

Cameroon

Response to Information Request Number:	CMR01001.ZAR
Date:	8 December 2000
Subject:	Cameroon: Information on the takeover of the Buea radio station in December 1999 by the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Cameroon / Cultural identity / Discrimination based on language / Independence / Nationalism / Secession / Separatism

Query:

Regarding the alleged Southern Cameroons National Conference (SCNC) Declaration of Independence on 12/30/99: was there a declaration of independence that has been verified by independent sources? Was anyone arrested? Who and/or how many? Are they still under arrest? Where are they being held? Where was the radio station from which the broadcast was made? What time was the broadcast? How long was the broadcast? Were there people outside of the radio station cheering on the SCNC members who seized the station? If so, how many were outside? Were they arrested?

Response:

Armed activists of the SCNC took over the Buea radio station in Southwest Province, Cameroon, on the night of 30-31 December 1999. They forced radio staff to play a tape of a proclamation of independence read by Judge Ebong Frederick Alobwede between the hours of 11:30 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. The attackers were not arrested but police detained radio staff for questioning following the takeover. Reports have not been found of cheering supporters outside the radio station. Nine days after the event Ebong and two other SCNC leaders were arrested and were reportedly still being held in the capital Yaoundé in late August 2000. Some 23 people were reportedly arrested following rallies on 8-9 January 2000 connected to the 30 December 1999 independence proclamation. In April 2000, police in Kumba in English-speaking southeastern Cameroon detained about 100 alleged secessionists to "sabotage" an action plan conceived by the SCNC.

The U.S. Department of State in its *1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Cameroon* states in regard to the takeover of the radio station: "On December 30, a group of armed Anglophones seized the state radio station in Buea, occupied it for 3 hours, and broadcast a message proclaiming the independence of the two Anglophone provinces; no violence or arrests were reported in connection with their occupation of the station" (U.S. DOS, *1999 Country Reports*, 25 Feb. 2000).

News reports document that "on 30 December [1999], a group of SCNC activists occupied a branch of the national radio in Buea, a main town in the Southwest Province, and broadcast a message calling for secession" (UN, IRIN, 4 May 2000). While it does not appear that any of those participating in the takeover were arrested at the time, one report states that "on December 30, 1999 police detained several Radio Buea staff members for questioning after members of the outlawed Southern Cameroon[s] National Council (SCNC) occupied the station's studio and broadcast an appeal calling on English-speaking Cameroonians to support the secessionist cause" (CPJ, 13 Mar. 2000). And in the days

following the station takeover, arrests of SCNC leaders were made following "marches that were held on January 8 and 9 in the towns of Buea and Limbe to press a call for independence." Citing a report in the Cameroon newspaper *The Herald*, *Agence Presse* reported "security forces have detained 23 members of the separatist . . . SCNC over secessionist rallies in towns in English-speaking parts of the country" (AFP, 17 Jan. 2000). Among those arrested was the SCNC leader, Judge Ebong Fred Alobwede, who led the takeover and read the proclamation of independence.

Details of the radio station takeover and its objectives are also provided from an interview with Judge Ebong, related news sources, and from the terms of the independence proclamation itself. According to one source, "a group of people, alleged to be SCNC independence fighters invaded the CRTV Buea premises on the night of Dec 30, 1999, took the lone policeman on guard hostage alongside all the workers and forced the technician to repeatedly broadcast a message declaring the independence of Southern Cameroons" (Tambe, "SCNC leaders dissociate selves from Dec. 30 independence declaration," no date). In an interview from prison in Yaoundé, Judge Ebong stated that he had participated in the takeover. He stated that there were two law enforcement officers on duty at the station, that they were "disarmed but not harmed," and that "we immediately gave back their guns after accomplishing our mission." According to Judge Ebong, "we took over the radio to broadcast to the people of Southern Cameroons, the proclamation of the independence of Southern Cameroons. This happened between 11:30 p.m. and 3:30 a.m. on December 30, 1999" (eCameroun.com, "Feature: Exclusive jailhouse interview," no date).

The taped proclamation of independence of the Southern Cameroons was read by "Justice Ebong Frederick Alobwede, Chairman of the High Command Council of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), here come to address you this 30th December 1999 on the Proclamation of the Restoration of the Sovereignty and Independence of the Southern Cameroons, on behalf of Prince Esoka Ndoki Mukete, National Chairman of the Southern Cameroons." The proclamation claimed to formalize "the Restoration of the Sovereignty and Independence of what used to be the Southern Cameroons under United Kingdom administration henceforth [to] be known and called the Federal Republic of the Southern Cameroons . . . Pending re-establishment of the institutions of the Federal Republic of the Southern Cameroons, the Chairman, and the Executive council of the SCNC shall co-ordinate the day-to-day internal administration" of the state (SCNC, 30 1999). Judge Ebong stated that he had been arrested nine days after the radio takeover, along with Chief Ayamba and James Sabum and ultimately detained at the Secretariat of State for Defense in Yaoundé where he was still being held in late August 2000 (eCameroun.com, "Feature: Exclusive jailhouse interview," no date).

In late April 2000, *Radio France Internationale* reported that about a hundred people had been arrested in order to sabotage an "action plan" conceived by the SCNC. "Reliable sources said that the secessionist movement planned to occupy all the command top posts of the English-speaking southern province on the one hand, and organize a series of demonstrations at Buea, Limbe and Kumba, the main metropolis of the region, on the other" (BBC, 27 Apr. 2000).

Agence France Presse (AFP), "23 secessionists detained in English-speaking Cameroon," (17 January 2000)-from Nexis search.

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (BBC), "About 100 secessionists reportedly arrested in Anglophone southwest," (27 April 2000)-from Nexis search.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Cameroon: Radio journalists harassed over human rights coverage." (13 March 2000). URL: <http://www.italian.it/isf/ifex226.htm>

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