



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Cameroon

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2006](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
March 6, 2007

Cameroon, with a population of approximately 17.3 million, is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. Despite the country's multiparty system of government, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. In October 2004 CPDM leader Paul Biya won re-election as president. The election was flawed by irregularities, particularly in the voter registration process, but observers believed the election results represented the will of the voters. The president retains the power to control legislation or to rule by decree. He has used his legislative control to change the constitution and extend the term lengths of the presidency. Although civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, security forces sometimes acted independently of government authority.

The government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous human rights abuses. Security forces committed numerous unlawful killings; they regularly engaged in torture, beatings, and other abuses, particularly of detainees and prisoners. Impunity was a problem in the security forces. Prison conditions were harsh and life-threatening. Authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained anglophone citizens advocating secession, local human rights monitors and activists, and other citizens. The law provides for the arrest of homosexuals and persons not carrying identification cards. There were reports of prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention and infringement on citizens' privacy rights. The government restricted citizens' freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and harassed journalists. The government also impeded citizens' freedom of movement. The public perceived government corruption to be a serious problem. Societal violence and discrimination against women; trafficking in persons, primarily children; discrimination against indigenous Pygmies and ethnic minorities; and discrimination against homosexuals were problems. The government restricted worker rights and the activities of independent labor organizations, and child labor, slavery, and forced labor, including forced child labor, were reported to be problems.

Poor understanding of human rights has contributed to abuses in the country. The government took significant steps during the year to improve citizen's understanding of their specific human rights and protection through publication of its own human rights report. The government also conducted training sessions throughout the country on the provisions of the penal code scheduled for implementation in 2007.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including

Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that government agents committed politically motivated killings; however, throughout the year security forces continued to commit unlawful killings, including killings resulting from beatings and other use of excessive force.

There were new developments in the 2004 killing of John Khontem. On April 12, the Ngoketunjia High Instance Court sentenced National Assembly member Doh Gah Gwanyin III and each of nine codefendants to 15 years in prison and a \$1,000 fine (500,000 CFA francs). Gwanyin filed a motion for bail because of poor health, and, on August 18, the Bamenda Court of Appeals granted him bail.

On November 29, security forces mistakenly shot and killed a man while trying to arrest another person who allegedly participated in a violent demonstration the day before in Maga, Far North Province.

There were reports that police used excessive force to disperse demonstrators, resulting in the deaths of several of them (see section 2.b.).

Prisoners reportedly died in custody during the year due to beatings and abuse by security forces.

There were new developments in the February 2005 torture case of banker Emmanuel Moutombi. The Douala Military Tribunal's investigation yielded the names of those involved in Moutombi's death. On March 21, the tribunal sentenced gendarmerie officers Athanase Domo, Pierre Minkeng Ndjemba, and Jean Mbiakop to 10, nine, and eight years in jail, respectively, on charges of torture that resulted in death. Two other officers, Anatole Clement Banem and Jean-Claude Menanga Ahanda, received 10 and six month sentences, respectively, on violation of instructions charges. The court released two of the codefendants due to lack of evidence. The court also ordered the

government to pay \$90,000 (44 million CFA francs) in damages to Moutombi's family.

There were new developments in the March 2005 shooting death of Jean-Pierre Mpochede. On October 27, the Kribi High Court sentenced Police Commissioner Japhet Bello Miagougoudom to 15 years in prison and awarded \$40,000 (20 million CFA francs) in damages to the victim's family. The court also sentenced Police Inspector Aboubakari Modibo to 10 years in jail but acquitted the seven other codefendants.

There were no new developments in the 2005 police killings of Denis Serge Etoundi, Aurelien Mayouga Noundou, Elvis Sigala Tasama, or Claude Obam Ndoum.

There were no new developments in the 2004 beating death of Emmanuel Song Bahanag or the torture death of Laurent Gougang.

There were no new developments in the 2004 police killings of Justin Abena Ngonu or Desire Etoundi.

There were new developments in the 2000 high-profile case of the shooting death of Luc Benoit Bassilekin. On April 27, after a two year suspension, the Douala Military Tribunal resumed hearings on the case. The trial was ongoing at year's end.

There were fewer reports that police used excessive, including deadly, force than in the previous year.

There were fewer incidents where police beat or shot suspects. The government took more steps to investigate and prosecute officers who used excessive force (see section 1.d.).

On February 23, police officer Daniel Ayissi Fouda of the Mbengwi police station in the Northwest Province allegedly shot and killed Elvis Ndengue, a motorcycle taxi driver, after Ndengue refused to transport a young woman who Ayissi Fouda had just arrested to the police station. Ayissi Fouda fled the crime scene. The investigation was ongoing at year's end.

On August 22, the Yaounde district attorney charged Ni John Fru Ndi, chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), with the murder of Gregoire Diboule. Fru Ndi was accused of being responsible for violence that resulted in the death. On May 28, SDF vanguards from Bamenda stormed the party's head office in order to prevent the party's dissenting faction from holding a congress (see section 3). The charges against Fru Ndi were still under investigation at year's end.

During the year mob violence and summary justice against persons suspected of theft and the practice of witchcraft continued to result in deaths and serious injuries. The press reported 43 deaths from beatings and burning, the most ever reported.

Douala, the economic capital, had the highest number of mob "justice" incidents. The mob violence was attributed in part to public frustration over police ineffectiveness and the release without charge of many individuals arrested for serious crimes (see section 1.d.). During the year there was a notable rise in crime, and authorities responded by purchasing 60 vehicles to increase police efficacy. The country has a functional police academy and engaged in training police for neighboring countries.

On January 19, former subjects of Fon Vugah Simon II, the former traditional ruler of Kedjom Keku, a village of Mezam Division in the Northwest Province, beat him to death and then burned his body upon his return to the village after having been deposed two years earlier. They accused him of immorality and destroying their tradition. Shortly after the killing, the gendarmerie arrested 59 persons. Approximately 20 were released and the rest remained in pretrial detention. Hearings began on June 28 and were still ongoing at year's end.

On March 4, a mob burned to death Jean-Pierre Onguene, Serge Toussaint Awa Amougou, and Joseph Cyrille Meba'a, whom they caught stealing in the Yaounde neighborhood of Nsimeyong-Damase. The police initially caught and held the suspects, until a large mob broke into the police station, pulled out the three, and killed them. An investigation was still ongoing at year's end.

On June 2, an angry crowd burned to death Jean Bape, Daniel Fotie, and Clovis Koagne on allegations of theft in various houses of Tchokaong, a village of Mifi Division in the West Province. The gendarmerie was still investigating the case at year's end.

In October 2005 the Meme High Court (Southwest Province) sentenced Police Inspector Stephen Ngu to eight years in prison for beating and burning to death Afuh Bernard Weriwu.

There were no new developments in the 2005 burning deaths of Papi Gosse, Jonas Benang, and an unknown individual in Douala.

There were no new developments in any of the killings by mobs in 2004. There were no new developments in the 2003 appeal of the acquittal of six army officers who were charged with executing nine youths in Bepanda.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances during the year.

There were no developments in the 2005 case of 20 citizens reportedly captured by agents of Equatorial Guinea's government and taken to Equatorial Guinea for alleged crimes.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices; however, there were credible reports that security forces continued to torture, beat, and otherwise abuse prisoners and detainees.

In the majority of cases of torture or abuse, the government rarely investigated or punished any of the officials involved; however, in at least one case during the year, gendarmerie officers accused of torturing a citizen to death in 2005 were detained and investigated (see section 1.a.).

During the year there were no reports that persons in police and gendarmerie custody died as a result of torture.

There were reports that security forces detained persons at specific sites where they tortured and beat detainees. Security forces also reportedly subjected women, children, and elderly persons to abuse.

Numerous international human rights organizations and some prison personnel reported that torture was widespread; however, most reports did not identify the victim because of fear of government retaliation against either the victim or the victim's family. Most victims did not report torture for fear of government reprisal or because of ignorance of, or lack of confidence in, the judicial system.

In Douala's New Bell Prison and other nonmaximum security penal detention centers, prison guards inflicted beatings, and prisoners were reportedly chained or at times flogged in their cells. Authorities administered beatings in temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities.

Two forms of physical abuse commonly reported by male detainees were the "bastonnade," where authorities beat the victim on the soles of the feet, and the "balancoire," during which authorities hung victims from a rod with their hands tied behind their backs and beat them, often on the genitals.

Security forces reportedly continued to subject prisoners and detainees to degrading treatment, including stripping them, confining them in severely overcrowded cells, denying them access to toilets or other sanitation facilities, and beating detainees to extract confessions or information about alleged criminals. Pretrial detainees reported that they were sometimes required, under threat of abuse, to pay "cell fees," a bribe paid to prison guards to prevent further abuse.

On June 13, Yaounde police stormed a gathering of students from the University of Yaounde II, who were protesting an unannounced hike in taxi fares. Police, who arrived to disperse the spontaneous demonstration, violently beat and seriously injured many students. They also arrested 50 students, who were later released.

In June officers from the Yaounde antiriot squad beat Wackenhut guard service employee Felix Ahanda and many of his colleagues, who were demonstrating to demand payment of money they alleged the firm owed them. The beating left Ahanda with damaged testes.

According to the French-language news site Afrique Centrale, in August soldiers severely injured and wounded five policemen while trying to free a fellow soldier from police custody by force.

There were no new developments in the 2005 police beatings of Genevieve Toupouwou, Gregoire Angotchou, or Nelson Ndi Nagyinkfu.

There were also no developments in the 2005 incident in which security forces beat and arrested 50 students in Bafoussam, West Province, for participating in an illegal demonstration.

There were no new developments in the 2004 beating of a man named Bikele by police officers, or the 2004 assault and arrest of Epie Nzounkwelle by a local government official.

Security forces physically abused and harassed journalists during the year (see section 2.a.).

There were no reports that security forces sexually abused individuals during the year.

There were no new developments in the 2004 case of sexual abuse of Biloa Ndongo by a gendarmerie mobile unit in the Melen neighborhood of Yaounde.

Illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Chad reported that they were subjected to harsh treatment and imprisonment (see section 5).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Prisons were seriously overcrowded, unsanitary, and inadequate, especially outside major urban areas. The government did not provide funds to cover serious deficiencies in food, health care, and sanitation, which were common in almost all prisons, including "private prisons" operated by traditional rulers in the north. Prisoners were kept in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons, where the number of inmates was four to five times the intended capacity. According to a 2004 report by the International Center for Prison Studies, published by the Catholic newspaper La Croix, there were 67 prisons for the country's approximately

20,000 detainees.

Overcrowding was exacerbated by the large number of long pretrial detentions.

In 2005, 800 persons were hired and trained to work in the prison system. In 2004 the government shifted responsibility for administering prisons and detention centers and all individuals arrested by security forces from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to the Ministry of Justice. In addition the government created a human rights body within the Ministry of Justice to monitor abuses in prisons and jails (see section 4).

There were reports that prisoners died due to a lack of medical care.

There were no developments in the March 2005 case of Djabba Bouba, a prisoner in the Douala prison who reportedly starved to death in a Douala prison.

Health and medical care were almost nonexistent in the country's prisons and in its detention cells, which were housed in gendarmeries and police stations. However, while some prisons had medical facilities, they lacked the funds and personnel to administer assistance. Between August 5 and 7, three inmates died at the Kumba prison in the Southwest Province, reportedly from untreated tuberculosis.

Prisoners' families were expected to provide food for their relatives in prison. Douala's New Bell Prison contained seven water taps for a reported 3,500 prisoners, contributing to poor hygiene, illness, and death.

Prison officials reportedly tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners with impunity. Corruption among prison personnel was widespread.

Prisoners sometimes could bribe wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom. Prisoners in New Bell Prison could pay bribes for more comfortable sleeping arrangements and to avoid doing prison chores.

There were two separate prisons for women.

There were also a few pretrial detention centers for women; however, women routinely were held in police and gendarmerie complexes with men, occasionally in the same cells. The secretary of state in charge of penitentiary administration acknowledged this was a serious problem. Mothers sometimes chose to be incarcerated with their children or babies while their children were very young or if they had no other child care option.

Juvenile prisoners were often incarcerated with adults, occasionally in the same cells or wards. There were credible reports that adult inmates sexually abused juvenile prisoners.

Pretrial detainees routinely were held in cells with convicted criminals.

Some high-profile prisoners were separated from other prisoners and enjoyed relatively lenient treatment.

Authorities held adults, juveniles, and women together in temporary detention centers. Detainees usually received no food, water, or medical care. Detention center guards at times resorted to corruption, accepting bribes from detainees in return for access to better conditions, including permission to stay in an office instead of a cell. Detainees whose families were informed of their incarceration relied on their relatives for food and medical care. Overcrowding was common in the detention centers and was often aggravated by the practice of "Friday arrests" (see section 1.d.).

In the North and Extreme North provinces, the government continued to permit traditional chiefs, or Lamibe, to detain persons outside the government penitentiary system, in effect creating private prisons. Traditional rulers throughout the country derive support and legitimacy from their subjects, many of whom turn to the Lamibe for dispute resolution. Within the palaces of the traditional chiefdoms of Rey Bouba, Gashiga, Bibemi, and Tcheboa there were private prisons that had a reputation for serious abuse. Prior to the destruction of the palace prison in 2005 in Garoua, in the North Province, palace staff estimated that a total of 50 prisoners were held in the palace prison annually, normally for one to two weeks.

Individuals who were found guilty in Garoua were reportedly often beaten or subject to other forms of physical abuse. According to members of all the chiefdoms' palace staffs, individuals accused of serious crimes such as murder were turned over to local police.

The government permitted international humanitarian organizations access to prisoners. Both the local Red Cross and the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) made infrequent, unannounced prison visits during the year. The government continued to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisons. In 2005 the ICRC stated that the government allowed international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) increased access to prisons.

In July 2005, during a visit by diplomatic observers to the Douala New Bell Prison, the prison administrator said that the prison, built to hold 700 inmates, held 3,194. Of these, 2,300 were pretrial detainees, who were not held separate from convicted prisoners. In August 2005, during a similar visit to the Yaounde Kondengui Prison, the same observers learned that the prison, built for 800 inmates, held 3,521 of whom were awaiting trial. In May 2004 a senior official estimated that 1,600 out of 1,800 inmates in Bafoussam Prison were pretrial detainees.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued to arrest and detain citizens arbitrarily.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police, the National Intelligence Service (DGRE), the gendarmerie, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the army's military security department, the army, the minister of defense, and, to a lesser extent, the Presidential Guard are responsible for internal security; the national police and gendarmerie have primary responsibility for law enforcement. The Ministry of Defense, including the gendarmerie, national police, and DGRE, are under an office of the presidency, resulting in strong presidential control of security forces. The national police includes the public security force, judicial police, territorial security forces, and frontier police. In rural areas, where there is little or no police presence, the primary law enforcement body is the gendarmerie.

Citizens viewed police as ineffective, which frequently resulted in mob "justice" (see section 1.a.). It was widely believed that individuals paid bribes to law enforcement and the judiciary to secure their freedom. Police officers and members of the gendarmerie were widely viewed as corrupt officials who frequently and arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens. Police demanded bribes at checkpoints, and influential citizens reportedly paid police to make arrests or abuse individuals involved in personal disputes. Private disputes, such as feuds between business partners, frequently resulted in one party making allegations of impropriety or homosexuality about the other and involving the security forces.

According to Transparency International's 2005 Global Corruption Barometer, citizens viewed the police as extremely corrupt. Impunity remained a problem but was less severe than in previous years. Insufficient funding and inadequate training contributed to a lack of professionalism in the national police. The Center Province purchased 150 police vehicles to improve police effectiveness.

Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o, who in 2004 was appointed the general delegate for national security, took significant steps during the year to investigate, suspend, and prosecute security forces accused of abuses.

In 2005 Mebe Ngo'o rehabilitated the "police of the police," an internal affairs unit of undercover agents that had been dormant for many years. By year's end the unit was functioning and had received funding, although there were no public reports of any cases investigated by this unit.

During the year Mebe Ngo'o also sanctioned at least 17 police officials who violated laws and regulations, including those on corruption and extortion. Seven others were also sanctioned by the courts.

For example, on March 2, pending legal action, Mebe Ngo'o suspended three police commissioners for three months without pay for intimidation and aggravated corruption. On September 4, the president signed decrees terminating them from the police force, and revoking their pension rights. On August 21, Mebe Ngo'o suspended eight police officers for three months without pay who were involved in the trafficking of ordinary passports.

In March 2005 Mebe Ngo'o suspended a Douala police officer and a Yaounde police inspector for three months for behavior that "tarnished the image of the police." He suspended another Yaounde-based police inspector for two weeks for keeping a citizen's driving license unnecessarily.

During the year courts convicted at least seven police and gendarmerie officers for human rights abuses.

On May 15, the Douala prosecutor detained four police officers

from the Douala Central Police Station No. 2 for the theft of \$2,000 (one million CFA francs) seized from a thief who had stolen the money from a shop. In June the Bafoussam tribunal sentenced a police inspector from the Fouban police station to one year in jail, a \$400 fine (200,000 CFA francs), and \$300 in damages (150,000 CFA francs) to be paid to Raoul Noka for the 2003 suit that his lawyer filed against him for the nonpayment of his legal fees. On August 4, the Yaounde High Court sentenced a gendarmerie commissioned officer to 18 months in jail for the 2005 murder of his young neighbor.

On August 23, the Bamenda Court sentenced the Bamenda judicial police commissioner to pay damages of \$1,200 (600,000 CFA francs) to Edwin Nkwain Mbang for arbitrarily arresting and detaining him for 18 days in 2001.

In May 2005 the Douala Military Tribunal sentenced two police inspectors from the Douala Central Police Station No. 1 to six months in jail for the 2001 armed assault and robbery of three Nigerian citizens.

The government also took actions to reform security forces including the police and gendarmerie. On June 22, several gendarmerie and police officers completed a four-week training seminar on order preservation, with an emphasis on citizens' rights, human rights, and individual freedoms. The government also sent candidates to attend the International Law Enforcement Academy police training.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires police to obtain an arrest warrant except when a person is caught in the act of committing a crime. Police legally may detain

a person in connection with a common crime for up to 24 hours and may renew the detention three times before bringing charges. While this provision was generally respected, there were unverifiable reports that police occasionally violated it.

The law provides for the right to judicial review of the legality of detention only in the country's two anglophone provinces, and this provision was respected in practice. In the francophone provinces, French legal tradition applies, precluding judicial authorities from acting on a case until the authority that ordered the detention turns the case over to a prosecutor. In practice these processes took between 15 days to a month. In francophone provinces, after a magistrate has issued a warrant to bring a case to trial he may hold the detainee in administrative or pretrial detention indefinitely, pending court action. During the year such detention often was prolonged, due to the understaffed and mismanaged court system. The law permits detention without charge by administrative authorities such as governors and senior divisional officers for renewable periods of 15 days, ostensibly to combat banditry and maintain public order. Persons taken into detention frequently were denied access to both legal counsel and family members. The law permits release on bail only in the anglophone provinces; bail was granted infrequently.

To prepare for the new Code on Criminal Procedure scheduled to enter into force in January 2007, the Ministry of Justice organized training sessions on the code in each of the country's 10 provinces. The code extends the right of individuals to be released on bail to the whole country. It also allows those arrested and held in police and gendarmerie facilities for investigation to be assisted by a lawyer from the beginning of their detention.

Police and gendarmes often arrested persons on spurious charges on Fridays at mid-day or in the afternoon. While the law in the anglophone provinces provides for judicial review of an arrest within 24 hours, the courts did not convene on weekends, so individuals arrested on a Friday typically remained in detention until Monday at the earliest. Police and gendarmes made such "Friday arrests" after accepting bribes from persons who had private grievances. There were no known cases of policemen or gendarmes being sanctioned or punished for this practice.

Security forces and government authorities reportedly continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, often holding them for prolonged periods without charges or trial and, at times, incommunicado.

There were reports of political detainees, including anglophone citizens advocating secession, local human rights monitors or activists, journalists, and other critics of the government (see sections 2.a. and 2.b.).

Police also arrested persons during unauthorized demonstrations, invariably releasing them within a few hours unless they engaged in violence (see section 2.b.).

During the year security forces preemptively arrested approximately 70 leaders, members, and supporters of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an anglophone secessionist group (see section 3).

There were no developments in the 2005 trial of three SCNC members charged with disturbing the public order.

On April 2, gendarmes of the Center Province town of Bokito arrested and detained Suzanne Binyom and Felicite Atchang for 24 hours at the request of Ernest Oloume, the ruling party deputy from the locality. The women had come to pay a courtesy call on their parliamentarian. Oloume told the gendarmes that the women looked suspicious; they in turn filed a complaint for arbitrary arrest and detention.

On April 17, gendarmes from the Yaounde-Kondengui brigade arrested and briefly detained Alice Nkom, a prominent Douala-based lawyer. She was visiting her clients, alleged homosexuals who had been awaiting trial for several months, in the Yaounde central prison. Nkom took some pictures of her clients but was prevented from continuing by prison wardens, who claimed she had no right to take pictures. Nkom told them that there was no law prohibiting her actions. Unable to cite a law backing their claim, prison officials called the gendarmes to have Nkom removed.

On September 15, Police Commissioner Mve of the Douala judicial police office ordered the arrest and detention of Conrad Mongue-Din, a Douala-based lawyer. Mongue-Din went to the judicial police office to assist a client. The police commissioner denied his request for access. When Mongue-Din insisted, Commissioner Mve ordered Mongue-Din detained, claiming he created a disturbance. Mongue-Din filed a complaint through the Douala branch of the Cameroon Bar Association.

There were no developments in the 2005 arrest of a labor leader during a sit-in (see section 6.a.).

There were no developments in the 2004 arrest of a Human Rights Defense Group member by a Northwest Province chief.

Police frequently arrested persons without identification during sweeps (see section 1.f.). Citizens are required to carry identification with them at all times.

The law provides that detainees must be brought promptly before a magistrate; however, bureaucratic inefficiency and, at times, arbitrary actions led to prolonged pretrial detention, and sometimes persons were held incommunicado for months or even years (see section 1.c.). For example, in 2005, in Douala's New Bell Prison and Yaounde's Kondengui Prison, 5,300 of the 6,715 persons incarcerated were in pretrial detention. This high number was due to many factors, including the complexity of cases, staff shortages, and corruption. The average pretrial detention period ranged from one to five years. Longer detention periods were often linked to the loss of a file and the absence of a lawyer to follow up on the case. In January 2005 the Union of Northwest Human Rights Organizations stated it had visited 20 detainees in the Bamenda Prison who had each been awaiting trial for 10 years.

In 2003 the Ministry of Justice and the European Union launched an assistance program to examine cases of prolonged pretrial detention and resolve them. The program was still ongoing at year's end; however, the lack of personnel impeded its effectiveness.

There was no information available on Barnabe Atangana or Beniot Bilongo, who remained in pretrial detention at the end of the year after 22 years and nine years, respectively.

The law specifies that, after an investigation has concluded, juveniles should not be detained without trial for longer than three months; however, in practice the government detained juveniles for longer periods of time. For example, at the end of 2004, Michel Sighanou, a juvenile who was transferred from the Yabassi prison to another prison in 1996, had been awaiting trial for more than seven years. No additional information was available at year's end.

In recent years there have been reports that some prisoners were kept in prison after completing their sentences or having been released under a court ruling. During a July visit to Douala, a Catholic prison chaplain told diplomatic observers that there were still many such cases. Authorities kept more than 100 prisoners in jail past their release dates due to the prisoners' inability to pay court fees or damages.

The government took steps to implement a tracking system that would permit authorities to locate released prisoners and collect fines or damages.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary remained highly subject to executive influence, and corruption and inefficiency remained serious problems. The court system was subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, which was part of the presidency. A constitutional anomaly names the president as "first magistrate," thus "chief" of the judiciary and the theoretical arbiter of any sanctions against the judiciary, which could influence judicial action. In practice, however, the president has not filled this role. The constitution specifies that the president is the guarantor of the legal system's independence. He also appoints all judges with the advice of the Supreme Council of the Magistrature. Some politically sensitive cases were never heard by the courts. However, the judiciary showed modest signs of growing independence. During the year the courts found the government liable for damages in a few human rights cases involving abuses by security officers. For example, in the Miagougoudom case, the government awarded the victim's family \$40,000 (20 million CFA francs) in damages (see section 1.a.).

The court system includes the Supreme Court, a court of appeals in each of the 10 provinces, and courts of first instance in each of the country's 58 divisions.

The legal system includes both national and customary law, and many criminal and civil cases can be tried using either one. However, criminal cases are generally tried in statutory courts, and customary court convictions involving witchcraft automatically are transferred to the statutory courts, which act as the Court of First Instance. Customary law, which is used most frequently in rural areas, is based upon the traditions of the ethnic group predominant in the region and is adjudicated by traditional authorities of that group. Customary law is deemed valid only when it is not "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience." However, many citizens in rural areas remained unaware of their rights under civil law and were taught that they must abide by customary laws. 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.

Customary courts served as a primary means for settling civil disputes in rural areas, primarily in family-related civil cases, such as in matters of succession, inheritance, and child custody. Divorce cases can be brought to customary courts only if the government has not sanctioned the marriage through an official license. Customary courts may exercise jurisdiction in a civil case only with the consent of both parties. Either party has the right to have a case heard by a statutory court and to appeal an adverse decision by a customary court to the statutory courts. Most traditional courts also permitted appeal of their decisions to traditional authorities of higher rank.

The legal structure is strongly influenced by the French legal system, although in the two anglophone provinces certain aspects of the Anglo-Saxon tradition apply. In the past this mixed legal tradition led to conflicting court action in cases handled in both francophone and anglophone jurisdictions.

During the year the government approved a new Criminal Procedure Code and conducted training on the code throughout the country, in anticipation of its implementation in 2007.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair public hearing in which the defendant is presumed innocent. However, this provision often was not respected. There is no jury system. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. Defendants generally were allowed to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants also had access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Because appointed attorneys received little compensation, the quality of legal representation for indigent clients often was poor. The bar association and some voluntary organizations, such as the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists, offered free assistance in some cases. The Project for the Improvement of Conditions of Detention continued to engage lawyers to work on prison cases. Trials normally were public, except in cases judged by the Ministry of Justice to have political overtones or to be disruptive to social peace. In practice defendants enjoyed a presumption of innocence and exercised their right to appeal their cases.

There were reports that officials continued to hold individuals in prison beyond the jail terms set by the courts. In 2005 the general prosecutor of the Yaounde Superior Court reviewed the files of approximately 150 prisoners at the Kondengui Prison to check their judicial status.

Political bias by judges (often instructed by the government) often stopped trials or resulted in an extremely long process with extended court recesses. Powerful political or business interests enjoyed virtual immunity from prosecution; some politically sensitive cases were settled through bribes.

Military tribunals may exercise jurisdiction over civilians when the president declares martial law and in cases involving civil unrest or organized armed violence. Military tribunals also have jurisdiction over gang crimes, banditry, and highway robbery. The government interpreted these guidelines broadly and sometimes used military courts to try matters concerning dissident groups.

Military trials were subject to irregularities and political influence.

Political Prisoners

During the year authorities continued to hold two groups of prisoners who could be considered political prisoners.

There were no developments in the case of 15 members of the secessionist group SCNC serving long prison sentences following their 1999 convictions in military trials. Their trials and convictions did not meet international or national legal standards; Amnesty International and other international human rights NGOs criticized the trials as unfair. In addition the military tribunal admitted into evidence confessions that were credibly alleged in court to have been exacted under torture.

The prisoners maintained they were political prisoners convicted for supporting a political belief; however, the government claimed they were imprisoned for acts of violence against government offices and officers. The government permitted access to the prisoners on a regular basis by international humanitarian organizations.

Because it advocates succession the government considered the SCNC an illegal organization and refused to register it as a political organization.

During the year the government continued to hold two individuals widely considered by human rights NGOs to be political prisoners because of irregularities in their trials and restricted access to counsel. Titus Edzoa, former minister of health and long-time aide to President Biya, and Michel Thierry Atangana, Edzoa's 1997 campaign manager, were arrested in 1997, three months after Edzoa resigned from government and launched his candidacy for president. They were convicted on charges of embezzling public funds and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions; however, these rights were subject to the "higher interests of the state," and there were numerous, credible reports that police and gendarmes harassed citizens, conducted searches without warrants, and opened or seized mail with impunity. The government continued to keep some opposition activists and dissidents under surveillance. Police sometimes punished family members and neighbors of criminal suspects.

The law permits a police officer to enter a private home during daylight hours without a warrant if he is pursuing an inquiry and has reason to suspect that a crime has been committed. The officer must have a warrant to make such a search after dark; however, a police officer may enter a private home at any time in pursuit of a criminal observed committing a crime.

During the year police put the houses of SCNC officials and activists under surveillance, searched the houses of some SCNC leaders, and disrupted SCNC meetings in private residences (see section 3).

An administrative authority may authorize police to conduct neighborhood sweeps without warrants. Such sweeps at times involved forced entry into homes in search of suspected criminals or stolen or illegal goods. Security forces sometimes sealed off a neighborhood, systematically searched homes, arrested persons, sometimes arbitrarily, and seized suspicious or illegal articles.

In 2005 there were credible reports that security forces in Douala and Yaounde used such sweeps as a pretext to loot homes and arbitrarily arrest persons for minor offenses, such as not possessing identity cards. For example, in June 2005 the Douala police, accompanied by gendarmes and soldiers, conducted a sweep in the Douala neighborhoods of Bonakuamouang, Bessengue Valley, and Bessengue, and arrested approximately 100 individuals, mostly young men and women. Police held them in a Douala police station until their identity was established, a process that took 24 hours.

Citizens without ID cards were detained until their identity could be established and then released. Several complained of the police's arbitrary seizure (theft) of electronic devices and cell phones, and registered their complaints at the police station.

There continued to be accusations, particularly in the North and Far North provinces, that traditional chiefs arbitrarily evicted persons from their land.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and while the government continued to restrict these rights in practice, media groups were vibrant and active.

The government sometimes invoked strong libel laws to silence criticism of the government and officials. Journalists, particularly broadcast journalists, often practiced self censorship as a result of real or expected government intimidation, harassment, and criminal penalties for speech-related offenses.

Individuals generally were able to criticize the government publicly and privately without being subjected to government reprisal, although the country's strict libel law resulted in self-censorship. However, the government prohibited discussion or advocacy of secession, which resulted in numerous arrests of SCNC members during the year (see section 3).

On May 12, the Yaounde administrative authorities pressured the Cameroon Episcopal Conference to cancel a press conference where it was to present its final report for the 2004 presidential election. The Justice and Peace Committee, which organized the conference, finally cancelled it.

On September 1, the Sous-prefet of Yaounde I banned opposition leader Woungly Massaga's press conference on an electoral reform plan based on a project by the Catholic Church. The Sous-prefet asserted that Woungly Massaga could not hold the conference because he failed to demonstrate that the Catholic Church authorized him to endorse its project. A week later, the Sous-prefet of Yaounde III banned a press conference by Massaga in that locale on the same grounds.

On September 19, the Sous-prefet of Yaounde I banned a meeting that Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme, a democracy and human rights NGO, organized at the Chamber of Agriculture. Droits de l'Homme wanted to launch a "National Forum of Civil Society on Elections," to discuss electoral reform and the creation of an independent electoral body that would govern all elections. In his ban order, the Sous-prefet asserted that he did not understand the real purpose of the meeting.

The government published one of the country's few daily newspapers, the Cameroon Tribune. The newspaper did not report extensively on protests or political parties critical of the government, overtly criticize the ruling party, or portray government programs in an unfavorable light.

During the year approximately 200 privately owned newspapers were published; however, only an estimated 25 were published on a regular basis, primarily for lack of funding. Mutations, La Nouvelle Expression, and Le Messager were the only privately owned daily newspapers. Newspapers were distributed primarily in urban areas, and most continued to criticize the government and report on controversial issues, including corruption, human rights abuses, homosexuality, and economic policies. However, the government used criminal libel laws to inhibit the press by criminalizing the propagation of false information.

Despite the large number of private newspapers in the country, the influence of print media was minimal. Distribution was problematic outside of major towns, and prices of independent newspapers were high, due largely to high government taxes on newsprint.

In 2004 the government established a special fund to support the development of the press, particularly newspapers, and funds were disbursed to some private newspapers and radio stations. The government continued to disburse such funds during the year. According to media reports, funding was awarded very selectively, and some media outlets, such as Mutations and Radio Reine, refused to apply for funds. The government exerted control over some newspaper warehouses and seized editions of controversial newspaper editions prior to distribution or after they were released.

The government tightly controlled the broadcast media. Radio remained the most important medium reaching most citizens. There were approximately 20 privately owned radio stations operating in the country. Approximately 75 percent of private radio stations were concentrated in Yaounde and Douala. Ownership of the private radio stations was very diverse, with only one owner having more than one station. The state owned CRTV broadcast on both television and radio and was the only officially recognized and fully licensed broadcaster in the country. The government levied taxes on all registered taxpaying citizens to finance CRTV programming, which allowed CRTV a distinct advantage over independent broadcasters.

Nonprofit rural radio stations were required to submit an application to broadcast but were exempt from paying licensing fees. Potential commercial radio and television broadcasters must submit a licensing application and pay an application fee when the application is submitted. Once the license is issued, stations must then pay an annual licensing fee, which can be expensive. Although the government had not issued new broadcast licenses in many years, companies operated without them.

During the year the National Communications Council (NCC), whose members were appointed by the president, continued to review all broadcasting license applications, the first step in issuing licenses. In addition a technical committee composed of government-appointed members--including government officials, journalists, and jurists--continued to review the NCC's decisions.

There were no developments in the 2005 case of the closure of Lake Side Independent Radio for broadcasting without a license.

There were several low-power, rural community radio stations with extremely limited broadcast range that were funded by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and foreign countries. The government prohibited these stations--which broadcast programs on education, health, the environment, and development to small audiences--from discussing politics.

The law permits broadcasting by foreign news services but requires them to partner with a national station. The BBC, Radio France International, and other foreign services broadcast in partnership with state-owned CRTV.

Television was less pervasive but more influential than print media. The five independent television stations largely avoided criticizing the government, although their news broadcasts sometimes focused on poverty, unemployment, poor education, and government neglect, and corruption which the broadcasts said had caused these problems.

Like the Cameroon Tribune, CRTV provided broad reporting of CPDM activities, while giving relatively little attention to the political opposition. During the year CRTV management continued to instruct staff repeatedly to ensure that government views prevailed at all times.

Security forces, usually acting under the command of local provincial government officials, reportedly continued to restrict press freedom by arresting, detaining, physically abusing, threatening, and otherwise harassing journalists.

On January 3, gendarmes from the Douala neighborhood of Bonaberi attacked Pius Njawe, a journalist and the publisher of *Le Messager* newspaper. Njawe was driving his car on the Wouri bridge in Douala when he witnessed a car accident. He stopped to take pictures, but the investigating gendarmes barred him from doing so. When Njawe insisted, the gendarmes beat and kicked him, finally pushing him back into his car. Njawe did not file a complaint against the gendarme officers.

On September 3, officers from the Yaounde military security agency (Semil) arrested and detained Duke Atangana Etotogo, publisher of the monthly *L'Afrique Centrale*, without a warrant and seized magazine copies that were on sale. Etotogo published a series of analytical reports on the armed forces and their leadership. The purpose of the arrest was to force him to reveal his sources. Semil released Etotogo after five days of intensive interrogation. Before his release on September 7, the military security agency demanded that Etotogo write a letter of apology to the president, who is the supreme chief of the armed forces, which he did.

According to the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists in April Eric Motomu, editor of *The Chronicle*, was beaten unconscious by the bodyguard and driver of opposition leader John Fru Ndi. Motomu said he was treated for head and chest injuries. Earlier, Motomu had been summoned by police in Bamenda in connection with a defamation case brought against him by Fru Ndi. However, Motomu was not formally charged.

On November 6, Sweet FM radio presenter Agnes Taile was attacked by three hooded intruders, who forced their way into Taile's home in Douala, dragged her outside, beat her, and tried to strangle her. She was hospitalized with multiple injuries. Authorities had not made any arrests by year's end.

There were no developments in the 2005 police beatings of journalists Philip Njaru and Innocent Yuh, who were hospitalized from their wounds. There were also no developments in the 2005 case of broadcasters Freedom FM and Radio Oku, which were both closed by government officials.

There were no reports that the government indirectly censored the media by controlling advertising revenues. Since the government was the largest advertiser in the country, however, and could choose which media outlets to pay to place advertising, it continued to have a certain degree of influence over media outlets.

The government prosecuted its critics in the print media through criminal libel laws. These laws authorize the government, at its discretion and the request of the plaintiff, to criminalize a civil libel suit or to initiate a criminal libel suit in cases of alleged libel against the president and other high government officials; such crimes are punishable by prison terms and heavy fines. The libel law places the burden of proof on the defendant. Local leaders in particular abused this law to keep local reporters from reporting on corruption and abusive behavior. Various government members and senior government officials filed nine libel suits against journalists.

On March 3, a Yaounde court sentenced Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga, publisher of the Yaounde-based weekly *L'Anecdote*, to four months in jail on defamation charges. In February Belinga published a list of alleged homosexuals, which included Gregoire Owona, a government member, who filed a libel suit. The court ruling found only that the publisher could not substantiate his claim. The court fined Belinga \$2,000 (one million CFA francs) and ordered him to pay symbolic damages to the plaintiff and publish the ruling in several newspapers. Similar suits were filed by Owona and by Jean-Pierre Mayo, the general manager of the Yaounde-based National Social Insurance Fund hospital, against Biloa Ayissi, publisher of the Yaounde-based weekly *Nouvelle Afrique*. In the Owona case, the court sentenced Ayissi on March 24 to six months in jail for defamation, fined him \$2,000 (one million CFA francs), ordered him to pay symbolic damages to the plaintiff and to publish the ruling in several newspapers and some electronic media. In the Mayo case, the court ordered Ayissi to pay \$6,000 (three million CFA francs) in damages.

The other journalists whom courts convicted on defamation charges in private cases included Dieudonne Mveng, publisher of the weekly newspaper *La Meteo*, Socrate Dipanda, publisher of the weekly *Le Constat*, Peter William Mandio, publisher of the weekly *Le Front*, Henriette Ekwe, columnist with *Le Front*, and Georges Gilbert Baongla, publisher of the weekly *Le Dementi*. Most received suspended prison sentences. None of the journalists sentenced to prison terms were sent to prison.

There were no developments in the April 2005 defamation case against Guibai Gatema and Abdoulaye Oumate.

There were no developments in the 2005 libel case against *Le Jeune Observateur* publisher Jules Koum Koum.

There were no developments in the 2004 case of Eric Wirkwa Tayu, convicted of defamation.

In March 2005 the Union of Cameroonian Journalists created the Cameroon Media Council (CMC), an independent, self-regulating body of journalists aiming to promote press freedom, access to information, professionalism, and ethical reporting. The CMC, supported by the

minister of communication, also had as part of its mission the goal of reviewing and disciplining media professionals and arbitrating complaints against journalists. Complaints included ethical breeches, such as the common practice for newspaper reporters and editors of accepting payments from politicians and businessmen to write articles containing unsubstantiated allegations against the opponents and competitors of their benefactors.

Internet Freedom

There were no reports that the government attempted to monitor the Internet. There were also no reports that the government restricted access to the Internet. The Internet was available and used by citizens, although access was limited by cost and slow connections.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Although there were no legal restrictions on academic freedom, state security informants reportedly operated on university campuses. Professors said that participation in opposition political parties could adversely affect their professional opportunities and advancement. During the year strikes in the state universities of Yaounde I, Yaounde II, and Douala deteriorated and resulted in violent confrontations between students and security forces (see section 2.b.).

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly; however, the government restricted this right in practice.

The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or processions to notify officials in advance but does not require prior government approval of public assemblies and does not authorize the government to suppress public assemblies that it has not approved in advance. However, officials routinely have asserted that the law implicitly authorized the government to grant or deny permission for public assembly. Consequently, the government often did not grant permits for assemblies organized by persons or groups critical of the government and repeatedly used force to suppress public assemblies for which it had not issued permits.

Security forces forcibly disrupted the demonstrations, meetings, and rallies of citizens, trade unions, and groups of political activists throughout the year.

On numerous occasions throughout the year, authorities refused to grant the SCNC, an unregistered political group the government deemed illegal because it advocated secession, permission to hold rallies and meetings, and security forces arrested and detained some activists (see section 3).

On March 9, Douala gendarmes disrupted a gathering of Manifeste Africain pour la Nouvelle Independance et la Democratie (MANIDEM), an opposition party, although the party claimed it had received tacit approval for the meeting from the competent administrative authority. Some benches were broken in the altercation, but MANIDEM resumed its meeting after the gendarmerie group commander intervened and called his subordinates to order.

Police forcibly dispersed student demonstrators during the year, which resulted in deaths and injuries. For example, on June 13, Yaounde police dispersed a gathering from the University of Yaounde II and arrested 50 students (see section 1.c.). The rector filed suits against some of the students.

On August 4, the Yaounde First Instance Court began hearings on the cases of four leaders of the Association for the Defense of Students' Interests (ADDEC)--Ibrahim Mohaman, Rodrigue Batogna, Messi Bela, and Tememou--in connection with charges of rebellion and disturbance of public order. The trial was ongoing at year's end.

On November 29, the Buea antiriot police shot and killed two students, Ufeanei Ivo Abiandong and Bennett Moma Kenyufon, while dispersing a demonstration at the University of Buea. The students were protesting those admitted to the faculty of medicine because the protesters believed the minister of higher education had tampered with the names on the admission's list. An investigation was ongoing at year's end.

On December 21, Fouban gendarmes shot and killed Issah Njifouh, a night watchman, during a demonstration in Njinka Chiefdom in Fouban. The demonstrators were protesting the government's decision to replace Adamou Ndam Njoya, an opposition leader and traditional ruler of their chiefdom, with another person. An investigation was still ongoing at year's end.

The Yaounde First Instance Court sentenced students to prison terms during the year in connection with events that occurred in 2005.

On April 11, the Yaounde First Instance Court sentenced Thierry Okala Ebode, a leader of the ADDEC, to a suspended six month jail term (which could be imposed at any time over the next three years if arrested on similar charges) on charges of rebellion and disturbance of public order. In November 2005 ADDEC had organized a meeting on the campus of the University of Yaounde I to discuss issues that made students' lives difficult. The university rector reportedly called the gendarmes to break up the meeting. This resulted in clashes between the gendarmes and the students, of whom many were arrested. There were no developments in the 2005 killing of two University of Buea students by security forces.

There were no reports that security forces broke up or disrupted gatherings of the SDF during the year. However, administrative authorities banned marches and meetings that the SDF wanted to conduct in Douala and Limbe. For example, on July 4, the Sous-prefet of Douala I banned a march organized by the SDF to protest the pauperization of citizens. The Sous-prefet justified the ban by claiming the march might disturb public order. On October 13, the Sous-prefet of Limbe banned a meeting of the National Executive Committee of the SDF on the grounds that internal fighting might disrupt public order.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association, but the government limited this right in practice.

The conditions for government recognition of a political party, a prerequisite for many political activities, precluded peaceful advocacy of secession. While more than 180 political parties, together with a large and growing number of civic associations, operated legally, the government continued to refuse to register the SCNC as a political party and harassed and arrested its leaders and members (see section 3).

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion and the government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were a few exceptions.

Religious groups must be approved and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to function legally. Although there were no reports that the government refused to register any group, the process usually took several years, due primarily to administrative delays. The government did not register traditional religious groups on the grounds that the practice of traditional religion was a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

There were no further developments in the January 2004 arrest and detention of Michel Atanga Effa and Gervais Balla for the 2003 murder of a priest or in the May 2004 beating of Pastor Alombah Godlove by the traditional ruler of his village.

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the law; however, individuals generally were prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with another offense, such as murder. Witchcraft traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases of unknown cause.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were occasional reports of discrimination in the northern provinces, particularly in rural areas, by Muslims against Christians and persons who practiced traditional indigenous religions. However, the overall amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The size of the Jewish community was very small, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2006 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The constitution and law provide for these rights; however, security forces routinely impeded domestic travel during the year.

Roadblocks and checkpoints manned by security forces proliferated in cities and on most highways, making road travel both time-consuming and costly. Extortion of small bribes was commonplace at these checkpoints. Police frequently stopped travelers to check identification documents, vehicle registrations, and tax receipts as security and immigration control measures. There were no reports that security forces killed individuals suspected of evading checkpoints. However, there were credible reports that police arrested and beat individuals who failed to carry their identification cards as required by law.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not use it; however, some human rights monitors or political opponents who considered themselves threatened by the government left the country voluntarily and declared themselves to be in political exile.

In 2005 the government, the Nigerian High Commission to Cameroon, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary repatriation of 10,000 of the 17,000 Nigerian Fulani cattle breeders who fled their homes in 2001 to escape ethnic fighting. During the year a large number of Nigerians returned home.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

In March 2005 between 10,000 and 15,000 citizens in and around the Adamawa Province villages of Djohong and Ngaoui were displaced following attacks and looting by unidentified armed groups from the Central African Republic (CAR).

According to the Adamawa Province's governor, the groups targeted cattle herders of the M'bororo ethnic group, kidnapping them and demanding ransom due to the group's perceived wealth. The government reportedly sent troops in 2005 to restore order in the border area, and during the year a rapid intervention unit operated in the area.

During the year the government worked with the UNHCR to protect and assist IDPs.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system of providing protection to refugees. In practice, the government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution, and granted refugee status or asylum. In 2005 the National Assembly passed legislation that formally established the status of refugees, and the president signed it into law in July 2005.

The government also provided protection to certain individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention and its 1967 protocol. At year's end the UNHCR estimated that the country provided temporary protection to approximately 17,500 refugees, the majority of whom were Chadian and Nigerian, in addition to 5,300 asylum seekers, some of whom were economic refugees presenting themselves as political victims.

During the year, as a result of numerous attacks and kidnappings by unidentified armed groups in the CAR, approximately 20,000 members of the M'bororo ethnic group reportedly fled to the country, according to UN agencies and local human rights groups, bringing the total number of refugees to 35,083. In June the UNHCR reported that 20,383 M'bororos from CAR settled near the CAR border, with approximately 13,000 in the East Province and 7,000 in Adamoua. There were also 2,948 Nigerian refugees in Banyo (Adamaoua and Northwest provinces) and 11,752 urban refugees in Yaounde and Douala.

The government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. The government has been tolerant and understanding of CAR and Chadian citizens coming across the borders to flee their countries, facilitating their entry and providing assistance.

A special task force, including troops from the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (comprised of Cameroon, Gabon, CAR, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, and Chad), regularly launched joint operations, with logistical support from the French army, against CAR and Chadian rebels.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The law provides that citizens have the right to change their government peacefully; however, dominance of the political process by the president and his party and electoral intimidation, manipulation, and fraud limited the ability of citizens to exercise this right in past elections.

Elections and Political Participation

In October 2004 President Biya, who has controlled the government since 1982, was re-elected with approximately 70 percent of the vote in an election widely viewed as freer and fairer than previous elections, and in which opposition parties fielded candidates. However, the election was poorly managed and marred by irregularities, in particular in the voting registration process, but most international observers deemed that the irregularities did not prevent the elections from expressing the will of the voters.

Some observers said progress had been made and called the election transparent; others, such as the Commonwealth Observer Group, stated that the election lacked credibility. Some opposition parties alleged that there was multiple voting by individuals close to President Biya's party and massive vote rigging. One domestic group described the election as a masquerade. The 2002 legislative elections, which were dominated by the CPDM, largely reflected the will of the people; however, there were widespread irregularities.

In December the National Elections Observatory published its assessment of the 2004 elections; the assessment cited electoral weakness in voter registration and report collection, recommended that the observatory assume control of voter registration, and called for an increased responsibility for the observatory in organizing elections. The government also established an independent electoral commission.

Since 1991 only government bills proposed by the presidency have been enacted by the National Assembly. However, in March the National Assembly agreed to consider a private member's bill on the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns that an opposition party tabled at the session opening. This consideration followed another one that took place in 2004. Only parties with representatives in the National Assembly can submit bills for consideration. During its June 2005 session, the National Assembly refused to consider a bill on electoral reform tabled by the SDF, the leading parliamentary opposition party.

Members of the Beti ethnic group, including the Bulu subgroup to which the president belongs, figured prominently in the government, civil service, and management of state-owned businesses.

The president's control over the country's administrative apparatus was extensive. The president appoints all ministers, including the prime minister, and also directly appoints the governors of each of the 10 provinces. The president also has the power to appoint important lower level members of the 58 provincial administrative structures.

The right of citizens to choose their local governments remained circumscribed. The government increased greatly the number of municipalities run by presidentially appointed delegates, who have authority over elected mayors. Delegate-run cities included most of the provincial capitals and some division capitals in pro-opposition provinces; however, this practice was almost nonexistent in the southern provinces, which tended to support the ruling CPDM party. In municipalities with elected mayors, local autonomy was limited since elected

local governments relied on the central government for most of their revenue and administrative personnel.

There were more than 180 registered political parties in the country. Fewer than 10, however, had significant levels of support, and only five had seats in the National Assembly. The ruling CPDM held an absolute majority in the National Assembly; opposition parties included the SDF, based in the anglophone provinces and some major cities. The largest of the opposition parties were the National Union for Democracy and Progress, the Cameroon Democratic Union, and the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon.

The government considered one unregistered anglophone political group, the SCNC, illegal, because it advocated secession from the country and authorities refused to register it as a political organization. During the year security forces preemptively arrested approximately 70 leaders, members, and supporters of the SCNC; such arrests were conducted to prevent persons from participating in political meetings.

On numerous occasions throughout the year, authorities refused to grant the SCNC permission to hold rallies and meetings. Security forces disrupted SCNC meetings, including in private residences, arresting SCNC activists and releasing them a couple of days later. For example, on April 27, gendarmes arrested 65 SCNC activists in Oku, in the Northwest Province, while they were holding a meeting in a private residence. They were not charged and were released four days later. On May 7, the Bamenda police broke up Hitler Mbinglo Humphrey's press conference in the Musang-Rendez-vous neighborhood, arresting Mbinglo Humphrey and three others. The police subsequently arrested 17 other activists who protested the arrest of their leaders. They were released after a brief detention.

In August SDF Chairman Fru Ndi was accused of being responsible for violence that resulted in the death (see section 1.a.).

On September 16, gendarmes from the Bamenda gendarmerie legion in the Northwest Province arrested five SCNC activists in their office: Fidelis Tchenkwo, Emmanuel Enu, Prescilla Khan, Elvis Bandzeka, and Cletus She. They were released after a brief detention. The SCNC claimed that the arrests were to prevent the activists from preparing and holding a meeting of the "Northern Zone."

On September 19, the Prefect of Mezam Division in the Northwest Province signed an order banning all public meetings, rallies, or gatherings of more than four persons and prohibiting access to electronic media for any SCNC official or sympathizer.

On October 1, security forces arrested and detained some activists in the Northwest and Southwest provinces for activities such as raising an SCNC flag in a public market place. They were released after a few days' detention.

On October 1, the Bamenda police blocked access to radio and television stations, put the houses of SCNC officials and activists under surveillance, and searched the houses of some SCNC leaders, including Chief Ayamba Ette, the SCNC chairman, Nfor Ngalla Nfor, the vice president, and Binlo Hitler, the president of the Northern Zone.

In advance of the annual celebration of Southern Cameroon "independence" on October 1, the government engaged in a campaign of closing down SCNC rallies and meetings.

There were no developments in the 2005 arrests of three SCNC members charged with disturbing the public order.

The government also continued to hold some SCNC activists in temporary detention pending trials.

Women held 18 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.

Many of the key members of the government were drawn from the president's Beti/Bulu ethnic group, as were disproportionately large numbers of military officers and CPDM officials. Pygmies were not represented in the National Assembly or the government.

Government Corruption and Transparency

Corruption remained a serious problem in all branches of government. The public perception was that judicial and administrative officials were open to bribes in almost all situations. According to a Transparency International survey published in December 2005, an average household paid \$205 (113,000 CFA francs) each year in bribes, or more than 20 percent of the average person's annual income; the average annual income per person was approximately \$800 (440,000 CFA francs).

According to Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index, corruption among the country's public officials was perceived by both resident and nonresident experts to be "rampant," which was the most severe assessment designation used by Transparency International.

Unlike in the previous year, international activists did not criticize the government's lack of transparency in managing revenues from an international oil pipeline.

During the year the government also took some steps to fight corruption. For example, on January 25, the government officially launched the activities of the National Agency for the Investigation of Financial Crimes (ANIF). Part of its mission is to fight money laundering, corruption-related enrichment, and the embezzlement of public funds.

On February 3, ANIF conducted a working session with the managers of the financial institutions to train them on effectively participating in the fight against corruption.

On March 11, the president signed a decree repealing the order that created the National Corruption Observatory and a decree creating the National Anticorruption Commission, which replaced the observatory. The commission is under the president's authority. Its leading mission was to monitor and evaluate the effective implementation of the government's anticorruption plan. It also gathered, centralized, and analyzed allegations and information regarding corrupt practices. Findings of the investigations conducted by the commission could lead to disciplinary or legal proceedings.

During the year the government sanctioned approximately 45 government employees and senior officials on corruption and embezzlement charges. Sanctions ranged from suspensions to dismissals.

On April 6, the National Assembly passed legislation requiring senior state administrators and managers to declare their assets after their appointment and again when they leave office.

On October 5, the National Assembly lifted the parliamentary immunity of Edouard Etonde Ekoto, the former board chairman of the Douala Port Authority, and Andre Boto'o a Ngon, the former board chairman of the Cameroon Real Estate Corporation, in connection with the high profile arrests of Ndong, Belinga, and Edou. Prosecutors interrogated them and while they were formally charged with embezzling public funds, Ekoto and Ngon were not arrested. Interrogations continued at year's end.

There were publicized prosecutions of government officials accused of corruption during the year.

The government began legal proceedings against the general managers of three government-owned corporations and some of their close collaborators. On February 21, police arrested Emmanuel Ondo Ndong, general manager of FEICOM, the financial institution that funds councils; Gilles Roger Belinga, the general manager of the Cameroon Real Estate Corporation; and Joseph Edou, the general manager of Credit Foncier, a real estate funding company. In connection with these cases, the prosecutor ordered the arrest and detention of 52 persons who were already under pretrial detention. The trials, which began in December, were still ongoing at year's end.

On February 24, Minister of Energy and Water Resources Alphonse Siyan Siwe was arrested, and dismissed from his job, on corruption charges stemming from his tenure as the director of the Douala Port before he joined the government in December 2004. The investigation was still ongoing at year's end.

On May 23, the prosecutor of Mbalmayo (Center Province) ordered the arrest and detention of Dieudonne Zang Mba Obele, for embezzlement of public funds. Hearings were held in June and Obele was ultimately released for lack of evidence.

There were no developments in the 2005 government corruption case in which three postal service officers were accused of embezzling \$2 million (101 million CFA francs) in public funds in 2002.

In March 2005 the government installed a new computer program to detect fraud by government employees and to better control the number of its civil servants and employees. By year's end the system revealed at least 3,000 "ghost" employees who did not exist or who were fraudulently drawing salaries. From the end of 2005 to March, the government sanctioned scores of fraudulent employees.

In June and August 2005, the government hired 22 potential candidates for the Audit Bench of the Supreme Court. In August 2005 the candidates started a two-month training program at the National School of Administration and Magistracy. In December 2005 the president appointed them Audit Bench Magistrates and they became fully active during the year.

There were no laws providing citizens with access to government information, and in practice such access was difficult to obtain. Most government documents, such as statistics, letters exchanged between various administrations, draft legislation, and investigation reports, were not available to the public or the media.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing findings on human rights cases; however, government officials repeatedly impeded the effectiveness of local human rights NGOs during the year by harassing members of human rights groups, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening and using violence against personnel. Philip Njaru, a human rights activist and executive director of the Kumba-based Friends of the Press Network, a human rights organization in Southwest Province, reported that police continued to harass him throughout the year.

Access to prisons by international NGOs reportedly improved during the year (see section 1.c.).

The activities of virtually all of these groups were limited by a shortage of funds and trained personnel. Observers criticized the country's NGO laws for giving the government the power to deny NGOs authorization to operate and to eliminate them by decree.

Numerous domestic human rights NGOs operated in the country, including, among others, the National League for Human Rights, the Organization for Human Rights and Freedoms, the Association of Women against Violence, the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, and the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the government arrested NGO members.

In September 2005 Amnesty International released a report, *Contracting Out of Human Rights: The Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project*, that criticized the government for placing financial interests above the concerns of citizens. Citing claims that the 2003 construction of an oil pipeline running from Douba in southern Chad to the port city of Kribi in the southwest of the country had damaged the livelihoods of fishermen, Amnesty International called on the government to offer recourse to the fishermen and to amend the agreements with oil companies to safeguard human rights. The government continued to work with the conglomerate running the pipeline to identify communities affected by the pipeline and to offer remuneration and other self-help projects.

The government cooperated with international governmental organizations and permitted visits by UN representatives and other organizations such as the ICRC.

The NCHRF, instituted in the 1990s, has the authority to summon witnesses and publish reports and the findings of its investigations. In July 2005 the president signed the implementing decree for a law passed by the National Assembly in 2004 that expanded the powers of the NCHRF and authorized it to summon witnesses and publish reports and investigative findings. It also created a permanent secretariat and a division in charge of the protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms. While the NCHRF remained hampered by a shortage of funds, during the year it conducted a number of investigations into human rights abuses, visited prisons, and organized several human rights seminars aimed at judicial officials, security personnel, and other government officers. Although the commission infrequently criticized the government's human rights abuses publicly, its staff intervened with government officials in specific cases of human rights abuses by security forces, attempted to stop "Friday arrests" (see section 1.d.), and sought to obtain medical attention for jailed suspects in specific cases. In September the president signed a decree appointing members to the commission and dismissing all incumbents but the chairman. The incumbents were appointed 15 years ago.

In February 2005 the government created a division of human rights in the Ministry of Justice to investigate and report on all cases of human rights abuses in the areas under the ministry's responsibility, including prisons, jails, and courtrooms.

During the year the government published its own human rights report, which included a complete list of all the legal rights and protections afforded to citizens.

Section 5 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, discrimination against ethnic minorities, and discrimination against homosexuals were problems.

Women

Domestic violence against women was common. While there were no reliable statistics, a large number of newspaper reports indicated that the problem was widespread. The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence. While assault is prohibited and is punishable by prison terms and fines, the government did not effectively enforce it in cases of assault on women. Women's rights advocates asserted that the law does not impose effective penalties against men who commit acts of domestic violence. There are no gender-specific assault laws, even though women were the predominant victims of domestic violence. Spousal abuse is not a legal ground for divorce. In cases of sexual assault, a victim's family or village often imposed direct, summary punishment on the suspected perpetrator through extralegal means, ranging from destruction of property to beating. During the year there were no reports of any convictions or of any action by the government to combat domestic violence.

The law prohibits rape; although rape occurred, police and the courts rarely investigated and prosecuted rape cases, which resulted in some convictions during the year. Official and private media regularly covered rape cases handled by the courts. During the year newspapers covered nine high profile rape cases which resulted in the arrest and detention of the perpetrators, whose pending trials were ongoing. In 2005 a couple of newspapers released special issues on the problem of rape, which was becoming acute, particularly in Douala and Yaounde. According to one of the reports, the Douala Courts heard approximately 40 cases per month.

The law does not prohibit female genital mutilation (FGM), and FGM was not practiced widely; however, it continued to be practiced in isolated areas in three of the 10 provinces, including some areas of Far North, Eastern, and Southwest provinces.

Internal migration contributed to the spread of FGM to different parts of the country. The majority of FGM procedures were clitorectomies. The severest form of FGM, infibulation, was performed in the Kajifu region of the Southwest Province. FGM usually was practiced on infants and preadolescent girls. Public health centers in areas where FGM is frequently practiced counseled women about the harmful consequences of FGM; however, the government did not prosecute any persons charged with performing FGM. The Association of Women Against Violence continued to conduct a program in Maroua to assist victims of FGM and their families and to educate local populations.

During the year breast ironing emerged as another form of violence against women, practiced in an effort to protect prematurely well-developed young girls from predatory older men. NGOs were leading public awareness campaigns to combat this practice.

While the law prohibits prostitution, it was tolerated. Prostitution was practiced predominantly in urban areas and places frequented by tourists. Trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation occurred (see section 5, Trafficking).

There were no developments in the 2005 case of a foreign pharmaceutical company that had conducted a clinical study of a drug intended to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among 400 female prostitutes, none of whom had HIV at the beginning of the trial. Local and international NGOs criticized the company and the Ministry of Health for lack of transparency and negligence, asserting that the government and the company did not sufficiently inform the prostitutes of the risks involved with taking part in the trials. In response to the allegations of misconduct, the Ministry of Health suspended the clinical tests in 2005, citing "dysfunctions" and saying that "certain corrective measures" needed to be taken by the research team. The minister also set up an independent inquiry, which reported that although allegations about safety made by certain NGOs were not true, new procedures needed to be instituted to ensure more regular reporting and study site accreditation before the trials could resume.

While the law prohibits sexual harassment, very few cases were reported or prosecuted during the year. The government did not conduct any public education campaigns on the subject and there were no statistics available on its occurrence.

Despite constitutional provisions recognizing women's rights, women did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. Some points of civil law were prejudicial to women.

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. Partly for this reason, some employers required a husband's permission before hiring female employees.

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. In the customary law of some ethnic groups, husbands not only maintain complete control over family property, but also can divorce their wives in a traditional court without being required to provide either verifiable justification or alimony. Polygamy is permitted by law and tradition. In cases of divorce, the husband's wishes determine the custody of children over the age of six. While a man may be convicted of adultery only if the sexual act takes place in his home, a woman may be convicted without respect to venue.

Traditional law normally governs the extent to which a woman may inherit from her husband in the absence of a will, and traditions varied from group to group. In many traditional societies, customs grant greater authority and benefit to male heirs than to female heirs. 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.

In 2004 religious leaders, including Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, launched a nationwide program to fight violence against women.

Children

During the year the government made some efforts to protect children's rights and welfare, including participation in seminars on children's rights.

The law provides for a child's right to education, and schooling was mandatory through the age of 14 and free in public primary schools. Since parents had to pay uniform and book fees for primary school, and because tuition and other fees for secondary education remained costly, education was largely unaffordable for many children. The government took measures during the year to improve access to schools, such as the construction of new classrooms, recruitment of new teachers, and provision of water fountains.

According to 2005 government statistics, 72.2 percent of girls between the ages of six and 14 were enrolled in school, compared to 81.3 percent of boys in the same age group. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the secondary school enrollment ratio (gross) was 36 percent for boys and 29 percent for girls. The low education rate continued to be attributed to socio-cultural prejudices, early marriage, sexual harassment, unwanted pregnancy, and domestic chores.

A 2004 government study found there is a large gap between the capacity of the schools and the number of potential students. According to the study, preschools served only 16 percent of the potential student population. Within the school system, the northern provinces were the most underprivileged, with only 5.7 percent of all teachers working in the Adamawa, North, and Extreme North provinces combined. The study showed that elementary schools only had enough seats for 1.8 million students, although 2.9 million attended school.

The government provided limited and basic medical care through local clinics and hospitals as well as through a limited number of school doctors. Boys and girls had equal access to state-provided medical care.

The exact extent of familial child abuse was not known, although children's rights organizations targeted the problem. Newspaper reports often cited children as victims of kidnapping, mutilation, and even infanticide. There were several credible stories of mothers (usually young, unemployed, and unmarried) abandoning their newborns in streets, garbage cans, and pit toilets.

FGM was performed primarily on young girls (see section 5, Women).

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 provinces of Adamawa and North, but was particularly characteristic of the remote Far North Province, where many women as young as 13 faced severe health risks from pregnancies. There were no statistics on the prevalence of child marriage. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some parents might have promised a female baby to an older male in order to begin receiving dowry payments.

There were reports of child prostitution and trafficking in children during the year (see section 5, Trafficking).

Child labor remained a problem (see section 6.d.).

Although exact numbers were unavailable, the country had a significant number of displaced or street children, most of whom resided in urban areas such as Yaounde and Douala.

On July 24, the Douala gendarmerie legion deported approximately 30 street children from the Akwa neighborhood to a suburb 18 miles from the city. The gendarmes' operation followed a series of aggravated thefts, allegedly perpetrated by the street children. The children were reportedly left along the road because there was no facility to harbor them, and they subsequently returned to Douala by their own means.

Trafficking in Persons

The law does not specifically prohibit trafficking in persons, but the law does prohibit slavery, prostitution, forced labor, and other crimes related to trafficking in persons and establishes minimum age requirements for workers. Trafficking remained a problem. Courts prosecuted traffickers using various provisions of the Penal Code that address related crimes. The country was a source, transit, and destination point for internationally trafficked persons; trafficking also occurred within the country. The Anti-Child Trafficking law, drafted by the government in cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), took effect in December 2005.

The law provides that any person who engages in crimes often associated with trafficking in persons shall be punished by prison terms of between six months and 20 years.

The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance was primarily responsible for fighting trafficking; however, the ministry was severely underfunded. It was believed that authorities prosecuted several trafficking cases during the year, but actual rates were difficult to determine since traffickers could be prosecuted under various sections of the penal code; there was no system for tracking outcomes.

In February 2005 a Yaounde court sentenced an individual named Nkodo to three years in jail and ordered her to pay damages of \$2,000 (one million CFA francs) to her victim, a 19-year-old girl who worked for her as a prostitute.

In May 2005 gendarmes in Yaounde dismantled a prostitution ring which exploited young boys. The boys were lured into the ring with promises of being hired by prestigious soccer clubs in a foreign country. Police arrested three of the organization's five members, who were in detention and awaiting trial at year's end; the other two were still in hiding. The boys were returned home.

In May 2005 police arrested three members of a homosexual and pedophile network of child traffickers. The three were formally charged and put under detention in the Yaounde central prison pending trial.

In June 2005 police arrested three individuals, including a local woman and two Gabonese men, in the South Province close to the Gabonese border. The three individuals were arrested while trying to smuggle two 13-year-old girls, who were kidnapped in the Boyo Division of the Northwest Province, into Gabon. The three were put under detention pending trial. During the investigation, South Province police officials said it was the third time that they had arrested traffickers at the country's borders with Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

The government continued to fight trafficking through the use of an interagency committee and a program to find and return trafficked children. In addition the government cooperated with Gabon, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin in fighting trafficking through the exchange of information and preparation of common legislation on trafficking. In 2005 the ILO and some local NGOs briefed parliamentarians on the problem of trafficking in persons.

Women and children traditionally have faced the greatest risk of trafficking and have been trafficked most often for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Most trafficking in children occurred within the country's borders, while most trafficked women were transported out of the country. According to anecdotal evidence from the NCHRF, women often were "hired" into hubs of prostitution, often in Europe. The method for trafficking women usually involved a marriage proposition by a foreign businessman. The woman was inducted into servitude upon arrival at a foreign destination. Girls were internally trafficked from the Adamawa, North, Far North, and Northwest provinces to Douala and Yaounde to work as domestic servants, street vendors, or prostitutes. Children were also internally trafficked to work on cocoa bean plantations. There have been credible reports of slavery, especially in some chiefdoms in the North Province (see section 6.c.). For example, there were reports that the Lamido (the traditional Muslim chief) of Rey Boubu in the Northern Province held slaves inside his compound. Although he was replaced by his son in 2004, there was no indication that the slaves were released.

According to a 2005 study by the International Circle for the Promotion of Creation and the Cameroon Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, of 722 young girls between nine and 20 years old interviewed in the cities of Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda, and Bafoussam, 291 were the victims of sexual exploitation.

There were no reports of radio advertisements offering to take adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 17 to Yaounde and Douala for

domestic labor; however, there continued to be flyer advertisements.

A 2000 ILO study conducted in Yaounde, Douala, and Bamenda, reported that trafficking accounted for 84 percent of child laborers in those three cities. Local NGOs believed this statistic was still accurate. In most cases, intermediaries presented themselves as businessmen, approaching parents with large families or custodians of orphans and promising to assist the child with education or professional training. The intermediary paid parents an average of \$12 (6,000 CFA francs) before transporting the child to a city where the intermediary would subject the child to forced labor with little remuneration. In four out of 10 cases, the child was a foreigner transported to the country for labor. The report also indicated that the country was a transit country for regional traffickers, who transported children between Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of the Congo, and the CAR for indentured or domestic servitude, farm labor, and sexual exploitation. Citizens also were trafficked to South Africa.

During the year the ILO and the government continued to support an awareness campaign to eradicate child trafficking in airports. Special antitrafficking embarkation and disembarkation cards continued to be designed and distributed. The cards described the dangers of trafficking and how to recognize the phenomenon.

The government continued to work with local and international NGOs to provide temporary shelter and assistance to victims of trafficking. In August 2005 a local NGO graduated 70 trafficking victims from its rehabilitation and reintegration program. The Catholic Relief Service worked to combat corruption in local schools that led to child prostitution. UNICEF was also actively engaged in combating girls' prostitution throughout the year.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides certain rights to persons with disabilities, including access to public institutions, medical treatment, and education, and the government was obliged to bear part of the educational expense of persons with disabilities, to employ them where possible, and to provide them with public assistance when necessary. On August 2, the minister of secondary education and the minister of social affairs signed an order that made access to public secondary education free for persons with disabilities and children born of poor parents with disabilities. There were few facilities for persons with disabilities and little public assistance; lack of facilities and care for persons with mental disabilities was particularly acute. Society largely tended to treat those with disabilities as outcasts, and many felt that providing assistance was the responsibility of churches or foreign NGOs. The law does not mandate special access provisions to private buildings and facilities for persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population consists of more than 200 ethnic groups, among which there were frequent and credible allegations of discrimination. Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Members of the president's Beti/Bulu ethnic group from southern parts of the country held key positions and were disproportionately represented in government, state-owned businesses, the security forces, and the ruling CPDM party.

There were no developments in the 2005 M'Bororo case against Alhadji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo. Since 1986 the M'Bororo have claimed that Danpullo kidnapped M'Bororo women, forcibly displaced the M'Bororo and seized their land and cattle, and used his money and influence with the government to order the beating and false imprisonment of members of the M'Bororo.

Northern areas of the country continued to suffer from ethnic tensions between the Fulani (or Peuhl) and the Kirdi. The Kirdi remained socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged relative to the Fulani in the three northern provinces. Traditional Fulani rulers, called Lamibe, continued to wield great power over their subjects, often including Kirdi, sometimes subjecting them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of slavery were reported, largely Fulani enslavement of Kirdi.

Natives of the Northwest and Southwest provinces tended to support the opposition party SDF and consequently suffered disproportionately from human rights abuses committed by the government and its security forces. The anglophone community was underrepresented in the public sector. Although citizens in certain francophone areas--the East, Far North, North, and Adamawa provinces--voiced similar complaints about under-representation and government neglect, anglophones said they generally believed that they had not received a fair share of public sector goods and services within their two provinces. Some residents of the anglophone region sought greater freedom, equality of opportunity, and better government by regaining regional autonomy rather than through national political reform and have formed several quasi-political organizations in pursuit of their goals.

Police and gendarmes subjected illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Chad to harsh treatment and imprisonment and often targeted Nigerian and Chadian communities when seeking to identify illegal immigrants. During raids, members of the security forces extorted money from those who did not have regular residence permits or those who did not have valid receipts for store merchandise. Some members of the country's large community of Nigerian immigrants complained of discrimination and abuse by government officials. Authorities repeatedly announced crackdowns on undocumented Nigerian immigrants, and illegal immigrants were subject to harassment on some occasions, although at a lower level than in previous years.

Indigenous People

Approximately 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, Bakola, and Bagyeli (Pygmies) primarily reside (and were the earliest known inhabitants) in the forested areas of the South and East provinces. While no legal discrimination exists, other groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices. Baka reportedly continued to complain that the forests they inhabit were being logged without fair compensation. Some observers believed that sustained logging was destroying the Baka's unique, forest-oriented

belief system, forcing them to adapt their traditional social and economic systems to a more rigid modern society similar to their Bantu neighbors.

Local Baka along the path of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline continued to complain that they were not compensated fairly for their land. Others alleged that they had been cheated of their compensation by persons posing as Baka representatives. On June 22, the committee in charge of the follow-up on the pipeline organized an evaluation seminar to determine compensation for the Bakola and Bagyeli. The committee agreed that despite improved access to education and healthcare, much remained to be done to improve living conditions for the pygmies.

An estimated 95 percent of Baka did not have national identity cards; most Baka could not afford to provide the necessary documentation to obtain national identity cards, which were required to vote in national elections. In 2004 Plan International and another NGO launched a program to educate Bakas about their political rights, which included the construction of a communal radio in the region of Abong-Mbang (Upper Nyong Division, East Province).

In August 2005 the Ministry of Social Affairs launched the Project to Support the Economic and Social Development of Bakas in South Province. The mission of the three-year project was to allow the issuance of birth certificates and national identity cards to 2,300 Bakas, as well as to help register hundreds of students in school.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Homosexual activity is illegal, with a possible prison sentence of six months to five years and a possible fine ranging from approximately \$40 to \$400 (20,000 to 200,000 CFA francs). While prosecution under this law was rare, homosexuals suffered from harassment and extortion by law enforcement officials. In addition, false allegations of homosexuality were used to harass enemies or to extort money.

There were new developments in the May 2005 arrest of 17 suspected homosexuals; five of whom were released shortly after their arrest for lack of evidence. On June 12, the Yaounde First Instance Court found the remaining men guilty of sodomy and sentenced them to 10 months in jail, although they were subsequently released for time served.

In June the administration of the Douala-based Eyengue Nkongo College, a private high school, expelled 34 students (including 12 females), alleging they were homosexuals. One female student was arrested upon her expulsion. One woman who lived near the school and two former schoolmates were also arrested. On July 7, the Douala First Instance Court released them after giving them a suspended three-year prison term and a fine of \$50 (25,000 CFA francs) on homosexuality charges.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join trade unions. However, the government imposed numerous restrictions. The law does not permit the creation of a union that includes both public and private sector workers, or the creation of a union that includes different, even closely related, sectors.

The law requires that unions register with the government, permitting groups of no less than 20 workers to organize a union by submitting a constitution, internal regulations, and nonconviction certifications for each founding member. The law provides for prison sentences and fines for workers who form a union and carry out union activities without registration. Government officials said that the government provided union certification within one month of application. However, independent unions, especially in the public sector, have found it difficult to register.

Registered unions were subject to government interference. The government chose the unions with which it would bargain; some independent unions accused the government of creating small nonrepresentative unions amenable to government positions and with which it could "negotiate" more easily. Some sections of labor law have no force or effect because the presidency had not issued implementing decrees.

In January and February 2005, the Ministry of Labor, with the assistance of experts from the ILO, held discussions with all trade unions in an effort to put in place a system for tracking and recognizing unions that would meet international criteria. The initial focus of this effort was on determining the actual, paid membership of each union to determine the size and importance of each group.

In 2005 the government restricted the civil rights of union leaders. For example, in 2005, police arrested and detained Alain Marcellin Mibo (for one hour), the leader of the Primary Education Teachers Association. For several weeks Mibo and his colleagues had been holding sit-ins in front of the prime minister's office to demand that they be given full-time civil servant status, instead of the part-time or temporary status they were employed under.

The constitution and law prohibit antiunion discrimination and employers guilty of such discrimination were subject to fines of up to approximately \$2,000 (one million CFA francs). However, employers found guilty were not required to compensate the workers for discrimination or to reinstate fired workers. The Ministry of Labor did not report any complaints of antiunion discrimination during the year, although there were credible press reports of union leader harassment.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The constitution and law provide for collective bargaining between workers and management as well as between labor federations and business associations in each sector of the economy. Two formal collective bargaining negotiations took place during the year, one with truck drivers and one in the tourism sector, including hotels, bars, restaurants, and night clubs.

There were no developments in the 2005 media sector collective bargaining dispute.

When labor disputes arose, the government chose the labor union with which it would negotiate, selectively excluding some labor representatives. Once agreements were negotiated, there was no mechanism to enforce implementation; some agreements between the government and labor unions were ignored by the government.

There were no developments in the May 2005 case involving workers from AES-Sonel who, through the Confederation of Free Cameroon Trade Unions, sought to annul a March 2005 collective bargaining agreement.

The Labor Code explicitly recognizes workers' right to strike but only after mandatory arbitration, and workers exercised this right during the year. Arbitration decisions are legally binding, but often unenforceable because the parties refuse to cooperate. It is not uncommon for such decisions to be overturned or simply ignored by the government or employers. The provision of the law allowing persons to strike does not apply to civil servants, employees of the penitentiary system, or workers responsible for national security. Instead of strikes, civil servants were required to negotiate grievances directly with the minister of the appropriate department in addition to the minister of labor.

In June there were five separate strikes, although some of them were related.

There were no developments in the 2004 case involving workers from the National Agency for Support to Forestry Development.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit forced or compulsory labor; however, there were reports that such practices occurred. Authorities continued to allow prison inmates to be contracted out to private employers or used as communal labor for municipal public works. Money generated from these activities was usually pocketed by prison administrators and not given to detainees.

The ILO confirmed that there was an increase during the year in serious trafficking issues, and slavery situations have been identified in the northern provinces (see section 5). NGOs and religious associations reported that children were kidnapped, sold, or "lent" by their parents to individuals claiming to look after their interests and sent to Yaounde or Douala to work in child beggar networks and, in some cases, prostitution rings. Some children were sent to neighboring countries to work. These victims were generally of both sexes and between the ages of six and 14 years old. According to a local human rights monitor the majority of parents implicated in this practice were naive, thinking only of the money to be earned and failing to imagine the conditions in to which their children would be placed.

In the South and East provinces, some Baka, including children, continued to be subjected to unfair and exploitative labor practices by landowners, including work on the landowners' farms during harvest seasons without payment (see section 5).

The government expressly prohibits forced and compulsory labor by children, but these practices occurred (see sections 5 and 6.d.).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law generally protects children from exploitation in the workplace and specifies penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for infringement; however, child labor remained a problem. The government specifically prohibits forced and compulsory labor by children, but there were reports that it occurred in practice.

The law sets a minimum age of 14 for child employment, which is inconsistent with the age for completing educational requirements (see section 5).

The law also bans night work and enumerates tasks that children under the age of 18 cannot legally perform. These included moving heavy objects, dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, and prostitution. The law also states that a child's workday cannot exceed eight hours. Employers were required to train children between the ages of 14 and 18, and work contracts must contain a training provision for minors. The prohibition against night work was not effectively enforced.

Information on child labor was difficult to obtain. However, according to a 2000 study by the ILO and Ministry of Labor, child labor existed chiefly in urban areas and in the informal sector such as street vending, car washing, agricultural work, and domestic service. Many urban street vendors were less than 14 years of age. An increasing number of children worked as household help, and some children were involved in prostitution. In the north there were credible reports that children from needy homes were placed with other families to do household work for pay. In the nation's major cities of Yaounde, Douala, and Bamenda, the ILO estimated that 40 percent of employed children were girls, of whom 7 percent were less than 12 years of age, and 60 percent had dropped out of primary school.

Parents viewed child labor as both a tradition and a rite of passage. Relatives often employed rural youth, especially girls, as domestic helpers, and these jobs seldom allowed time for the children to attend school. In rural areas, many children began work at an early age on family farms. The cocoa industry also employed child laborers. According to estimates, up to 8,000 underaged children (between the ages of five and 17) were working in the cocoa industry at year's end. These children originated, for the most part, from the Northern and

Northwestern provinces.

In March 2005 the ILO presented the preliminary draft of the ILO West Africa Cocoa/Agriculture Program to eliminate child labor. The program was started in the country in 2003 and ended in April. The program met its goal by removing approximately 1,300 children from hazardous work and forced labor conditions in the cocoa sector by March. Lack of additional funding for the program, however, raised concerns about what will happen to these rescued children.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor were responsible for enforcing existing child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses; however, the government did not allocate sufficient resources to support an effective inspection program. Moreover, the legal prohibitions do not include family chores, which in many instances were beyond a child's capacity. In 2005 the government employed 58 general labor inspectors to investigate child labor cases.

During the year foreign government officials visited the Cameroon Development Cooperation's (CDC) Del Monte banana and rubber plantations. They found children as young as six and seven working in the Tiko banana plantation, carrying heavy banana bunches on their heads, carting water to the fields, working around the nurseries, or harvesting rubber from the trees. Officials denied that children under 21 were hired on the plantation. Foreign observers, having met with both CDC and Del Monte officials, were satisfied that the companies neither recruited nor condoned child labor (and had systems in place to prevent this), and that the children observed at the Tiko project were primarily "free lancers," village children delivering water or collecting discarded bananas. There were fewer controls at the rubber plantation, where officials admitted that children often collected rubber in the mornings and evenings, mostly to help their family members working on the plantation.

The ILO continued to work with specific contact persons in various ministries and agencies involved in antitrafficking activities; it also conducted nationwide investigations and cooperated with local organizations.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage was approximately \$47 (23,514 CFA francs) per month and was applicable in all sectors. The minimum wage did not provide for a decent standard of living for an average worker and family. The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing the minimum wage nationally.

The law establishes a standard workweek of 40 hours in public and private nonagricultural firms and 48 hours in agricultural and related activities. There are exceptions for guards and firemen (56 hours a week), service sector staff (45 hours a week), and household and restaurant staff (54 hours a week). The law mandates at least 24 consecutive hours of weekly rest. Premium pay for overtime ranges from 120 to 150 percent of the hourly pay depending on amount and whether it is for weekend or late-night overtime. There is a prohibition on excessive compulsory service. Ministry of Labor inspectors were responsible for monitoring these standards; however, they lacked the resources for a comprehensive inspection program.

The government sets health and safety standards. Ministry of Labor inspectors and occupational health physicians were responsible for monitoring these standards; however, they lacked the resources for a comprehensive inspection program. The law does not provide workers with the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their continued employment.