



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
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25 January 2005

CMR43249.E

Cameroon: Information on female genital mutilation (FGM) among the Bamilékés in Cameroon, including how often it is practised and at what age; whether it is practised among urban families, who send their daughters away to study; whether the daughter can refuse and the consequences of her refusal; whether she can work and live in the city alone; information on the protection offered by the state if the daughter is threatened by her family or that of her husband (January-December 2004)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The following information was provided in 3 January 2005 correspondence by an associate professor of anthropology and chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Carleton College in Minnesota, United States.

The Bamiléké are a diverse group; Bamiléké is an umbrella designation for some 100 chiefdoms of varying size, all sharing basic political structure, kinship systems, and culture, but with considerable variation in details of ritual systems. ... While most Bamiléké are either Roman Catholic or belong to a variety of Protestant churches, or are adherents of traditional religious beliefs and practices, an increasing number are converting to Islam. According to my knowledge of Bangangté chiefdom, and in my conversations with urban Bamiléké women originating from both Bangangté and Bazou chiefdoms, [female genital mutilation] FGM is neither an indigenous practice nor is it practised by Bamiléké Christians. Nonetheless, it is possible that the practice has been introduced, particularly among Muslims, through cultural borrowing. It is possible that new converts are especially adamant about practices regarding the "purity" of women and distinguishing themselves from their non-converted neighbors.

According to the associate professor, if FGM exists, it is a new practice among the Bamiléké, so she could not confirm whether women would be threatened for refusing to undergo the procedure. She stated that

[t]hose insisting upon FGM would most likely be members of the woman's family or her husband's family. The consensus between the two families would depend not only upon beliefs, but also upon marital politics, bride wealth negotiations, and the families' need for financial transactions surrounding marriage. The woman's protection if threatened with FGM or with sanctions for refusing FGM would be weakened, minimal, or non-existent if there were collusion between the families for other reasons.

According to the associate professor, the state would most probably not be involved in protecting the woman because "informal, familial circles" usually determine the sanctions in situations such as this, which are beyond the purview of the government.

This information could not be corroborated by the Research Directorate within time constraints.

The following information on FGM in Cameroon in general may also be useful. According to the Centre for Reproductive Rights (CRR), FGM is not illegal in Cameroon (2003, 77, see also *Country Reports* 2003, Sect. 5; Fraternet 2 Oct. 2001). In practice, according to the Web site Fraternet, there are still [translation] "too many cases of genital mutilation" in Cameroon (ibid.). In addition, [translation] "20% of Cameroon women are victims of sexual mutilation" (ibid.; see also CRR 2003, 66; United Nations Nov. 2003, 133). The practice of FGM in Cameroon is particularly prevalent in the "extreme north, the south-west and the north-west of the country where the practice is said to affect 100% of Muslim girls and 63.6% of Christian girls." (United Nations Nov. 2003, 133)

For further information on FGM in Cameroon, please consult CMR39831.E of 23 October 2002.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Reference

Associate professor of anthropology, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton College, Minnesota, United States. 3 January 2005. Correspondence.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Africabib.org, AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International, Bamileke.com, Centre for Reproductive Rights, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003*, La famille Bamiléké, Fraternet.com, Human Rights Watch, United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Oral sources: Professor at the Yaoundé 1 University (Cameroun); Research associate at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) (France).

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