



Cameroon – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 February 2011

Information on women's rights in Cameroon, including legal and political rights.

A report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading 'Denial of Fair Public Trial' states:

"Customary law ostensibly provides for equal rights and status; however, men may limit women's rights regarding inheritance and employment, and some traditional legal systems treat wives as the legal property of their husbands." (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *2009 Human Rights Report: Cameroon*)

In a section headed 'Elections and Political Participation' this report states:

"Women held 23 of 180 seats in the National Assembly, six of 61 cabinet posts, and a few of the higher offices within the major political parties, including the ruling CPDM." (ibid)

It also states under the heading 'Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons'

"The law does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on race, language, or social status, but does prohibit discrimination based on gender and mandates that "everyone has equal rights and obligations." The government, however, did not enforce these provisions effectively. Violence and discrimination against women, trafficking in persons, and discrimination against ethnic minorities and homosexuals were problems" (ibid)

It also states:

"The law allows a husband to oppose his wife's right to work in a separate profession if the protest is made in the interest of the household and the family; a husband may also end his wife's commercial activity by notifying the clerk of the commerce tribunal of his opposition based upon the family's interest.

Customary law is far more discriminatory against women, since in many regions a woman traditionally was regarded as the property of her husband. Because of the importance attached to customs and traditions, civil laws protecting women often are not respected." (ibid)

Paragraph 8 of a 2010 report from the *UN Human Rights Committee* states:

"Notwithstanding the prohibition of discrimination enshrined in the Constitution of Cameroon, the Committee is concerned that women are discriminated against under articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code concerning the right of spouses to administer

communal property, article 229 of the Civil Code regulating divorce, and article 361 of the Penal Code that defines the crime of adultery in terms more favourable to men than women. The Committee also remains concerned that women are vulnerable to discrimination under customary law, even if customary law can in principle only be applied when compatible with statutory law. In general, the Committee is concerned about the prevalence of stereotypes and customs in Cameroon which are contrary to the principle of equality of rights between men and women and hinder the effective implementation of the Covenant. (arts. 2, 3 and 26)" (UN Human Rights Committee (4 August 2010) *Cameroon: "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant; Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee; Cameroon [CCPR/C/CMR/CO/4]"*)

Paragraph 11 of a 2009 report by the *UN Human Rights Council* states:

"On gender discrimination, the Minister noted that some traditions remain sources of discriminatory practices and violence against women. Also of note are the quasi-economic dependence of women in certain regions, the under-education of girls in certain parts of the country, and insufficient budget allocations for programmes and projects in this regard..." (UN Human Rights Council (3 March 2009) *UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* Cameroon - pg.5*)

Paragraph 20 of this report states:

"Noting that various NGOs had reported instances of torture, particularly torture of children by members of the security forces, Argentina asked about measures to avoid such practices. According to CEDAW, marked cultural stereotypes, as well as customs and traditions discriminating against women, persisted in Cameroon. Argentina inquired about the policies for promoting gender equality, including eliminating FGM..." (ibid) (pg. 7)

Paragraph 38 also notes:

"On eliminating practices concerning, inter alia, women and children, such as FGM, forced marriage and other forms of discrimination, the reform of the criminal code is underway, and In particular, the forthcoming adoption of the code of the family and of the child. These codes will make it possible to address these issues and bring legislation in line with international commitments." (ibid) (pg.11)

Paragraph 41 states:

"India was encouraged to learn that the Government was aware of gaps and education and attempts to reduce disparities between boys and girls" (ibid) (pg. 11)

A report by *Freedom House* under the heading 'Political Rights and Civil Liberties' states:

"Many laws contain gender-biased provisions and penalties. There is widespread violence and discrimination against women, who often are denied inheritance and property rights. Female genital mutilation is practiced in the Southwest and Far North

provinces, and homosexuality is illegal. Cameroon is a market for child labor and a transit center for child trafficking. Abortion is prohibited except in cases of rape or to preserve the life of the mother.” (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World - Cameroon (2010)*)

A report by the *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* under the heading ‘Status of the draft law for the prevention and punishment of violence against women; definition of discrimination against women and any sanctions provided’ states:

“The Government has gone further: it has prepared and is now carrying out an ambitious national plan for combating disparities between the sexes. This is the national programme for institutionalizing gender, which aims to mainstream gender and the different needs of men and women in the development process and in daily life, including family life. This programme will lead to gender-based budgeting in public services, so as to ensure that public spending is geared to meeting the needs of men and women equitably.” (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (10 November 2008) *Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of the combined 2nd and 3rd periodic report: Cameroon* -pg.3 par.4)

References:

Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World - Cameroon (2010)*
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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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European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)
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Human Rights Watch
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
IRIN News
Lexis Nexis
Minorities Rights Group Internationals
Online newspapers
Refugee Documentation Centre Library
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
UN Human Rights Council
UNHCR Refworld
United Kingdom Home Office
United States Department of State