



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Cameroon

Cameroon – CMR38288 – Religious  
conflict – Police corruption – Interfaith  
marriage – FGM

8 March 2011

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**1. Please provide background information on the history, politics, main ethnic groups, and economy of Cameroon.**

The earliest inhabitants of Cameroon were likely the Bakas (Pygmies), who still inhabit the forests of the South and East regions. Northern Cameroon was conquered by the Fulani, pastoral Islamic people of the western Sahel, during the late 1770s and early 1880s. The Portuguese presence, from the 1500s onwards, was primarily devoted to trade and the acquisition of slaves, particularly from the Muslim north. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the slave trade was largely suppressed by Christian missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

Cameroon became a German colony in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and remained so until the end of World War I, after which it was divided into British and French mandates.<sup>2</sup> French Cameroon achieved independence in 1960, with Anglophone Cameroon doing the same the following year, although part of the latter joined Nigeria. The rest joined Francophone Cameroon in a federation, which became a unitary state in 1972.<sup>3</sup> President Ahmadou Ahidjo governed Cameroon until his 1982 resignation, when he was succeeded by Paul Biya, who continued his predecessor's single-party system until 1992. Despite a boycott by the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), Biya's Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) failed to win an absolute majority in the 1992 elections. Biya, however, was re-elected under dubious electoral circumstances.<sup>4</sup> In 2008, Biya secured a constitutional amendment to remove a two-term presidential limit set in 1996, allowing him to stand for re-election in 2011.<sup>5</sup> The Cameroon constitution provides for a strong central government dominated by the executive, with the president able to appoint and dismiss cabinet members, judges, generals, regional governors and heads of state-owned enterprises with no requirement to consult the National Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

According to the US Department of State (USDOS), Cameroon consists of more than 250 ethnic groups forming five large regional-cultural groups: western highlanders (or

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Cameroon*, December 28

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> 'Cameroon' 2010, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press – Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Cameroon*, UNHCR Refworld, 3 May  
[www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html) – Accessed 19 August 2010 – Attachment 3

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Cameroon*, UNHCR Refworld, 3 May  
[www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html) – Accessed 19 August 2010 – Attachment 3

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Cameroon*, UNHCR Refworld, 3 May  
[www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html) – Accessed 19 August 2010 – Attachment 3

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Cameroon*, December 28

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 1

grassfielders), including the Bamileke, Bamoun and many smaller entities in the northwest (estimated 38 per cent of the population); coastal tropical forest people, including the Bassa, Douala, and many smaller entities in the southwest (12 per cent); southern tropical forest people, including the Ewondo, Bulu and Fang (all Beti subgroups), Maka and Pygmies (officially called Bakas) (18 per cent); predominately Islamic people of the northern semi-arid regions (the Sahel) and central highlands, including the Fulani (14 per cent); and the 'Kirdi', non-Islamic people of the northern desert and central highlands (18 per cent).<sup>7</sup>

Despite the discovery of major oil deposits in 1973, Cameroon's economy remains primarily rural, with agriculture accounting for a large percentage of the country's exports. Oil production has declined since 1985, while industrial development has focused on aluminium smelting, hydroelectric expansion, the resolution of transportation problems, and the development of medium-sized farms to halt the exodus of rural youth to urban areas.<sup>8</sup> Cameroon's economy is largely dependent on commodity exports, and its economic development has been hindered by economic mismanagement and corruption. The European Union is Cameroon's main trading bloc, accounting for over 36 per cent of imports and 66 per cent of exports. The United States is the largest investor in Cameroon, mainly through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and energy provider AES Sonel.<sup>9</sup>

**2. Please provide information on whether there is religious conflict and intolerance between Christians and Muslims in Cameroon. Please include information on the relative proportion of the population who belong to the main religious groups in Cameroon.**

Figures vary with regard to the relative proportion of the Cameroonian population and their religious affiliations. According to the USDOS, Cameroon has a population of 19.4 million; of these, approximately 69.2 per cent are Christian, and 20.9 per cent are Muslim. Of the remaining population, 5.6 per cent are animists, 3.3 per cent do not consider themselves associated with any religion, and one per cent practices other religions.<sup>10</sup> However, a separate USDOS report states that 40 per cent of the population are Christian, 20 per cent are Muslim, and 40 per cent are indigenous African religion.<sup>11</sup> The *Political Handbook of the World* reports that 53 per cent of the population is Christian, 25 per cent maintains traditional African beliefs, and 22 per cent is Muslim.<sup>12</sup>

Religious conflict and intolerance between Christians and Muslims in Cameroon is not endemic. In 2010, USDOS said there were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief or practice, and Christians and Muslims organised ecumenical ceremonies to pray and promote tolerance and peace.<sup>13</sup> In 2011, a meeting between the Council of Imams and Religious Dignitaries of Cameroon (CIDMC) and the

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<sup>7</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Cameroon*, December 28

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>8</sup> 'Cameroon' 2010, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press – Attachment 2

<sup>9</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Cameroon*, December 28

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>10</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Cameroon*, November 17, Section I – Attachment 4

<sup>11</sup> US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Cameroon*, December 28

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26431.htm> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 1

<sup>12</sup> 'Cameroon' 2010, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press – Attachment 2

<sup>13</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report – Cameroon*, November 17, Section III – Attachment 4

National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (CENC) resulted in consensus that inter-religious dialogue should be strengthened in the wake of a land dispute between the Catholic Church and a local Muslim community, which led to some Islamic fundamentalists distributing anti-Christian leaflets.<sup>14</sup>

At a 2009 open-air mass in Yaounde, Pope Benedict said cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Cameroon “should serve as a beacon of peaceful coexistence for other African nations”.<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict praised the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Christians, despite the prevalence of violence between the two religions in neighbouring Nigeria.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Is marriage between Christians and Muslims common in Cameroon?**

No information was found regarding the prevalence of Christian and Muslim interfaith marriage in Cameroon.

### **4. Deleted.**

### **5. Please provide information on the effectiveness and independence of the Cameroonian police services. Is there evidence to suggest that it is corrupt?**

It is broadly accepted that Cameroonian police services have had a long history of widespread corruption. According to the Fund for Peace, Cameroonian police forces are “corrupt, ineffective, poorly trained, underpaid, and act with impunity”. Fund for Peace claims there have been a number of complaints regarding police violation of human rights, such as beating and torturing detainees, and extra-judicial killings.<sup>17</sup> According to *The Post*, the Transparency International 2005 world barometer of most corrupt institutions ranked the Cameroon police force as the most corrupt institution in the world.<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence that the situation has dramatically improved in the intervening six years. According to a 2009 article in *The Post*, the Chief of Judicial Police expressed regret that the Police Force was seen as one of the most corrupt departments in Cameroon, saying “[w]hat makes the corruption situation more glaring on the Police force is that they are in constant contact with the public and some of them will condescend to the level of

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Cameroonian Christians, Muslims give their support to inter-religious dialogue’ 2011, Afrique Avenir website, source: ANA, 28 January <http://www.afriqueavenir.org/en/2011/01/28/cameroonian-christians-muslims-give-their-support-to-inter-religious-dialogue/> – Accessed 3 March 2011 – Attachment 5

<sup>15</sup> ‘Pope Praises Muslim-Christian Relations in Cameroon’ 2009, *Voice of America News*, 19 March <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-03-19-voa42-68824927.html> – Accessed 3 March 2011 – Attachment 6

<sup>16</sup> ‘Pope Praises Muslim-Christian Relations in Cameroon’ 2009, *Voice of America News*, 19 March <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-03-19-voa42-68824927.html> – Accessed 3 March 2011 – Attachment 6

<sup>17</sup> ‘Cameroon’ 2009, Fund for Peace website [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=367&Itemid=529](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=367&Itemid=529) – Accessed 12 May 2010 -Attachment 9

<sup>18</sup> ‘Cameroon Police Top World Corruption Chart’ 2005, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 12 December <http://allafrica.com/stories/200512121070.html> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 12

receiving FCFA 500. What is FCFA 500 or FCFA 1000 that some Policemen are soiling the name of the profession?”<sup>19</sup>

According to the *Political Handbook of the World*, in 2008 two Cameroonian police officers allegedly received \$30,000 in a plot to kidnap a former colonel in the Equatorial Guinean army (and a nephew of Equatorial Guinea’s president), who had been granted refugee status in Cameroon in 2003.<sup>20</sup> In 2007, *The Post* reported that members of Cameroon’s People Democratic Movement (CPDM) blamed a rising crime-wave in Cameroon on corrupt police and security forces. The article referred to public allegations that bandits “bribe their way out of detention with ease”, with CPDM members observing bandits becoming too friendly with police.<sup>21</sup>

In 2004, the Nigerian High Commissioner to Cameroon called on Nigerian residents of the country to remain law abiding, pay their taxes to their host government and avoid criminal acts, adding “[i]f any Cameroon law officer, police or gendarme harasses you unlawfully because he wants to extort money from you please don’t hesitate to fax a message including the name of such an officer to me or to your Provincial President for us to take necessary action”.<sup>22</sup>

**6. Please provide information on whether Islamic extremists or fundamentalists would be likely to target a Catholic person.**

No information could be found regarding whether Islamic extremists or fundamentalists in Cameroon would be likely to target a Catholic person. As stated in Question 2, religious conflict and intolerance between Christians and Muslims in Cameroon is not endemic, and no specific reports of Islamic extremists or fundamentalists targeting Catholics in Cameroon could be found. Furthermore, no information on the existence of Islamic extremist groups in Cameroon could be found.

**7. Please provide information on whether female circumcision is practised/expected amongst young girls in Cameroon and whether the refusal by parents to permit their daughter to undergo that would be offensive and humiliating to grandparents or to Muslims.**

Female circumcision (female genital mutilation – FGM) is prevalent in Cameroon. According to 2006 United Nations estimates, around 20 per cent of women in Cameroon had experienced FGM.<sup>23</sup> In 2007, Cameroonian vice Prime Minister Amadou Ali said “the practice of FGM is prohibited in Cameroon, and that during the revision of the Penal

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Judicial Police Boss Celebrates Achievements’ 2009, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 6 February <http://allafrica.com/stories/200902060732.html> – Accessed 4 March 2011 – Attachment 10

<sup>20</sup> ‘Cameroon’ 2010, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press – Attachment 2

<sup>21</sup> ‘Corrupt Security Officials Blamed for Rising Crime’ 2007, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 14 October <http://allafrica.com/stories/200710150981.html> – Accessed 4 March 2011 – Attachment 11

<sup>22</sup> ‘Cameroon: Nigerian High Commissioner Wants Corrupt Police, Gendarmes Reported’ 2004, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 20 December <http://allafrica.com/stories/200412201252.html> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 13

<sup>23</sup> ‘The Cameroon Red Cross establishes a strategy for the fight against female genital mutilation’ 2006, *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, 23 April – Attachment 14

Code, all will be done to make sure that a law against FGM is put in place and enforced”.<sup>24</sup>

No information could be found on whether refusal by parents to permit their daughter to undergo this procedure would be offensive and humiliating to grandparents or to Muslims. In Cameroon, the practice is not limited to adherents of Islam, with 13 per cent of women belonging to the Arabe-Choa/Peuls/Haoussa/Kanuri ethnic group having experienced FGM.<sup>25</sup>

## 8. Deleted.

## 9. Please provide information on the mechanism for the issue of death certificates in Cameroon and whether a death certificate might not be issued simply because a person died in a rural area.

While definitive information on the mechanism for the issue of death certificates in Cameroon could not be found, in some rural areas, death certificates are thought to be far less commonly issued than birth certificates, and are needed primarily for civil servants and other salaried employees whose widows are entitled to a pension.<sup>26</sup> Birth and death certificates are issued in villages, with a copy being retained in the master book from which they are issued. These are returned to a local administrative centre where they are held in municipal archives.<sup>27</sup> According to the British High Commission in Yaounde, Cameroon issues death certificates in French and English, but given the excessive bureaucracy, they can take some time – perhaps months – to be issued. Cameroonian death certificates do not provide details of the cause of death.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Cameroon: Law against female circumcision’ 2007, *Cameroon Tribune*, 23 November

<http://www.aegis.org/news/ifrc/2006/IF060804.html> – Accessed 23 April 2007 – Attachment 15

<sup>25</sup> Ireland Refugee Documentation Centre 2009, ‘FGM in Cameroon’, 30 April – Attachment 16

<sup>26</sup> Zeitlun, D. 2005, ‘The Documentary Impulse: Archives in the Bush’, Project Muse website, p. 418

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history\\_in\\_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history_in_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html) – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 18

<sup>27</sup> Zeitlun, D. 2005, ‘The Documentary Impulse: Archives in the Bush’, Project Muse website, pp 417-418

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history\\_in\\_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history_in_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html) – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 18

<sup>28</sup> ‘How to register a death’ (2008), British High Commission Yaounde website, 7 July

<http://ukincameroon.fco.gov.uk/en/help-for-british-nationals/living-in-cameroon/how-register-death#> – Accessed 7 March 2011 – Attachment 19

## Attachments

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2. ‘Cameroon’ 2010, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, [http://library.cqpress.com/phw/phw2010\\_Cameroon](http://library.cqpress.com/phw/phw2010_Cameroon) – Accessed 3 June 2010.
3. Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Cameroon*, UNHCR Refworld, 3 May [www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c0ceafec.html) – Accessed 19 August 2010.
4. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Cameroon*, November 17.
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7. Deleted.
8. Deleted.
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10. ‘Judicial Police Boss Celebrates Achievements’ 2009, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 6 February <http://allafrica.com/stories/200902060732.html> – Accessed 4 March 2011.
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12. ‘Cameroon Police Top World Corruption Chart’ 2005, *All Africa Global Media*, source: *The Post*, 12 December <http://allafrica.com/stories/200512121070.html> – Accessed 7 March 2011.
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16. Ireland Refugee Documentation Centre 2009, 'FGM in Cameroon', 30 April. (CISNET Cameroon CX226131)
17. Deleted.
18. Zeitlun, D. 2005, 'The Documentary Impulse: Archives in the Bush', Muse Project website [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history\\_in\\_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history_in_africa/v032/32.1zeitlyn.html) – Accessed 7 March 2011.
19. 'How to register a death' (2008), British High Commission Yaounde website, 7 July <http://ukincameroon.fco.gov.uk/en/help-for-british-nationals/living-in-cameroon/how-register-death#> – Accessed 7 March 2011.