

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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19 March 2015

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Cameroon: The village chief's warriors, specifically in the Mbouda region; possible consequences for someone who refuses to take over the duties of his deceased father, who was a member of one of these warrior groups (2012March 2015)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. The Village Chief's Warriors in Cameroon, Specifically in the Mbouda Region

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of New Human Rights (Nouveaux Droits de l'homme, NDH), a Cameroonian human rights NGO with headquarters in Yaoundé (NDH n.d.) and consulting status with the United Nations, stated that [translation] "Cameroon is made up of a number of ethnic groups and groupings or villages. The power of the king or village chief is seen differently depending on the region" (ibid. 13 Mar. 2015).

According to the Executive Director, [translation] "Mbouda is the capital of the Bamboutos department of the West region" (ibid.). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an assistant professor of African studies at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, who does research on Cameroon, including field research, and has written on chieftainships in the country, explained that Mbouda was a [translation] "small town" located between Bamenda and Bafoussam in western Cameroon (Assistant Professor 10 Mar. 2015).

Sources indicate that the Mbouda region is mostly populated by members of the Bamileke ethnic group (NDH 13 Mar. 2015; Professor 11 Mar. 2015; Assistant Professor 10 Mar. 2015). The Assistant Professor added that members of sub-groups of the Bamoun ethnic group were also in the region (ibid.).

A professor of social demography and anthropology at Carleton College in Minnesota, who does anthropological field research, particularly in the western part of the country and among the Bamileke, stated in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate that when Cameroonians speak of their [translation] "village," they are referring to [translation] "a chiefdom to which they bear allegiance" and that this "village" can be "fairly big" (Professor 11 Mar. 2015). The Professor added that there are various levels of chiefdoms, called *fons* (ibid.).

The Executive Director of NDH explained that [translation] "in the western regions, the kingdoms of the past that are now villages are ruled by village chiefs or kings" (NDH 13 Mar. 2015). The Executive Director added that individuals [translation] "who may be called warriors in the strict sense of the term existed before independence" (ibid.). According to the Professor of social demography and anthropology, with the exception of chiefs who rule very small communities, [translation] "the chiefs have henchmen who could be called warriors" (Professor 11 Mar. 2015). According to the Assistant Professor, [translation] "the Bamileke warriors take part in long-standing practices that govern maintaining the chiefdom and the power of the fons in Bamileke society" (10 Mar. 2015). According to the Professor of social demography and anthropology,

[translation] "some of these warriors are called 'servants of the chiefs' and others are members of secret societies" (11 Mar. 2015). Along the same lines, the Executive Director of NDH stated,

[translation]

Today, those that can be called warriors or king's guards are organized into "secret societies," a kind of association in which being accepted as a member confers certain social attributes and incurs a level of respectability in the village. The Bamileke culture places great importance on legends, traditions and the magico-spiritual. Therefore, these very mystified "secret societies" are part of the pillars of the king and his chieftdom (13 Mar. 2015).

The Professor of social demography and anthropology stated that there is [translation] "a variety of henchmen or warriors who act as the chief's police force" (11 Mar. 2015). The Assistant Professor stated that [translation] "the warriors are the extension of power within Bamileke chieftainships" (10 Mar. 2015).

2. Possible Consequences for the Person who Refuses to Assume the Warrior Duties of Their Deceased Father

According to the NDH Executive Director, [translation] "the warriors and members of the guard obtain their positions either by succession (from father to son) or by decree of the king [chief]" (13 Mar. 2015). However, according to the Professor of social demography and anthropology [translation] "all" the warrior positions are hereditary and passed from a father to one of his sons, who has been chosen for this role (11 Mar. 2015).

The Executive Director stated that

[translation]

according to elders and prominent persons and other guarantors of Bamileke traditions, a son who refuses to take over the duties of his deceased father should suffer spiritual consequences in the form of a curse, total failure of every undertaking ... etc. But there is no consequence that would directly hurt the physical integrity or the life of a son who refuses (13 Mar. 2015).

The Professor of social demography and anthropology stated the following:

[translation]

Since the hereditary link between the father and the son is considered a sacred or holy "vocation," the son must replace his father upon his death. Otherwise, there are drastic consequences, not only for the person who refuses, but also for his family and the fertility of the land in the chieftainship, and for all kinds of other aspects of life (Professor 11 Mar. 2015).

The Professor added that

[translation]

someone must assume the role, [namely,] the father's title and the related responsibilities. The heir "becomes" the father, the incarnation of his duties. If the designated heir does not take on the responsibility that falls to him, he must be made "ritually dead" so that someone else can inherit it (ibid.).

The Professor noted that it might be possible to carry out this ritual death through some customary practices, but that this might become [translation] "awkward" if the "dead person" reappears (ibid.). According to her, this person might then be truly killed to maintain compliance with the ritual order (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Assistant Professor of African studies, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. 10 March 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.

Nouveaux Droits de l'homme (NDH). 13 March 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate by the Executive Director.

_____. N.d. "Présentation de NDH." <<http://ndhcam.org/presentation-de-ndh/>> [Accessed 13 March 2015]

Professor of social demography and anthropology, Carleton College, Minnesota. 11 March 2015. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Instructor/researcher, University of Cotonou, Benin; professor of African anthropology, University of Amsterdam; Maison des droits de l'homme du Cameroun; professor emeritus of anthropology, Hobart and William Smith Colleges; professor emeritus of anthropology, University College London; professor of anthropology, University of Cape Town; professor of geography, Pôle universitaire de Guyane.

Internet sites, including: Afrilex; Cairn.info; Cahiers d'études africaines; Connect Africa; ecoi.net; Études africaines en France; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Irenees.net; IRIN; Minority Rights Group International; Techniques et cultures; United Nations – Refworld.

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