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Cameroon

Response to Information Request Number:	CMR03003.ZCH
Date:	October 05, 2002
Subject:	Cameroon: Information on Rape of Anglophone Women
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Cameroon / Gross human rights violations / Linguistic minorities / Minorities / Sexual assault / Torture victims

Query:

Have Anglophone Cameroonian women been raped in the context of expressing their political views?

Response:

Following armed attacks in North West province of Cameroon in March 1997, hundreds of people were arrested, predominantly members of the Social Democratic Front (SDF). Amnesty International, in its 1998 annual report stated, "civilians were beaten, kicked and humiliated and many incidents of rape were reported" (AI 1998). In its 2001 annual report, Amnesty stated, "a special security unit, known as the COMMANDEMENT OPÉRATIONNEL (CO), the Operational Command, was set up to combat street crime in Douala and Yaoundé, the capital. It was reportedly responsible for killing scores of criminal suspects, as well as for carrying out beatings, rapes and other ill-treatment of detainees" (AI 2001).

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (MFCVT) conducted an in-depth study of 60 Cameroonians who had fled to the United Kingdom and who claimed to have been tortured by Cameroon government forces. In its June 2002 report, the Medical Foundation concluded: "In the present study of 27 Cameroonian women receiving treatment at the Medical Foundation in London, 25 have been raped by agents of the Cameroonian State and/or while in the custody of the State" (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 4.1). Of

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the 60 men and women whose treatment formed the basis for the report, 35 of the subjects (58 percent) were members or supporters of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), nine (15 percent) were affiliated with the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), 13 percent were members of other parties, and only eight percent were not politically active (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 7.1). The study does not specify whether the SDF members or supporters were Anglophones, but the party gets the majority of its support from the Anglophone community. Of the nine study participants affiliated with the SCNC, there were a “roughly equal number of Anglophones and Francophones” (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 4.4a).

Though only two of the subjects in the study were formally charged with an offence, 11 cited unofficial accusations made against them by their interrogators, including, “harbouring and training opposition party members, attending political meetings..., subversion..., holding clandestine meetings, taking part in illegal meetings and rallies, supporting a student strike, disobeying the government, plotting to destabilize the government, endangering the security of the State, insulting the head of state, crimes against the President of the Republic, and political revolution” (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 7.2). The report cites 29 forms of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment carried out against participants in the study, including sexual assaults inflicted upon 93 percent of the women and 33 percent of the men. The alleged perpetrators of the grave human rights violations cited in the report included, police, soldiers, ‘secret police’, gendarmes, military police, presidential guards, ‘judicial police’, prison officers and the Operational Command—(CO) the aforementioned military unit formed to fight crime in Douala and Littoral province—and the anti-gang brigade—a joint anti-robbery unit of the army and paramilitary police (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 7.3 and 5.1).

Various governmental and human rights organizations report that torture is common in Cameroon (AI 16 Sep 1997; DIS Feb 2001; MFCVT 26 Jun 2002; UK Parliament 14 Mar 2000; USDOS 4 Mar 2002). The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture claims that torture in Cameroon is “widespread and systematic” (UN 11 Nov 1999). The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture concludes from its own study: “If you are a woman [in Cameroon], your torture will almost certainly include rape” (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 4). According to the Foundation study: “rape is a common form of torture in Cameroon, inflicted upon a third of the men in our study and almost all the women” (MFCVT 26 Jun 2002, 1 and 6.5).

In a telephone interview, a Western Washington University Cameroon specialist stated that selective harassment continued against members of the SDF and SCNC and that in the last 18 months a number of cases of women affiliated with political organizations in Cameroon who said they had been raped, had been brought to his attention (Professor of Liberal Studies 3 Oct 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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Last Modified 05/05/2003