

Document #2017810

HRW – Human Rights Watch

Cameroon: Political Opponent Freed

(New York)– Cameroon (<https://www.hrw.org/africa/cameroon>) President Paul Biya ordered (https://twitter.com/PR_Paul_BIYA/status/1180203915301785601) the release on October 4, 2019 of a prominent opposition leader, Maurice Kamto. The president also ordered the release of other members and supporters of Kamto’s party, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC). Kamto and the other detainees were released on October 5.

Kamto, along with over 200 MRC members and supporters, was arrested (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/30/cameroon-opposition-leaders-arrested>) between January 26 and 28 after countrywide peaceful protests. At least 350 more party members and supporters, including its vice president Mamadou Mota, were arrested (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/04/mass-arrests-opposition-members-cameroon>) between June 1 and 2 after they tried to hold demonstrations across the country.

“The release of Kamto and other opponents is excellent news,” said Lewis Mudge (<https://www.hrw.org/about/people/lewis-mudge>) , central Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “But Kamto, his allies, and supporters should never have been arrested and prosecuted in the first place for simply organizing peaceful protests.”

Kamto denounced the results of presidential elections in October 2018 and was facing trial (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/08/cameroon-tightens-screws-opposition>) before the Yaoundé Military Court on charges of insurrection, hostility against the homeland, criminal association, threats to public order, rebellion, and inciting insurrection, crimes that could carry the death penalty. The next hearing was scheduled for October 8. All charges against Kamto have been dropped.

Menkem Sother, a lawyer for Kamto, told Human Rights Watch that while he welcomed the news of Kamto’s release, 60 other party leaders, members, and supporters were still awaiting trial.

Kamto and other members of the political opposition should be allowed to continue their work, Human Rights Watch said.

Kamto’s release came on the last day of the “National Dialogue (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49931662>) ,” a series of nationwide discussions that started on September 30, aimed at addressing the crisis in Cameroon’s English-speaking regions, in which the Anglophone minority has been protesting against perceived discrimination by the central government.

On October 4, during the talks, the president announced (https://twitter.com/PR_Paul_BIYA/status/1179797487785320452) that the charges against 333 people arrested during unrest in the North-West and South-West regions were to be dropped.

Over the past three years, Cameroon’s Anglophone regions have been embroiled in a cycle of violence that has claimed 3,000 lives (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/camerouns-anglophone-dialogue-work-progress>) and forced half a million people (<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-north-west-and-south-west-crisis-situation-report-no-10-31-august-2019>) to flee their homes.

On August 30, 2017, Biya ordered the Yaoundé Military Court to drop charges against more than 40 people arrested following peaceful protests across the English-speaking regions in late 2016, including a prominent jurist, Paul Aya Abine, and two human rights activists, Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla and Fontem Aforteka’a Neba (<https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/cameroon-release-of-anglophone-leaders-a-relief-but-others-still-languish-in-prison>). On December 13, 2018, the president announced the release of 289 people arrested during unrest in the North-West and South-West regions.

Unlawful detention and abuse of detainees are rife in Cameroon. Many people perceived as opposing the government are held often on spurious charges related to national security and terrorism. In another case, Abdul Karim Ali, an outspoken Anglophone activist and political analyst, was arrested on September 25 and denied access to a lawyer for five days, in violation of Cameroonian law.

Abdul Karim Ali was taken to the State Defense Secretariat (Secrétariat d’État à la défense, SED) in Yaoundé. His whereabouts were finally made public on September 30 when he was taken before the Yaoundé Military Court and charged with acts of terrorism, financing terrorism, and secession.

Human Rights Watch has previously documented (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/cameroon-routine-torture-incommunicado-detention>) the widespread use of torture and incommunicado detention at the SED, mainly of detainees suspected of ties to armed separatist groups. The prison has been used to hold people incommunicado and as a place of torture since at least 2014. Torture is pervasive across the country, in both official and unofficial detention centers.

Abdul Karim’s lawyers say that his arrest was unlawful and filed a habeas corpus request to the Yaoundé High Court. A hearing has yet to be scheduled.

“The release of Kamto and other prisoners does not demonstrate that Cameroon is turning a new leaf because unlawful arrests continue,” Mudge said. “The government should demonstrate that meaningful change has come by ending unlawful arrests, incommunicado detention, and torture and by respecting the rule of law.”

ecoi.net summary:

Leader and other members of opposition party Cameroon Renaissance Movement



(MRC) freed after months in prison

Country:

Cameroon

Source:

HRW – Human Rights Watch [\(/en/source/11207.html\)](/en/source/11207.html)

Original link:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/07/cameroon-political-opponent-freed> (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/07/cameroon-political-opponent-freed>)

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Published:

7 October 2019

Document ID:

2017810

Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

