RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Cameroon: The Social Democratic Front (Front social démocrate, SDF), including its current status, its organization and structure, its membership card and the treatment of its members by the state authorities

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

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1. General Information on the Social Democratic Front

Sources consulted by the Research Directorate agree that the Social Democratic Front (Front social démocrate, SDF) is the main opposition party in Cameroon (Reuters 10 Oct. 2011; Freedom House 2011; International Crisis Group 25 May 2010, 18; Cameroon Tribune 26 May 2010). The party was founded in 1990 (ibid.; PHW 2011, 227; Political Parties of the World 2009, 99) in Bamenda, in the North West Province (PHW 2011, 227; Cameroon Tribune 26 May 2010).

1.1 Party support

Some sources state that the party’s support is concentrated in western Cameroon (US 8 Apr. 2011, sect. 3; PHW 2011, 227; Political Parties of the World 2009, 100). The International Crisis Group states, however, that the SDF has also obtained support in the rest of the country (25 May 2010, 18). The SDF is particularly present in the North West Province (ibid.; PHW 2011, 227; Political Parties of the World 2009, 100). Political Parties of the World states that the North West Province is the only province in which Ni John Fru Ndi, leader of the SDF, won a majority of the votes in the 2004 presidential elections (ibid.). Radio France internationale specified that, during the October 2011 presidential elections, Ni John Fru Ndi won 54 per cent of the votes [translation] “in the Anglophone North West,” the only region in the country in which Biya did not dominate (22 Oct. 2011). It was also in that province that the party won 19 of its 22 seats in the National Assembly in 2002, and 11 of the 20 North West Province seats in 2007 (Political Parties of the World 2009, 99-100).

According to Political Parties of the World, the North West Province is “the most anti-[President Paul] Biya part of the Anglophone area of Cameroon” (ibid.). Freedom House describes the SDF as a party that is led by Angophones (2011). According to International Crisis Group, the party is associated with the Anglophone minority in Cameroon, but rejected the idea of independence for the minority (25 May 2010, 18-19).
1.2 Electoral results

During the 1992 and 2004 presidential elections, Ni John Fru Ndi won approximately 36 and 17 per cent of the votes respectively (Cameroon Tribune 26 May 2010; Political Parties of the World 2009, 99-100). However, Political Parties of the World notes that, in both the 1992 and 2004 presidential elections, Ni John Fru Ndi came in second place for the number of votes, after President Paul Biya (ibid.). Ni John Fru Ndi also came second in the October 2011 presidential elections, with 10.7 per cent of the votes (RFI 22 Oct. 2011; Le Figaro 21 Oct. 2011). Political Parties of the World states that the SDF boycotted the 1997 presidential elections (2009, 100).

The SDF won 43 seats in the 1997 legislative elections, 22 seats in the 2002 elections and 16 seats in the 2007 elections (Cameroon Tribune 26 May 2010; Political Parties of the World 2009, 99-100). In comparison, the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais, RDPC), President Paul Biya’s party, occupies 153 of the 180 seats in the National Assembly (Freedom House 2011; International Crisis Group 24 June 2010, 1).

According to the Cameroonian daily Cameroon Tribune, the decrease in party support demonstrates that the SDF is in decline and must gain strength out of fear of becoming extinct (26 May 2010). The author of an article published in Jeune Afrique, a Paris-based weekly that deals with African news states, however, that the opposition parties and the anti-establishment movements in general have become less influential and less organized in Cameroon (13 Apr. 2011).

2. Structure and organization

According to the SDF Internet site, the party is organized according to the following structures: the ward, the electoral district, the divisional coordination, the provincial and the national (n.d.a). The Declaration of Principles is attached to this Response (SDF n.d.b).

Ni John Fru Ndi has been the leader of the SDF since it was founded in 1990 (International Crisis Group 25 May 2010, 18; Political Parties of the World 2009, 99). According to sources, some accuse Ni John Fru Ndi of authoritarianism (Jeune Afrique 13 Apr. 2011; International Crisis Group 25 May 2010, 19; Political Parties of the World 2009, 99-100). According to Political Parties of the World, several dissidents left the SDF in August 2002 and formed the “Alliance of Progressive Forces,” citing Ni John Fru Ndi’s “autocratic management” (ibid.). The International Crisis Group states that Fru Ndi’s leadership, which as time passes looks increasingly like a lifelong position, in a cruelly paradoxical mirror image of Biya’s role at the head of the regime (25 May 2010, 19).

International Crisis Group also states that Ni John Fru Ndi’s “defiant” refusal to learn French allows the regime to portray the SDF as a regional and “subversive” party (25 May 2010, 19).

Sources indicate that the Secretary General of the party is Elizabeth Tamanjong (Reuters 10 Oct. 2011; PHW 2011, 227). According to Political...
3. Treatment of SDF members by state authorities

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010* published by the United States Department of State, because of their support for the SDF, natives of the North West and South West provinces suffered “disproportionately” from human rights abuses by the government and the security forces (US 8 Apr. 2011, sect. 3).

*Country Reports 2010* also points out that sometimes authorities refused to grant opposition parties permission to hold rallies and meetings (ibid.). According to International Crisis Group, “[a]uthorities systematically refuse to authorize demonstrations by opposition parties or associations that are not close to the regime” (24 June 2010, 14). Sources state that, in February 2010, some SDF members were denied authorization to hold a ceremony to memorialize the victims of the 2008 protests (Freedom House 2011; International Crisis Group 24 June 2010, 14). According to Freedom House, these protests took place partly in response to a constitutional amendment that removed the limit of two presidential terms, allowing President Biya to run in the 2011 presidential elections (Freedom House 2011). Some sources state that the SDF opposed the amendment (*PHW 2011*, 227; *Political Parties of the World 2009*, 100).

During an interview with the International Crisis Group en 2010, an opposition leader stated that the regime was increasingly clamping down on demonstrations and meetings, adding that it was no longer possible to hold meetings like in the 1990s (24 June 2010, 14 footnote 100). According to Freedom House, “[o]pposition parties continued to be marginalized” in Cameroon (2011). Freedom House also states that, according to some critics, *Opération Épervier*, an anticorruption campaign implemented in 2004 by President Biya, and which, in May 2010, led to the arrest of over 100 officials, was a way to eliminate political opponents (2011).

According to *Country Reports 2010*, some professors stated that their possibilities for professional advancement could be affected if they were active in opposition parties or if they criticized the government (US 8 Apr. 2011, sect. 2a). Freedom House states also that many professors exercise self-censorship and that state security informants operate on the university campuses (2011).

4. Membership cards

Information on the SDF membership cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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


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