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COI QUERY RESPONSE - Cameroon

The Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), including activities and treatment by the authorities, particularly in Douala and Yaoundé

1. Background information and activities of the MRC

The Cameroon Renaissance Movement, or Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun in French¹ (MRC)², is an opposition party in Cameroon that was founded in 2012 by Maurice Kamto.³ According to the 2022 report by Amnesty International, MRC is one of the two biggest opposition parties in Cameroon, together with the Social Democratic Front (SDF).⁴ The German foundation, Bertelsmann Stiftung, noted in a report that includes information up to end of January 2021 that even with no seats in parliament, 'the MRC has become a major opposition party and appears particularly influential in urban areas'.⁵

In 2018, Kamto claimed that he had won the presidential elections, however, according to official results, he lost with 14 % against 71 % for the president at the time, Paul Biya⁶, from the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)⁷. Kamto contested the election result, but this was later confirmed by the Constitutional Court and Biya was re-elected as the President of Cameroon for his seventh term.⁸

In January 2019, Kamto called for demonstrations against the re-election of Biya which resulted in arrests of over a hundred people, including Kamto himself.⁹ On 13 February 2019, France24 reported that Kamto was charged with 'rebellion, insurrection and hostility to the homeland'.¹⁰ He was freed in October 2019 after 9 months in prison.¹¹

¹ FES, Cameroon and Central Africa Office, FES occasional papers, October 2022, [url](#), p. 11

² Some sources refer to the MRC in English also as 'Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon'. See: Al Jazeera, Cameroon's opposition leader Maurice Kamto released, 5 October 2019, [url](#); France24, Cameroon orders release of main opposition leader Maurice Kamto, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

³ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroon : Le Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC), 3 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report Cameroon, 23 February 2022 [url](#), p. 16

⁶ Al Jazeera, Cameroon's opposition leader Maurice Kamto released, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report Cameroon, 23 February 2022 [url](#), p. 3

⁸ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroon : Le Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC), 3 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁹ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroun : Les manifestations de janvier 2019, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰ France24, Cameroon's opposition leader Kamto charged with 'rebellion', 13 February 2019, [url](#)

¹¹ Al Jazeera, Cameroon's opposition leader Maurice Kamto released, 5 October 2019, [url](#); France24, Cameroon orders release of main opposition leader Maurice Kamto, 5 October 2019, [url](#); France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroun : Les manifestations de janvier 2019, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

MRC boycotted legislative and municipal elections in Cameroon¹², scheduled for February 2020.¹³ In October 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted that MRC organized demonstrations across Cameroon ‘to call for national dialogue, electoral system reforms and the return of peace to Anglophone regions of the country’.¹⁴ The response of the authorities was to impose a ban on gatherings and to deploy security forces to prevent the demonstrations.¹⁵

In September 2020, supporters of the MRC planning to protest against President Biya were arrested.¹⁶ The protests were ‘violently dispersed’, and, according to the MRC, over 500 persons were arrested, while the authorities claimed that 294 people were arrested, as reported by Civicus, an international non-profit organisation aiming at strengthening civil society around the world.¹⁷ Other sources reported that more than 500 people were arrested in the September 2020 demonstrations.¹⁸ Following the protests, Kamto was put under house arrest¹⁹, where he spent 78 days.²⁰ In 2019 and 2020, some 700 people linked to the MRC were arrested.²¹

In July 2021, authorities prohibited an MRC demonstration in Yaoundé, citing health and public order concerns, while on the same day they allowed a demonstration by supporters of the ruling party in Bertoua.²²

As reported by Human Rights Watch, as of December 2021, ‘[a]t least 124 opposition party members and supporters arrested in September 2020 during peaceful demonstrations remained in detention on politically motivated charges’.²³

¹² Africanews, Cameroon's opposition leader Kamto re-elected at the helm of MRC, 11 December 2023, [url](#); FES, Cameroon and Central Africa Office, FES occasional papers, October 2022, [url](#), p. 18; RFI, Cameroun: le MRC ne boycottera plus les élections, selon l'opposant Maurice Kamto, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³ KOACI, Cameroun: Le Mrc va boycotter les elections legislatives et municipales du 9 février 2020, 2000, [url](#)

¹⁴ OHCHR, Cameroon: UN human rights experts call for end to detention and intimidation of peaceful protesters, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵ OHCHR, Cameroon: UN human rights experts call for end to detention and intimidation of peaceful protesters, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶ Le Monde, Au Cameroun, des marches de l'opposition réprimées par les forces de l'ordre, 23 September 2020, [url](#); VOA News, Cameroon Military Tribunal Jails 47 Opposition Activists for Planned Protests, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ Civicus, Opposition protests: hundreds arrested, journalists assaulted and detained, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ Africanews, Cameroon: Opposition Denounces “De facto” House Arrest, 30 September 2020, [url](#); OHCHR, Cameroon: UN human rights experts call for end to detention and intimidation of peaceful protesters, 12 October 2020, [url](#); AI, Cameroon: Failure to release 23 detainees over September 2020 protests is ‘deeply disappointing’, 25 January 2023, [url](#); HRW, Cameroon Needs to Protect Prisoners from Cholera Outbreak; Overcrowding, Lack of Hygiene and Potable Water Increase Risk, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹ Africanews, Cameroon: Opposition Denounces “De facto” House Arrest, 30 September 2020, [url](#); OHCHR, Cameroon: UN human rights experts call for end to detention and intimidation of peaceful protesters, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰ BBC News, Maurice Kamto: Cameroon opposition leader free from house arrest after 78 days, 9 December 2020, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report Cameroon, 23 February 2022 [url](#), p. 11

²¹ Cameroon Concord News, Corrupt Fru Ndi acolyte elected president of SDF, 30 October 2023, [url](#); Le Monde, Cameroun : l'opposition et des experts de l'ONU dénoncent des « détentions arbitraires », 17 November 2022, [url](#)

²² HRW, World Report 2022 - Cameroon, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

²³ HRW, World Report 2022 - Cameroon, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

Amnesty International reported that ‘nearly 50 people were sentenced by military courts on 27 December 2021 for “insurrection”, “rebellion” and “endangering state security”’, including party members holding key positions in the MRC such as its spokesperson and a vice-president.²⁴ Other sources specified that the number of those sentenced was 47²⁵, while according to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides-OFPRA), it was 35 people.²⁶ The prison sentences were up to seven years²⁷ and those who received the heaviest sentences of seven years in prison included the spokesperson and the treasurer of the party²⁸ who remained in detention in 2022.²⁹

Information on activities of MRC in 2022 and 2023 was scarce among the sources consulted by the EUAA within time constraints. In November 2022, sources reported that Kamto’s MRC issued a press release demanding a release of persons associated with party who were held in ‘arbitrary detention’.³⁰ In December 2022, sources reported that Kamto paid a visit to the presidential palace that was perceived as controversial, reportedly to discuss a territorial dispute that Cameroon has with Nigeria.³¹

In July 2022, it was reported that Michelet Ndoki wanted to run for president of the MRC party.³² In July 2023, she was expelled from the party³³ and in December 2023, Kamto was re-elected as the party’s president.³⁴ According to Kamto, MRC will take part in ‘all upcoming elections’, as reported by Africanews.³⁵

2. Treatment of MRC members by the authorities

According to the briefing notes published by German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge-BAMF) in January 2022, ‘124 people [from

²⁴ AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁵ Le Monde, Cameroun : l’opposition et des experts de l’ONU dénoncent des « détentions arbitraires », 17 November 2022, [url](#); VOA News, Cameroon Military Tribunal Jails 47 Opposition Activists for Planned Protests, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁶ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroun : Les manifestations de janvier 2019, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²⁷ AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#); France, DIDR-OFPRA, Cameroun : Les manifestations de janvier 2019, 9 February 2022, [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 14

²⁸ France, OFPRA, DIDR, Cameroun : Les manifestations de janvier 2019, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15

³⁰ Le Monde, Cameroun : l’opposition et des experts de l’ONU dénoncent des « détentions arbitraires », 17 November 2022, [url](#); VOA News, L’opposition camerounaise et l’ONU dénoncent des “détentions arbitraires”, 17 November 2022, [url](#)

³¹ Cameroon-Info.Net, Cameroun – Polémique: Jeune Afrique dévoile le contenu de la lettre que Maurice Kamto est allé déposer à la Présidence de la République, 28 December 2022, [url](#); MMI, Cameroon’s ‘National Security’ revealed to be main reason for Maurice Kamto’s visit to Presidency, 29 December 2022, [url](#)

³² RFI, Cameroun: l’ambitieuse Michelle Ndoki veut prendre la tête du MRC de Maurice Kamto, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

³³ Africa Report (The), Cameroon: Michelle Ndoki unveils political ambitions, 26 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ Africanews, Cameroon's opposition leader Kamto re-elected at the helm of MRC, 11 December 2023, [url](#); Guardian Post (The), At MRC elective convention: Opposition drums fresh coalition to unseat Biya, 12 December 2023, [url](#)

³⁵ Africanews, Cameroon's opposition leader Kamto re-elected at the helm of MRC, 11 December 2023, [url](#)

over 500 people arrested during the MRC demonstrations in September 2020] are said to remain in custody'.³⁶ Amnesty International reported that as of 15 January 2022, 107 people linked to the September 2020 MRC demonstrations remained in detention, including in prisons in Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, and Mfou.³⁷ Some of those arrested were released after a year in detention³⁸, while several MRC party members in 2022 'were still facing proceedings at a military tribunal, with potential sentences ranging from five to seven years'.³⁹

In April 2022, several inmates in a Douala prison died of cholera, including at least one MRC supporter arrested in connection with the September 2020 protests.⁴⁰ According to MRC lawyers, 'at least four other MRC supporters have been diagnosed with cholera' in prison.⁴¹

The annual human rights report by USDOS on Cameroon covering 2022 noted that '[c]ourts often limited procedural rights in politically sensitive cases'⁴² and there were attempts to hold appeal hearings related to the MRC detainees in their absence and in absence of their lawyers.⁴³ In relation to the MRC prisoners, the same source stated that 'there were credible allegations that the charges were incommensurate with participating or attempting to participate in peaceful protests'.⁴⁴ The same report noted that '[w]hile many of the detainees were released, including Kamto, others remained in detention'.⁴⁵

In their annual report describing the situation in Cameroon in 2022, Freedom House noted that 'opposition leaders risk arrest and imprisonment. Opposition rallies are frequently prohibited by the government, while CPDM marches in support of President Biya are authorized'.⁴⁶ According to the same source, members of the opposition faced 'frequent harassment, intimidation, and arrests'.⁴⁷ The same source also reported that '[p]ublic criticism of the government and membership in opposition parties can have negative consequences on professional and career advancement'.⁴⁸ USDOS noted that in 2022, some political opponents had their passports confiscated to prevent them from traveling abroad and their movement was monitored.⁴⁹

³⁶ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration, 3 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷ AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ AI, Cameroon. Arbitrarily detained person dies of cholera in Douala, other detainees at risk, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ HRW, Cameroon Needs to Protect Prisoners from Cholera Outbreak; Overcrowding, Lack of Hygiene and Potable Water Increase Risk, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴² USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 14

⁴³ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 14

⁴⁴ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁵ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 28

According to the annual human rights report by USDOS on Cameroon covering 2022, '[t]here were no reports of newly identified political prisoners or detainees as of the end of the year'.⁵⁰

On 25 January 2023, AI reported that a judge rejected a request to release a group of 23 people sentenced to prison for their participation in the September 2020 demonstrations, after their lawyers argued that based on a UN working group's opinion, their arrest was 'completely arbitrary'.⁵¹ In February 2023, AI reported that '[s]ince 2016, the Cameroon authorities have been imprisoning hundreds of people simply for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. For example, [...] 62 people who protested at demonstrations organized by the political party the MRC [are currently detained]'.⁵² According to the OHCHR Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention released in July 2023, 15 persons in Cameroon were subjected to 'arbitrary detention', including Maurice Kamto.⁵³

According to a report of the UN Secretary-General released in November 2023, 'civil society and opposition parties [in Cameroon] continued to experience restrictions to civic space. On 17 August [2023], local authorities in the West Region banned a public sport event planned by Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun in Bafoussam'.⁵⁴

According to a report published by AI in January 2022, 'MRC detainees have reported widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment by security forces, including the SED [Defence Secretary of State-Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense] and the police in Yaoundé'.⁵⁵ A report by NGO Freedom from Torture, published in July 2023, without specifically mentioning MRC, found that '[o]ppositionists from Cameroon have been tortured for opposing the state'.⁵⁶

Additional information on political prisoners in Cameroon can be found in the EUAA query response [Political prisoners and prison escapees](#), published on 22 February 2022.

⁵⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15

⁵¹ AI, Cameroon: Failure to release 23 detainees over September 2020 protests is 'deeply disappointing', 25 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵² AI, Activist held without charge for 200 days, 27 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵³ OHCHR, Arbitrary detention - Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 31 July 2023, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁴ UNSC, The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa; Report of the Secretary-General, 30 November 2023, [url](#), para. 38

⁵⁵ AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Freedom from Torture, Where does torture happen around the world?, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

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