



Cameroon - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 28 May 2009

Cameroon: Current treatment of members and supporters of the SDF party.

Section 1c of the *United States Department of State* 2008 Human Rights Report for Cameroon, under the heading 'Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment', states:

"On February 26, during a visit to the Yaounde Kondengui Central Prison, Divine Chemuta Banda, chairman of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF), learned that many of the SDF militants incarcerated in 2006 in connection with the death of Gregoire Diboule had been treated inhumanely and denied medical care." (United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) (25 February 2009) - *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Cameroon*)

Section 2b of the same report, under the heading 'Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association', states:

"On February 13, in the Bessengue neighborhood the Douala GMI disrupted an SDF march to protest against constitutional reform. The police used water cannon, trucks, and tear gas to disperse demonstrators in addition to beatings with rubber batons.

During the February riots, which spread to 31 localities including Yaounde and Douala, and the subsequent government crackdown, security forces shot and killed demonstrators and rioters. While the government reported 40 persons killed, NGOs such as La Maison des Droits de l'Homme claimed that security forces killed over 100 persons.

For example, on February 23, Douala police shot and killed Lovet Ndimba Tingha, a meat vendor, while police attacked a crowd gathered for a march organized by the SDF leading opposition party. The march protested President Biya's intention to remove constitutional term limits. The press reported that SDF organizers had decided to disband for fear of violence and that police attacked while the crowd dispersed. Human rights organizations assisted Tingha's family in filing a complaint against the police; no further information was available at year's end." (ibid)

Section 2d of the same report, under the heading 'Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons', states:

“On March 2, DGRE officers arrested SDF parliamentarian Jean Michel Nintcheu from Littoral Region at the Douala International Airport, while he was about to travel to France. Despite Nintcheu's parliamentary immunity, the DGRE officers confiscated his passport but released him after an hour of detention and without any formal charges. On June 10, officials returned Nintcheu's passport to him.” (ibid)

Section 5 of the same report, under the heading ‘National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities’, states:

“Natives of the North West and South West regions tended to support the opposition party SDF and consequently suffered disproportionately from human rights abuses committed by the government and its security forces.” (ibid)

Section 2 of a January 2009 *Amnesty International* report, under the heading ‘Unlawful killings of political opponents’, states:

“On 20 August 2004, John Kohtem, a leader of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Balikumbat district of North-West Province, was beaten to death. Doh Gah Gwanyin, a local traditional chief and Member of Parliament representing the ruling RDPC, was publicly named by the SDF and local human rights groups as having instigated and participated in the beating of the victim. Prior to his death, John Kohtem is reported to have accused Doh Gah Gwanyin of involvement in voter registration malpractices that were intended to favour the ruling party during the October 2004 elections. Doh Gah Gwanyin is reported to have vowed revenge and to have subsequently ordered his supporters to beat John Kohtem.

Following protests and demonstrations by the SDF and other opposition political party supporters in Bamenda, the capital of North-West Province, against John Kohtem's killing, the gendarmerie arrested 11 people in connection with the murder. Gwanyin's co-accused were Lawrence Mborfor, Moses Sama (alias Capsa), Woldiep Yanuke, Sama Dohgit (alias George Wabit Sampson), Vincent Panvah Yegag, Godlove Dugum, Eric Ngwamuti Doheric, William Sama, McHenry Galabe, Peter Samgwa Sikop and Linus Sama.” (Amnesty International (29 January 2009) - *Cameroon: Impunity underpins persistent abuse*, p.3)

Section 3.3 of the same report, under the heading ‘Long-term detention without trial of SDF members’, states:

“The Social Democratic Front (SDF) is the leading opposition political party in Cameroon. It draws most of its support from the predominantly anglophone South- West Province and North-West Province. The government has invariably accused the SDF of being separatist, like the SCNC. As a result, many members of the SDF have been arrested and detained after being accused of supporting secession for the two provinces.

Although government suspicions against the SDF have persisted, there have been far fewer detentions of its members in recent years. However, a dispute

between two rival factions of the SDF culminated in the arrest and long-term detention without trial of at least 23 members of the main faction of the party, who were accused of killing Grégoire Diboulé, a prominent member of the dissident faction, on 26 May 2006. Those arrested, who were held without trial until November 2008, include retired army colonel James Chi Ngafor who was not present when Grégoire Diboulé died. Others detained with him at Kondengui central prison in Yaoundé were Philip Asah Che, Zacharie Forest Nembot, Elias Mbah, Simon Fonki, Dieudonné Fopa, Robert Tarete, Peter Fonso, Edward Moukam, Abraham Bayong, Francis Kom Mocto, Justice Mbah, Jean Touyem, Johnson Kuchong Chia, Emmanuel Forsmendjong, Joseph Kenah, Christopher Sama, John Nchinda, Godheart Sayem, Mathias Agwanje, David Tedongmo, and Jean Pierre Simo. One of those arrested in May 2006, John Ngu Mbahaning, died from meningitis on 15 August 2006, shortly after he had been transferred from the prison to hospital. Another detainee, Innocent Kom Mokto also died in custody on 4 October 2008.” (ibid, p.8-9)

A January 2007 *UK Home Office* operational guidance note on Cameroon, in a section titled “Members of the SDF (paragraph 3.6.2), states:

“The SDF is the largest opposition political party to play a major role in opposition political party activity and contested elections in 2004. The SDF is a legally registered political party and has seats in the National Assembly and mayoral representation throughout the country. SDF members are not considered to be at risk of persecution on the basis of membership of the SDF. John Fru Ndi, National Chairman SDF told the UK delegation of a fact finding mission to Cameroon in January 2004 that government officials and the police harass and intimidate members of the SDF. Young people whose parents are members of the SDF in particular are harassed and intimidated by the government. Many young SDF supporters are also stopped from obtaining jobs or starting up new businesses. Often the government claims that they have not paid the correct taxes so keep postponing the necessary documents needed to start a new business. It is difficult for many young SDF supporters to live in Cameroon because of the harassment and intimidation. However, it must be noted that this form of intimidation is not used against all SDF members.” (UK Home Office (24 January 2007) - *Operational Guidance Note – Cameroon*, p.4)

A June 2006 article in *The Post* reported the arrest of SDF members in June 2006 as follows:

“Following the May 26 bloody clash of two factions of the SDF in Yaounde that led to the death of one person and the wounding of several others, the Fru Ndi-appointed Coordinator for the Centre Province, Retired Colonel Chi Ngafor, has been held at the gendarmerie headquarters since last week.” (Post, The (Buea) (05 June 2006) - *Col. Ngafor, 21 Others Detained* Kinsai, Nformi Sonde)

Also from *The Post* is an article which states:

“The militants were arrested on May 26 when pro-Fru Ndi militants clashed with those of the Ngwasiri faction that organised a controversial convention of the SDF in Yaounde. The violent clashes led to the death of erstwhile Administrative secretary of the party in the Centre province, Gregorian Diboule who was loyal to the Ngwasiri faction.” (Post, The (Buea) (14 July 2006) - *Col Ngafor, Other SDF Detainees in Kondengui Nsom*, Kini)

A report from *The Post* on the death of an SDF detainee states:

“One of the SDF detainees languishing in pre-trial imprisonment at the Yaounde Kondengui Maximum Security Prison, died on Saturday, August 19 at 5:00 pm after a brief illness. John Nguh, 43, who hailed from Mbengwi, was one of those arrested in connection with the death of Gregoire Diboulé on May 26. By press time, it was not yet clear what killed Nguh.” (Post, The (Buea) (21 August 2006) - *SDF Murder Suspect Dies in Detention Nsom*, Kini & Kinsai, Nformi Sonde)

A June 2005 document on the treatment of the SDF from the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

“Sources indicate that on 20 August 2004, John Khontem, an SDF leader in the North West Province, was beaten to death by the guards of Gah Gwanyin Doh III (Country Reports 2004 28 Feb. 2005, sec. 1.a; see also AI 25 May 2005) in Balikumbat (PANA 26 Aug. 2004). Gah Gwanyin is not only the traditional ruler and mayor of this village, but he is also a representative of the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally (Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais, RDPC [the party in power]) in that region (AI 25 May 2005; PANA 26 Aug. 2004; *ibid.* 23 Aug. 2004). According to Country Reports 2004, John Khontem was returning from a meeting where he had accused Gah Gwanyin of committing pre-electoral fraud (28 Feb. 2005, sec. 1.a).” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (09 June 2005) - *CMR100062.FE – Cameroon: Government attitude toward and treatment of members of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) (June 2005)*)

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted

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Amnesty International

BBC News

ECOI: European Country of Origin Information Network

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

International Crisis Group (ICG)

IRB: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRIN News

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
United Kingdom: Home Office
UNHCR Refworld
United States Department of State