is located in.

⁹ Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁰ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019; National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

¹¹ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

The changes implemented in 2011 included a transition from provinces to regions in Cameroon. This is reflected in the civil status certificates' headers as well.¹²

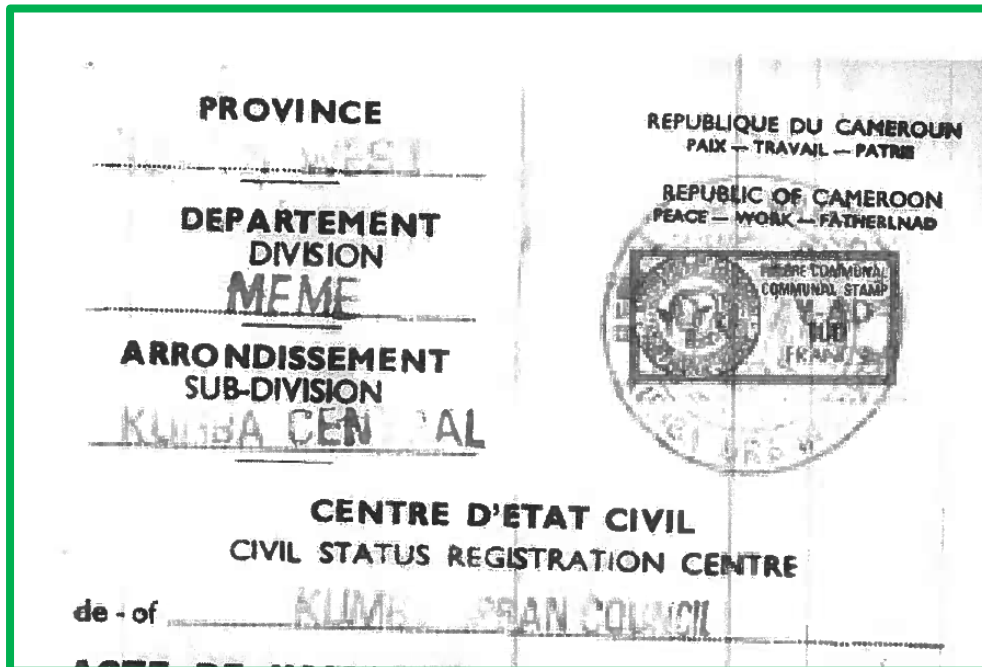


Image 2: Example of the header in a Cameroonian birth certificate from 2001. (NIDC reference material)

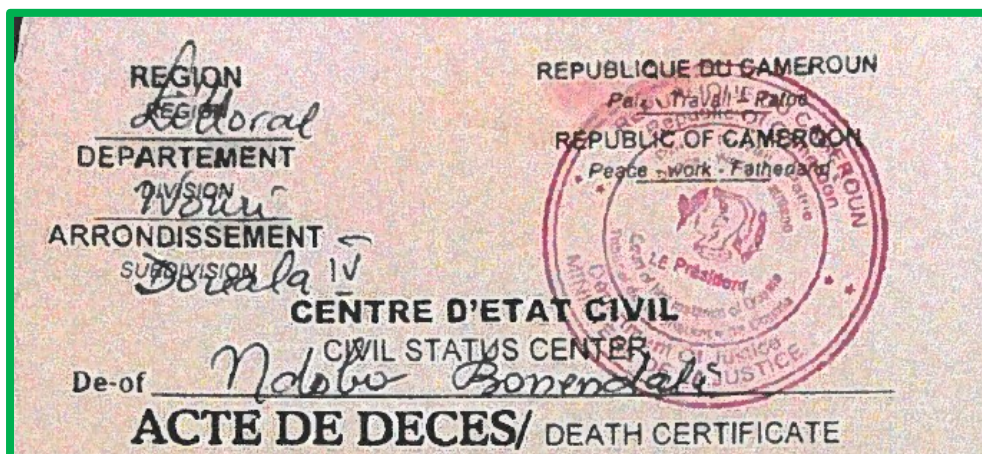


Image 3: Example of the header in a Cameroonian death certificate from 2016. (NIDC reference material)

Three sources interviewed in Yaoundé mention how the changes made to the certificates follow the 2011 law, including the change from *Province* to *Region*. However, the sources were not clear and in agreement on when this change was in

¹² Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019; Ministry of External Relations, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

fact implemented. One source places the implementation within the same year¹³, while another source refrains from placing it within a specific year after 2011.¹⁴

Representatives of the Cameroonian MFA also mention the changes made to the layout of civil status certificates. The representatives stated that it may take up to three years for these kinds of changes to be implemented in all layers of the administration, especially for rural regions in Cameroon. The representatives suggested that it may have taken a couple of years to change *Province* to *Region* in all the forms across Cameroon.¹⁵

Footer

The footer leaves space for attestation.

In order for Cameroonian birth, marriage and death certificates to be valid, it should be signed by two civil status registrars. According to the report of audience from BUNEC, civil status registrars will also affix a stamp on the civil status documents before they are issued to the registrant.¹⁶ At the Main Centre Yaoundé 6, the civil status documents are signed by the secretary and signed and stamped by the mayor.¹⁷ At a secondary centre, such documents will be signed by the civil status registrar and his clerk.¹⁸

Marriage certificates should however contain six signatures; two witnesses, the spouses and two civil status registrars.¹⁹

NIDC is aware of an incident where the archived marriage certificate only had one spouse signature and one stamp apart from signatures from the two witnesses and the two registrants.

¹³ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁴ Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁵ Ministry of External Relations, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁶ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019

¹⁷ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁸ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

References

Oral sources

General Manager and Director, National Civil Status Registration Office (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

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Mayor, Main Centre Yaoundé 5 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Mayor, deputy mayor and secretary, Main Centre Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Registrar and secretary, Secondary Centre, Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Sub-director of Privileges, Immunities and Consular Affairs, Ministry of External Relations (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.