



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Cameroon - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 30 April 2009

Information on Forced Marriage in Cameroon.

A report by the *UN Human Rights Council* states

“2000, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) noted the persistence of cultural practices and deep-rooted stereotypes relating to the roles and responsibilities of women and men in all areas of life, and urged Cameroon to adopt legislation to prohibit discriminatory cultural practices, in particular those relating to female genital mutilation (FGM), levirate marriage, inheritance, early and forced marriage and polygamy” (UN Human rights Council (9 December 2008) *Compilation Prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(b) of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 – Cameroon*)

A Report by the *UK Home Office* states

“while the minimum legal age for a woman to marry is 15, many families facilitated the marriage of young girls by the age of 12. Early marriage was prevalent in the northern regions of Far North, Adamaoua, North, and particularly the remote Far North Region, where many girls as young as nine faced severe health risks from pregnancies. There were no statistics on the prevalence of child marriage.” (UK Home Office (16 March 2009) *Country of Origin Key Documents*)

A report by the *UN Human Rights Council* states

“Forced marriage is an offence and primary education is free and compulsory. In 2004 the Government created a Ministry on Women’s and Family Issues and constant efforts are made to follow a gender-based approach. The Constitution enshrines the principle of equal rights for all citizens. A national action plan for the integration of women in development has been adopted with the support of national and international partners and the current reform of the Criminal Code would result, inter alia, in the criminalization of female genital mutilation” (UN Human Rights Council (3 March 2009) *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Cameroon*)

A report by the *UK Home Office* states

“Women were also forced to marry and in some regions parents could, and did, give girls away in marriage without the bride’s consent. Often the husband, who could be many years older than his bride, paid his wife’s parents a ‘bride price’. Once a price had been paid, the girl was considered the husband’s property. When a married man died, his widow often was unable to collect any inheritance, since she herself was considered part of the

man's property. Often the widow was forced to marry one of the deceased husband's brothers. If she refused, she had to repay the bride price in full and leave the family compound. In the northern provinces, some Lamibe reportedly prevented their wives and concubines from leaving the palace. The lack of a national legal code covering such family issues often left women defenseless against these male-oriented customs (UK Home Office (16 January 2008) *Country of Origin Information Report*)

Also

"North and Far North regions of Cameroon. [In the Northern provinces] young girls are offered to 50 to 80 year old men who are willing to pay very high bride prices for the children. In early marriages, children are placed in situations where they are exploited economically and sexually. Because of their immaturity and naivety, they are often docile, easy to track and hardly have the courage to participate in debates concerning important decisions in family and their households... The girls do not have any say in their marriages. Custom, being the backbone in this practice, encourages, protects, authorises and legalises early marriages. In the name of custom, parents with a very strong family authority profit from this situation and literally sell their daughters to men who are at times the parents' elders... As the role of the mother is very important in the early marriage of a daughter... The early marriage of young girls is a phenomenon that exists in Adamawa, r, they are pressured and manipulated by family members: husbands, brothers and parents, to persuade the young girl into the marriage by convincing them that marrying at a very young age is prestigious and a model of success and dignity... For certain communities, elderly men ask young girls to marry their sons who have gone to study or to look for jobs in town. This is generally the case among the Bamileke, who live in the West of Cameroon" (Ibid)

References

Immigration and Refugee Board Canada (5 May 2005) *Cameroon: Situation and treatment of young women, including the existence of forced or arranged marriages; prevalence of such marriages; whether a woman can refuse such a marriage, and the consequences of the refusal; available protection and redress (April 2005)*

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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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IDSN//

IRIN News

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Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

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Relief Web