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## Cameroon

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	CMR03005.ZCH
<b>Date:</b>	October 16, 2002
<b>Subject:</b>	Cameroon: Information on the Relationship Between the Anglophone and Francophone Communities
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Cameroon / Arrested persons / Detained persons / Detention / Discrimination based on language / Language rights / Linguistic minorities / Minorities / Right to self-determination / Secession / Separatism

#### Query:

Please provide information on the relationship between the Anglophone and Francophone communities in Cameroon.

#### Response:

For more than a decade, the Cameroon government of President Paul Biya has responded with repression and human rights violations to attempts by Anglophone political parties and other groups to ameliorate the situation of Anglophones within Cameroon, according to reports of human rights groups, international organizations, and media sources. In his 1999 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture pointed to the arrest and ill treatment of members of opposition parties during elections in 1992 and 1997 in Cameroon:

"Followers of the two main opposition parties in the two English-speaking provinces of the Nord-Ouest [North-West] and Sud-Ouest [South-West] and the Extreme-Nord [Far North] province, namely the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Union nationale pour la démocratie et le progrès [National Union for Democracy and Progress] (UNDP) are said to have been particularly targeted by the mass arrests and ill-treatment" (UN 11 Nov 1999).

Reasonable Fear  
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In its 2001 report on human rights in Cameroon, the U.S. Department of State found:

“The Government’s human rights record remained generally poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses... Security forces continued to arrest and detain arbitrarily various opposition politicians, local human rights monitors, and other citizens, often holding them for prolonged periods, often without charges or a chance for trial and, at times, incommunicado... The Government restricted freedom of assembly and association. At times the Government used its security forces to inhibit political parties from holding public meetings; security forces also used excessive force to disperse demonstrations” (USDOS 4 Mar 2002).

In October 2001, following demonstrations in English-speaking provinces for greater political rights in which three people were killed, nine injured and over 100 arrested, Amnesty International called on the Cameroon government to “respect rights of freedom of association and expression” (AI 4 Oct 2001). Amnesty also stated:

“Over the last decades feelings of political marginalisation and discrimination have grown stronger in the English speaking provinces, leading to the foundation of the various political movements including the SCNC [Southern Cameroon National Council] and the affiliated SCYL [Southern Cameroon Youth League] in the early 1990s. Government response to pro-secessionist political movements and those demanding greater regional autonomy has increasingly toughened” (AI 4 Oct 2001).

A news report on demonstrations in the English-speaking provinces on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1972 referendum creating a unified Cameroon stated, “official celebrations held ... [in Buea] were dwarfed by secessionist banners and posters observed all over” (Afrol News 21 May 2002). Referring to the groups calling for secession from Cameroon, the report continued:

“These groups at first sight may give the impression of hopeless dreamers, but anti-Yaoundé resentments are strong among Anglophone Cameroonians. The Anglophone population might be split on the issue of wanting a separate state, but mostly agree that they have become marginalized within the unified state” (Afrol News 21 May 2002).

“A simple example is the theoretic bilingual structure of Cameroon that never has been implemented in practical terms. In Francophone Cameroon, English is mostly not understood at all. In Buea and Bamenda government offices, French however has become a must. Anglophones for this and other reasons are absent from vital decision-making organs of the country and have a higher unemployment rate” (Afrol News 21 May 2002).

Two specialists on Cameroon consulted by the Resource Information Center stated that the divisions between the Francophone and Anglophone communities in Cameroon are very serious and appear to be getting worse.

A Cameroon specialist at Western Washington University expressed the view that the divisions between the two communities recently had become deeper and the overall situation more tense. He stated that the absence of any significant movement on the part of the Cameroon government to address the concerns of the Anglophone population has strengthened the position of separatists [including the SCNC and the SCYL] within the Anglophone community at the expense of the more mainstream Social Democratic Front (SDF), led by John Fru Ndi. He also stated that though it is difficult to estimate the level of support for the Anglophone separatists, the SCNC has significant backing in the Anglophone population and has picked up support particularly among young people impatient with the lack of results produced by the SDF. At this time, the increased support for more radical solutions is not manifested in the streets or in armed actions, but in growing resentment in the Anglophone community at their continued treatment within Cameroon (Professor of Liberal Studies 3 Oct 2002).

A Cameroon specialist at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization that promotes democracy world-wide, expressed a similar view of the poor state of Francophone/Anglophone relations in Cameroon. He viewed the relations between the two communities as “very bad and worsening,” with resentment growing in the Anglophone community. He saw two groups within the Francophone political community. The first camp, which includes President Biya, is essentially indifferent to the concerns and grievances of the Anglophone population, and is unwilling to take any meaningful action to remedy the problems. The second group is sensitive to Anglophone grievances and believes a forum should be created to address those concerns. However, the second group is not in a position of power (Senior Associate for Africa 12 Oct 2002).

Within the Anglophone political community, the NDI specialist saw three main groups. The first group comprises people who feel that the Anglophone community is not getting a fair shake—this group includes people in positions of authority in government and the military. The second group comprises those who feel that if the rules of the game can be changed, then it is possible to envisage a situation where Anglophone rights could be protected and advanced within the context of a reformed political system. The third group—which includes members of an older generation who did not agree with the original political arrangements under which the country became independent, and a younger generation that feels disenfranchised and frustrated at being cut out of opportunities for jobs, contracts and other benefits—believes that Anglophones can never advance under the existing political set-up. The specialist agreed that the SDF appeared to be losing support in the Anglophone community and that there seemed to have been a movement toward the separatist groups (Senior Associate for Africa 12 Oct 2002).

Both Cameroon experts viewed the human rights situation as very poor. The professor pointed to the fact that the security forces turned over to a hospital the body of a leader of the (SCYL) Southern Cameroon Youth League in recent weeks rather than just burying it. The professor saw this as a way of sending a message to government opponents. Human

rights violations against both SDF and SCNC members and supporters continue, mainly taking the form of selective harassment (Professor of Liberal Studies 3 Oct 2002). The NDI specialist viewed the human rights situation as "very bad," with the government continuing to arrest and harass political opponents. The government's unwillingness to look at Anglophone grievances or to explore a negotiated solution to the Anglophone problem, in his opinion, played into the hands of militants within that community (Senior Associate for Africa 12 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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