



Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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13 April 2005

### CMR43510.FE

Cameroon: Update to CMR41594.FE of 29 May 2003 on the situation of women who are victims of rape and the recourses available to them; update to CMR41855.FE of 25 August 2003 on domestic violence, including protection and services offered to victims, police attitudes and laws in this regard, as well as whether victims can file a complaint (2003-April 2005)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

### Practice and prevalence of domestic violence

Corroborating sources indicate that domestic violence is widespread in Cameroon (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5; *Le Messenger* 7 June 2004; *ibid.* 1 Apr. 2005; PANA 10 Dec. 2004; OMCT 17 Nov. 2003). According to a 1 April 2005 article in *Le Messenger*, a Cameroon newspaper, a survey conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) shows that in Cameroon [translation] "nine out of 10 women have, at least once, been victims of physical, sexual or simply emotional violence by their partner." According to that same survey, one third of women living in a common-law relationship are victims of sexual abuse, and more than 75 per cent of women surveyed said they had been forced to have sexual relations with their partner (*Le Messenger* 1 Apr. 2005). The UNESCO survey also states that violence against women includes marital rape and that the aggressor can be a brother, father, husband or lover (*ibid.*).

According to a report of a fact-finding mission carried out from 17 to 25 January 2004 by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the United Kingdom, forced marriage is considered a "big problem" in Cameroon (12 May 2004, Sec. 9.16). In some regions, parents marry off their minor daughters, without their consent, to men who, once the dowry is paid, consider their wife as their property (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5.; OMCT 17 Nov. 2003).

On 11 March 2005, *The Post*, a Cameroon newspaper, stated that, upon their return from International Women's Day festivities in Douala, some women were locked out or were beaten by their husband.

In a 7 June 2004 article from *Le Messenger*, the Association Against Violence Toward Women (Association de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes, ALVF) indicated that, out of the 654 abused women who came to their office in 2002, 245 were victims of physical violence, 139 of verbal violence, 38 of sexual violence and 10 of moral violence. To illustrate the severity of domestic

violence that Cameroonian women are subject to, sociologist Marie-Thérèse Mengue said that [translation] "in the home, helpful and exploitable women are insulted, beaten, traumatized, regularly tortured and weakened; all of these things do serious damage, which can even lead to insanity" (*Le Messenger* 7 June 2004).

### **Attitudes and beliefs**

According to the aforementioned UNESCO survey, Cameroon's social organization and values system are at the root of violence against women (*Le Messenger* 1 Apr. 2005; see also OMCT 17 Nov. 2003). For example, over 30 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women are reportedly [translation] "in favour of" domestic violence (*Le Messenger* 1 Apr. 2005). The survey shows that [translation] "women who are victims of violence deny that they are abused;" nearly 52 per cent of them do not believe that they are victims of violence, even if they recognize that they [translation] "have been subject to physical or moral aggression" (ibid.).

### **State protection**

*Country Reports 2004* states that the law in Cameroon does not specifically prohibit domestic violence (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5; see also *Le Messenger* 1 Apr. 2005; OMCT 17 Nov. 2003). However, it does prohibit rape and, when such crimes are committed, the police investigate and the courts prosecute the cases (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). In a 17 November 2003 newswire, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) states that, in Cameroonian detention centres, women are often subject to "torture," more specifically rape, by other inmates and prison guards, but that they seldom complain, for such reasons as the impunity the aggressors receive.

An article in *Le Messenger* states that legislation specifically prohibiting violence against women could be introduced in 2006 (1 Apr. 2005). The aforementioned United Kingdom report states that it is still possible to take domestic violence cases to court without such legislation (12 May 2004, Sec. 9.17). However, according to the president of the ALVF, [translation] "the penalties imposed by the law are not severe enough to have a deterrent effect on men found guilty of domestic violence" (*Le Messenger* 7 June 2004), and domestic violence is not legal ground for divorce (ibid.; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5).

The results of a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) survey, published in December 2004, show that 52 per cent of cases of domestic violence are resolved in the family context (PANA 10 Dec. 2004). An Inter Press Service (IPS) article refers to a rare case brought before the court in which a civil servant was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for "murdering his wife after a prolonged period of physically abusing her" (15 Mar. 2004). The same article reports that Cameroonian women seldom press charges against their husband for fear of breaking up their marriage (IPS 15 Mar. 2004). Referring to statements made by Yvonne Léopoldine Akoa, magistrate and judge of the court of first instance in Yaoundé, *Le Messenger* states that [translation] "Cameroonian penal legislation has failed to protect women in particular against domestic violence" (5 Apr. 2005).

At the international level, Cameroon has not yet ratified certain conventions, including the International Labour Organization Convention

Concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities (C. 156); the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages; the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (*Le Messenger* 1 Apr. 2005).

In the aforementioned newswire, the OMCT states that "the government of Cameroon fails to protect women from violence whether at the hands of private individuals or state officials" (17 Nov. 2003). It also points out that, in addition to failing to pass a law prohibiting domestic violence, the government has no political will to run a campaign to eliminate that type of violence (OMCT 17 Nov. 2003).

One source referred to the non-governmental organization ALVF, which assists families in distress, in particular by providing shelter in four regions of Cameroon to women who are victims of violence (IWHC n.d.).

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.

#### References

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[Accessed 6 Apr. 2005]

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). 17 November 2003. "Violence Against Women in Cameroon." (Dialog/AllAfrica)

#### Additional Sources Consulted

The Association Against Violence Toward Women (ALVF) did not provide information within the time constraints for this Response.

**Publications** : *Africa Confidential* , *Africa Research Bulletin* , Resource Centre country file.

**Internet sites, including** : AllAfrica, Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Women Living Under Muslim Law, Women's Human Rights Resources, World News Connection (WNC).

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