25-29 February 2008

Cameroon

A discreet and bloody crackdown

A REPORT WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY

THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER WITH
ASSISTANCE FROM ACAT-CAMEROON AND ACAT-FRANCE
The National Human Rights Observer of Cameroon was created in 2006 with assistance from the Concerted Program for Multi-Actors (CPMA). It consists of five Regional Observers with each having several Cameroonian civil organizations. The regional observers are as follows:

1. The Littoral Regional Observer:
   It covers the Littoral and South West Regions. It focuses on arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions.

2. The Centre Regional Observer:
   It covers the Regions of the Centre. It focuses on the economic and social sectors.

3. The West Observer:
   It covers the West and North West. It focuses on land problems.

4. The North Observer: It covers the Regions of the Far North, North and Adamawa. It also focuses on land issues.

5. The East Observer: It focuses on illegal exploitation of forest and mining.

Each regional observer is led by a Cameroonian civil society organization.

The objectives of the observer include, among others, the monitoring of human rights violations and the basic objectives cited above as well as the production of an annual report on the situation of human rights in Cameroon.

The observer is made up of a general assembly (general meeting of all organizations of the regional observers); a technical secretariat which consists of three leading organizations of the regional observer in the Littoral, West and Centre. Their role within the secretariat include: coordination, communication, and management of projects.
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INTRODUCTION

From 25 to 29 February 2008, Cameroon witnessed scenes of violent demonstrations that observers called "the hunger strike". Just like in other African countries that have experienced the same type of strike actions (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso ...), it was politically motivated by the following causes: the draft amendment of the Constitution which was seen as an extension of the mandate of President Paul Biya and his regime of bad governance, the rise in price of fuel and food; all of this triggered the popular uprising.

In response to the strike called by the main transporters’ unions to protest against rising fuel prices, the population, especially youths, stormed the streets of major cities of five provinces in the Southern parts of Cameroon namely: the provinces of the Southwest, Northwest, West, Centre and Littoral; the protesters were clamouring for their socio-economic, civic and political rights. Given the magnitude of the social strife, security forces (police, gendarmes and military) were deployed in their numbers and armed to the teeth to suppress the population which, most often, are unarmed. In the face this strife, the security forces responded with a bloody crackdown of the population. They committed serious violations of human rights resulting in the death of at least 139 people. Thousands of people who were arrested during and after the riots were later brought to justice. No member of the security forces suspected of committing serious violations of human rights was sanction or prosecution. No commission of enquiry was established to investigate the cause of the four days of violence. Although the situation is now stable, the possibility of renewed unrest and more crackdowns remains real, particularly with the approaching presidential elections of 2011.

Against this backdrop of unrest, several associations in Cameroon which are members of the National Human Rights Observer decided to proceed with the documentation of human rights abuses committed in late February 2008. They have, impartially and independently interviewed many victims and witnesses. These investigations were difficult because of the security situation that prevailed immediately after the riots. Many victims and eyewitnesses have also been reluctant to meet with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for fear of reprisals.

The report entitled “Cameroon: 25-29 February 2008 – A discreet and bloody crackdown” is a summary of these investigations and interviews. The compilation of this work has been done with the assistance of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT); ACAT Littoral-Cameroon and ACAT-France during its visit to Cameroon in June 2008.
A REVIEW OF THE GENERAL PICTURE BEFORE THE STRIKE ACTION OF FEBRUARY 2008

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the year 2007, several top officials of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) – the ruling party, made repeated calls for the constitution to be amended so as to allow President Paul Biya seek a third mandate in 2011 against the provisions of the constitution. The constitution allows for a maximum of two terms. The debate was thus launched. Various Opposition parties opposed the moves and threatened the regime with another street demonstrations. On the 30\textsuperscript{th} of October 2007, President Paul Biya explained on a French TV channel France 24 that the Constitution does not allow him, "to put forth his candidature, adding that: "You also have people who feel that to ensure continuity, the president must put his candidature. I leave the discussion to continue." On 6 November 2007, the day the nation was commemorating the accession of Mr. Paul Biya to power, (6 November 1982) CPDM militants publicly called for the revision of the constitution. On 31 December 2007 the President announced, on the occasion of his end-of-year speech, that he will reform the constitution: "From all our provinces, I have received many calls in favour of amendments, and

The revised Constitution was adopted in the National Assembly on 10 April 2008 by 157 votes in favour of amendments, 5 against and 15 abstentions. The CPDM has 153 MPs out of 180. Major changes to the Cameroonian Constitution were made with respect to the status of the President of the Republic like Section 6 sub 2 which states that the president is elected for a term of seven years. He can stand for re-election. Before then, the president could not serve for more than two terms according to Section 15 sub. 4 which reads - In the event of any crisis or when circumstances require, the President may, after consultation with the President of the Constitutional Council and the offices of the National Assembly and the Senate, ask the National Assembly to decide, by law, to extend or shorten its mandate. In this case, the election of a new National Assembly takes place forty days and not more than one hundred and twenty days after the expiry of the extension or abridgement of mandate. Today, that same Section states that "In case of serious crisis, the president may hold on to power without elections. Section 53 sub. 3 reads: The president will be given immunity under Sections 5, 8, 9 and 10 for any unlawful act committed while in office and cannot incur liability during his mandate. It now means that, the president, even when no longer in office, enjoys immunity.

NOTE
1 • Several African Heads of States have amended their constitutions so as not to limit the number of presidential terms: Mauritania (1991), Tunisia (2002), Guinea (2002), Togo (2003), Gabon (2003), Chad (2005), Uganda (2005), Algeria (2008)
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

After twenty-six years in power, Mr. Paul Biya is seen by most Cameroonians as a ruthless leader. Since he became Head of State, the country’s economic situation has continuously been deteriorating, leading to an unbelievably worsened situation especially in the areas of corruption, unemployment, poverty, misery, insecurity. The disruption of water and electricity supply has become too frequent. Health and education have become less accessible. The living conditions of students have deteriorated: no scholarships, school fees steadily rising and insanitary condition of university hostels. The strong waves of civil movements in the early ’90s gave rise to democracy and plurality of opinion. No amount of criticism has deterred the regime from staying in power through sham presidential elections.

Most Cameroonians feel that the government and her sclerotic members of the ruling class are completely indifferent to their problems. The youths of today have understood that Paul Biya is desperate for a constitutional amendment to enable him remain in power. His stay in power will also block the hope for political change and will continue to perpetuate a system which has brought insecurity, unemployment and poor living conditions. Their only hope is for him to leave the country to find a better life elsewhere. The sharp increase of oil prices, resulting from vertiginous increase in the prices of basic commodities (rice, bread, oil) and construction materials, nonetheless, aggravated the social unrest as well as amplified resentment against the ruling elite.

NOTE

2 • Cameroon has been a member of the Commonwealth since 1995.
In the climate of latent tension, the Governor of the Littoral province issued a banning order on the 15th January 2008, prohibiting, inter alia, unauthorized public manifestation throughout the province for an indefinite period. This decision reawakened the already popular discontent generated by the proposed reform of the constitution.

Despite this ban, several meetings convened by the opposition parties on the issue of constitutional reform successfully held in Douala, capital of the Littoral province. Mr. Mboa Massock Ma Batalong, a political maverick, held several meetings in the neighborhoods of Douala early February 2008. The purpose of these meetings was to organize protest match against the draft constitutional reform. In an effort to reinforce the Governor’s banning order, the forces of law and order dispersed demonstrators who had gathered to listen to Mr. Mboa Massock’s address. After stopping him on several occasions, he was abducted and abandoned in the middle of the night of 16th February 2008 in the Yabassi forest, about a hundred kilometres from Douala.

After the press conference of Wednesday, the 13th February granted by leader of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) – Mr. Ni John Fru Ndi on constitutional reform, clashes occurred between the police and the participants of that conference. The police used tear gas canisters to dispersed participants, onlookers and passers-by.

Thursday 21 February, Equinoxe TV, a Douala-based private television station had shown images of these demonstrations. The TV station was subsequently shut down by the local government authorities for, as they claimed, "operating without the legal framework of the audiovisual communication." On Friday, February 22, Radio Équinoxe was also shut down. These media houses regularly opened debates during which criticisms were made by panellists in respect of the proposed constitutional amendment.

On Saturday the 23rd of February, a rally of the SDF that was scheduled to take place at "Rond Point Dakar" in Douala, with the objective of raising awareness about the amendment of Section 6 sub.2 of the constitution; it was cancelled at the last minute by the SDF Provincial officials for fear of police reprisal. An important detachment of the police was, in effect, deployed to the rally ground the day before. After the departure of the SDF Parliamentarian for Wouri East, Hon. Jean Michel Nintcheu, the police moved...
DEBRIS OF BARRICADE ON THE ROAD IN DOUALA

in to disperse the crowd with tear gas and water canon. The situation degenerated. Angered by the brutality of the police and the military, the youths of the district erected barricades, burned tyres on the streets; the police retorted by opening fire. The spontaneous confrontation turned out to be bloody in this neighbourhood of Douala. The riots continued in the night. In addition to the confrontations between the youths and police, there was also looting of shops, burning of vehicles and the destruction of buildings (petrol stations, the kiosks of Pari-Mutuel Urbain Camerounais – PMUC). The police fired live bullets and killed three persons and wounded many. A number of people were also arrested.

Sunday 24 February, the situation in Douala remained tense but no violence was reported except for some sporadic gunfire. Alongside the political movements that were fighting against the constitutional amendment, a social upheaval broke out within the same period. The agitators were demanding economic reforms. They were protesting against fuel price hikes; at the same time, transporters’ unions also called for a general strike.

NUMEROUS BARRICADES WERE ERECTED IN MANY STREET CORNERS. TYRES AND OTHER MATERIALS WERE BURNT ON THE HIGHWAYS, THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC IN AND OUT OF MAJOR TOWNS WERE BLOCKED

On Monday 25 February, the call for general strike action was massively followed. In the main cities of five provinces namely; the Center, Littoral, North West, West and South West, no taxis, motorcycles and intercity buses circulated. Sensing the danger of possible vandalism, most vehicles were packed. The few people who ventured to drive were halted. In several cases, private vehicles were damaged and fire set on others. Due to lack of transport, most services and businesses remained closed as well as schools and colleges. A large proportion of the downtrodden population joined the transporters’ strike. Their demands were for an improvement in their social life style.

Many youths spontaneously descended to the streets to express their disillusionment and loss of hope for a better future. The strike then became a widespread movement. No political organization or trade union instigated the protestors. It was all spontaneous. The cities were totally paralyzed. Peaceful demonstrations could be seen everywhere. Rallies were held at junctions of main streets. Youths brandishing placards bearing various slogans: “Do not touch my constitution”, “Biya must go”, “Halt the cost of living.” Numerous barricades were erected in many street corners. Tyres and other materials were burnt on the highways, the flow of traffic in and out of major towns were blocked. The streets were taken over by young thugs and looters. Taking advantage of the paralyzed cities, they attacked shops.

NOTE
3 • According to the government, thirty-one cities were affected by the strike action:
Central Province: Yaoundé.
Littoral Province: Douala, Nkongsamba, Mbanga, Melong, Njombe, Penja and Loum.
North West Province: Bamenda, Kumbo, Santa, Nkambe, Ndop, Bali, Mbengwi and Batibo.
Western Province: Bafoussam, Dschang, Bafang, Kekem, Mbouda and Foumbot.
South West Province: Buea, Limbe, Muyuka, Tiko, Ekona, Muea, Ombe, Mutengene and Kumba.
On Monday 25 February 2008, in a release published in the government daily newspaper Cameroon Tribune, the Minister of Communication, Jean Pierre Biyiti Bi Essam, condemned the violence of February 23, and regretted “the damage caused by these irresponsible acts” and strongly denounced “those who exploited the naivety of the youths.”

In Douala thousands of protesters manifested in an uncontrolled manner. Barricades were erected in many streets; tyres and other materials were burnt on the roads. The entrances into the town (from Yaounde and West Province) were impassable. The Wouri bridge was blocked by demonstrators. The strike action started peacefully, but later degenerated into scenes of violence. Many vehicles found on the streets were damaged. Many stores that were found open were ransacked. In different places in the cities, the police intervened with tear gas and water canon to disperse the demonstrators. Protesters responded by throwing stones. The strike was thus transformed into pitched battles between security forces and the protesting youths. Unable to control the stone-throwing crowd, the police fired live bullets. In some cases they fired at close range. The bloody situation deteriorated and the strike was transformed into real urban riots. Many scenes of looting and vandalism were increasingly witnessed in all neighbourhoods of the city, except in the Bonanjo administrative district where the seaport remained under tight security throughout the strike. In the Akwa neighbourhood, bands of several hundred youths armed with stones and clubs, attacked private schools.

In Yaounde, a few incidents occurred between transporters’ unions and the police.

In Kumba, no vehicles circulated in the morning. The whole town was blocked with barricades by groups of young people. All commercial shops were closed. There were only pedestrians moving on the streets. In the afternoon, demonstrators waving placards with anti-Paul Biya messages as: “Biya is old and tired” “Biya must go,” “Constitutional change only over our dead bodies.” The various groups of demonstrators headed to Fiaogho neighbourhood where they assembled near the brewery company called

Shops, bakeries, pharmacies, hotels, restaurants, filling stations were ransacked and looted. The kiosks of Pari-Mutuel Urbain Cameroun (PMUC) were specifically targeted. Administrative buildings were burnt. The 5th police district, the Divisional Office, the town hall and the central divisional taxation buildings were looted and then set ablaze by demonstrators. The SNEC (water utility company) and AES-SONEL (electricity utility company) services were attacked and damaged. In Bonaberi, a score of policemen were kidnapped, beaten and their uniforms torn. Military reinforcements were sent from Yaounde and Koutaba to assist the police and gendarmes on the ground. At the end of the day, the security forces regained control of the main street junctions. After overpowering the protestors in Douala, the police multiplied identification checks and arrests. The city of Douala was then looped and grid by the police, including elite troops. They were instructed to shoot at people who were in and around places where there was looting or vandalism. This, however, did not prevent looting in the night.
Numerous barricades were erected on many street corners. Tyres and other materials were burnt on the highway. Entrances into the town were impassable.

During the day, violence also reached Bafoussam and Buea. The town of Buea was the scene of clashes between the police and the demonstrators. The rioters were armed with stones after having erected barricades. Looting also took place.

The University of Dschang was the scene of protests. A student was killed by stray bullet around the university campus. Several buildings and cars were burnt. Significant damages were done in Bafang. It was deplorable. All kiosks belonging to PMUC were destroyed. The CPDM office and two TOTAL fuel stations were burnt.

In the evening, the Minister of Communication and government Spokesman accused the SDF of being behind the strikes in Douala and Bamenda. This statement increased tension as the population had expected more measures of appeasement from the government than accusations.

Tuesday 26 February: after a relatively quiet night in Douala even as looting continued in some districts, violent demonstrations resumed in some quarters to an extent, especially in Bepanda, Grand Moulin, Logpom, Maképè, Bonamoussadi, Bonaberi, Ndok-passi. Apart from two bakeries that remained open and protected by armed military personnel, shops and markets remain closed. The aircrafts destined to land in Douala were diverted to Yaounde. The port of Douala was shut down. Shops, fillings stations and other services as well as French interests like Orange shops, PMUC kiosks were destroyed. The SIDEM company located at the flyover in Douala airport was attacked by rioters, it suffered extensive damage (new trucks and other working materials were burnt). President Paul Biya’s effigies were blemished in several places in the city. In the Douala University campus, demonstrators requested the departure of Paul Biya and the Rector of the University. Contingents of additional soldiers arrived from other parts of the country to lend support to law enforcement officers who were overwhelmed by the events. The use of firearms became systematic and repressive measures were applied to a higher degree.

NOTE
4 • Many Cameroonians considered France as partly responsible for their misery because of their continuous support of President Paul Biya’s regime.
In Yaoundé, the transporters’ call for a strike was massively followed. The strike action went on while transporters’ unions were negotiating with the government. For the first time in the history of strike action in Cameroon, the nation’s political capital was paralyzed. To be on the safe side, traders closed their shops. Demonstrators carried placards bearing messages such as: “Touch not my Constitution” and decried the expensive lifestyle of the ruling class. Barricades were raised in some quarters as means to prevent direct confrontations between demonstrators and police; the strike continued throughout the day and in the night. PMUC facilities and a local taxation office were attacked.

In Kumba, barricades were erected on all roads. Several administrative buildings – the taxation office, the treasury, urban planning, businesses and social services were looted (computers, chairs, furniture) after which, the structures were burnt. Filling stations and shops were also targeted as well as PMUC kiosks. The rioters quickly took control of the city. The police erected barricades in order to block demonstrators from entering into their office building. From within their office building, they fired live bullets at the crowds to keep demonstrators away. Two people were killed. The building was partly burnt by the crowd. Incidentally, there was a heavy downpour that hindered the rioters thus ending the violence prematurely. Some skirmishes were reported during the night. During that same night, military reinforcements arrived from Douala and Buea. All activities were halted in Buea, Bafoussam and Bamenda with the arrival of the soldiers. Social unrest equally prevailed in Foumban, Loum, Dschang, Bangangte, Limbe, Nkongsamba: no vehicles were seen anywhere, gatherings and barricades were noticed everywhere. Shops were closed.

IN COURSE OF THE DAY OF FEBRUARY 26, MANY PEOPLE WERE SHOT DEAD, ESPECIALLY IN LOUM, WHERE SIX YOUTHS WERE KILLED

In the evening, representatives of transporters’ unions agreed to call off the strike after the government offered a reduction of 6 francs CFA/litre (less than € 0.01) of gasoline prices during the negotiations. They called for the resumption of work the next day. The Mayors of Douala appealed for calm. The Bishops of Cameroon, through the voice of Cardinal Christian Tumi appealed to Cameroonian to dialogue. The governor of the city of Douala requested some filling stations and pharmacies to open under the protection of the army. At the same time, several traditional leaders close to the CPDM denounced the popular uprising and called for stronger crackdown against demonstrators. They chanted with xenophobic messages like "the rioters should go and strike in their own home towns ...." On this day, many people were shot and killed, including six young people in Loum.

Wednesday 27 February: The calling-off of the strike action was not respected by the grassroots which considered the concession made by the government as very insufficient. So, the strike continued. Despite the reopening of a few bakeries under military protection and the deployment of joint patrols (army - police), the city of Douala remain...
paralyzed and scenes of violence and looting took place in various neighborhoods. In Bonaberi, the CIMENCAM cement factory was attacked. In Bonapriso, skirmishes were reported in the morning. There were other hot spots at the junction of two churches in Bessengue valley and at a place called Shell New bell. But the most deplorable incident is the bloody suppression of a peaceful match involving thousands of youths who were trapped by the police in the middle of Wouri bridge at Bonaberi. A number of young people died or drowned; some shot by the forces of law and order as they tried to escape. A curfew was declared in the city of Douala from 18:00 p.m. to 06:00 a.m. in the morning. Early in the morning taxis were seen circulating in Yaounde. But from 9 a.m. of same day, demonstrators took to the streets again, set up barricades, burned tyres, stop traffic and closed shops by force especially those in the central market. The forces of law and order were involved in firing bullets and tear gas, notably from an helicopter. A peaceful match to the presidency of the Republic was violently suppressed and the political capital was completely surrounded by the military. The situation escalated and there was violent clashes between the population and the police in several neighbourhoods of Yaoundé (Tsinga, Mokolo, Mendong, Ngoussou, Mimboman, Ekounou ...).

In the heat of this civil unrest, the president appeared on national TV to address the nation. He sounded so arrogant as if to say "you can go to war if you want". Frustrated by the President’s arrogance, the students invaded the University of Yaounde I campus. They were brutally beaten by the police and soldiers. Barricades were erected on the streets, and even roads leading to the Presidential Palace. There was once again a mass arrest of demonstrators.

The following morning, the traffic remained blocked in Buea while clashes continued in its neighbourhoods. The police shot dead a young man in Muea town.

Meanwhile, Bamenda still remained a ghost town (lack of transportation, stores closed and the streets barricaded by young people). The town hall was attacked and burnt. The car of the Government delegate suffered some damages and his wife’s school was partly ransacked. Other buildings were attacked and burnt, so too was the official grand stand for public festivities, the taxation office, the AES-SONEL premises, and the brewery depot of Les Brasseries du Cameroun.

In the morning in Nkongsamba, troops of the police elite force, Mobile Intervention Unit known in French as (GMI) fired live bullets on a gathering of youths. Two people were killed, many were injured.

In Bafoussam, youths erected barricades in almost all localities of the city: Toungang, Tyo Ville, Tamdja, Djeleng, Nylon, Banengo, and TPO junctions blocking traffic. The police tried to dislodge them but this resulted in violent clashes. The police responded to the stone-throwing crowd by firing live bullets. Five youths were killed (among others Tantoh Emmanuel, 25, and Elvis Momo). During the clashes, several vehicles, including that of the Senior Divisional Officer of Mifi and the Divisional Officer of Bafoussam I were damaged. Private institutions, an Orange store and two bakeries were also looted. PMUC antenna both located at the Auberge junction were damaged.

In Dschang, traffic resumed gradually.
PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT OF CAMEROUN

THE HEAD OF STATE’S ADDRESS TO THE NATION: A SPEECH THAT AGGRAVATED THE SITUATION

The speech was perceived as a declaration of war against the young protestors. After the speech ended, a large number of heavily armed military men took positions on the streets of many cities. Even special military units such as GSO, ESIR and BIR were mobilized on the ground. Many military tanks were deployed in Yaounde. Helicopters were hovering in the sky. The management of urban riots was therefore made to look like an insurgency and war against the state;

Wednesday 27 February at 20:00 p.m., President Paul Biya came out of silence in a strong speech that lasted five minutes on radio and television. The Head of State, after referring to the "human and material losses. Probably very heavy," said that "the issue is exploitation. In other words, the transporters’ union strike was exploited by politicians for political gains." He subsequently denounced, in a veiled manner, a conspiracy of the opposition to overthrow him. He said: "For some, their goal is to get through violence what they could not obtain through the ballot box, i.e. through the normal democratic process. The apprentice sorcerers who, in the background, have manipulated these youths were not bothered about the risk that they were exposing them in confrontations with the police." The President concluded his speech by assuring that Cameroon will remain a state of law ...

The disorder can only bring misfortune and misery. All the legal means at the disposal of the government will be used to ensure that power remains within the law. "The speech of the Head of State demonstrated willingness of the President to regain control of the situation by force. He was in search of scapegoats within the ranks of the opposition. He did not give any concrete reply, or measure, or even promises to solve the problems posed by the striking population. Nothing on the issue of constitutional reform, the high cost of living, rising prices and chronic unemployment of young people was addressed. The disappointment was widespread among the population. The demonstrators were thereafter regarded and treated as enemies of the state.

Even though, the Head of State remains the guarantor of social peace, security of lives and properties, his speech gave the forces of law and order a leeway to act with impunity. The police, gendarmes and the soldiers felt that they were entrusted with a mission to freely suppress any group of people as they wish. The chasing of union leaders in the neighbourhoods began: arbitrary arrests of youths, ill-treatment of detainees and secret detention. The law enforcement officers took advantage of the situation and forcefully entered private homes and extorted money and goods from the occupants using violent and intimidating tactics. In the evening, well-armed members of the military attacked the Ngoa-Ekelle university campus of Yaounde. They destroyed the rooms, molested students and even those who had nothing to do with the strike action. Several students were arrested. The outcome of this punitive expedition was the wounding of at least five students. On their parts, the youths responded to the speech with more burning and destruction. Incidents were reported throughout the night in Douala and Yaounde. The police responded by firing live bullets into the crowd of rioters.
In Foumbot there were also clashes. The policemen who were sent from Douala and Buea were deployed in the centre of Kumba town to protect certain buildings like the central market, BICEC (bank) and the High Court. Up till midday the city was calm. Most of the barricades were cleared off the roads; few private cars and motor bikes started to circulate again in the city. In the afternoon, demonstrators mounted barricades again thus blocking vehicles and making movement impossible. All of this happened mostly in the zones of Kumba II (Fiango) and Kumba III (Mambanda). While there was no strike action in progress, soldiers in three civilian vehicles carrying light machine guns on one of the vehicles (on the rear) fired indiscriminately (at least four times) on civilians who were just walking in groups around the central market - at least three people were killed. Meanwhile, from a military helicopter, unprovoked soldiers threw tear gas and fired live bullets at people walking in groups injuring many. Soldiers took advantage of the situation by harassing the population and robbing passers-by of their money; they also snatched mobile phones and jewelleries.

Thursday February 28: the main cities in the country were under surveillance by the military all day long; there was relative calm. The situation remained extremely tense in most cities. In Douala, there were still no traffic; shops remained closed. The few banks that opened were guarded by the police and the military; elsewhere, incidents were reported in several neighbourhoods. In Kumba, calm had returned. The military were everywhere and the population was living in fear. The situation was the same in Buea and Bafoussam. In Bamenda there were clashes. Looting was carried out in a deplorable manner. Several people were killed by live bullets.

At least 16 people - including John Tegen, Eliza Saidu, Tchoumnou Thomas, Dorothy Tah Andong, Babila Doh Elvis, Atemgeh George, Mboh Napoleon were treated on 27 February 2008 in three Health Centres – Presbyterian Health Centre, Hope Clinic and Kumba District Hospital for gunshot wounds including two people who were found at the Brasserie Fiango depot. At least four others were killed by live bullets in Kumba on the same day of the 27 February 2008.

In Yaounde, taxis and private cars were still not circulating. The army was positioned at different road junctions in the city to prevent any further uprising. However, tension remained visible in the neighborhoods where gunshots were heard. Apart from the privately-own daily newspaper Le Jour and the daily Government Cameroon Tribune, no newspaper was available in the capital city. While publishers of press organs were being invited to the Ministry of Communication, the gendarmerie was invading the premises of Magic FM radio, at 10:30 a.m. They confiscated their equipment as well as mobile phones belonging to the journalists. Their radio signals went off the air. The journalists of this radio station had made an error by allowing radio callers to strongly criticize the president’s speech.

Friday 29 February: Because of the massive presence of the law enforcement officers, calm returned to the country. The cities were under high police surveillance, some of whom were in plain clothes. Taxis returned to work and businesses were gradually resuming. Fear was noticeable, and some families had to flee for fear of being arrested.
INEXHAUSTIVE LIST OF CASUALTIES FOLLOWING THE VIOLENCE OF FEBRUARY 2008

The government version of February 2008 strike action stated a death toll of 40 including a policeman (see table below). The number of those injured was not known, but according to government authorities, there were many civilians and soldiers wounded. This was made known during a press conference granted by the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization - Mr. Marafa Hamidou Yaya on Monday 10th of March 2008 in Yaounde. The government version of the death toll during the strike action, though minimized, was heavy by all standards; however, those figures were very far from the reality. Despite the difficulty faced in verifying certain incidents and allegations of violence resulting in deaths, at least 139 people lost their lives during the strike. Douala alone had the heaviest death toll (see table below). 54 names of victims have so far been identified by the National Human Rights Observatory (see Table page 36).

However, no exact figure of the total casualties can be given. It is very difficult to arrive at an accurate figure of the number of deaths for several reasons:

- Many victims were not transported to the hospital or the mortuary, they were immediately buried by their families; according to some traditions, a victim must be buried in his village of origin.
- Many families could not speak or give testimony for fear of reprisals. Parents recovered the bodies of their children on the promise that they will remain silent as to the cause of their death. The government advised families of victims to avoid talking too much about what happened.
- Today, the victims who were seriously injured during the strike action continued to suffer from their injuries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITIES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF DEATHS ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER</th>
<th>NUMBER OF DEATHS ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douala</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaounde</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>2 (including a policeman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbanga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bafang</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njombe-Penja</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loum</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamenda</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bafoussam</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumba</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limbe</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dschang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muea</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL   ATLEAST 139  40

A REPORT WRITTEN AND COMPILLED BY THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY
EVALUATION OF MATERIAL DAMAGE DUE TO THE VIOLENCE OF FEBRUARY 2008

Many cities suffered losses in terms of looting, vandalism and destruction (by fire) of public and private properties. Most of the damage was done by civilians. Some of these acts were spontaneous. Others were intended to send a message of frustration to the Cameroonian authorities by targeting structures that symbolize the state; other targets were companies owned by those believed to be backing the regime like the French. French business concerns like PMUC kiosks, Orange Shops, Total filling stations were also touched. Many Cameroonians consider that France is partly to blame for their misery because of its continued and irreplaceable support to President Paul Biya.

DAMAGES ON PUBLIC PROPERTIES

According to government sources, 44 public buildings or those buildings being rented by the government were looted, ransacked and burnt.

• Douala: Office of the Divisional Officer of Douala V, Mayor’s Office of Douala V, 13th Central Taxation office.

• Kumba: Public Security of Kumba I, Meme Special Branch, Divisional Finance Office, Divisional Taxation Office Delegations of Basic education and development, Delegation of Urban Development and Housing, Delegation of State Property and Land Tenure

• Yaoundé: Youths’ Center of insertion at Nkomkana.

• Kekem: Divisional Officer’s Office.

• Santa: Divisional Officer’s Office, Gendarmerie Territorial Brigade

Many public vehicles or those owned by civil servants were burned or seriously damaged.

DAMAGE ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

Economic operators also suffered heavy losses. Cameroonian government has estimated that the damage can amount to tens of billions of francs CFA (millions of euros (5)).

Thirty-three filling stations were wholly or partially destroyed. Several depots of brewery companies were looted. There were also burnings or lootings of some social offices and certain enterprises, pharmacies, kiosks of PMUC and even destruction of agro-industrial sites. In Addition, several private vehicles were vandalized or burned. In Douala, for example, SIDEM which was rumoured to belong to the eldest son of Paul Biya, was wrecked. Many of the company’s vehicles were burnt. On 27 February, the cement factory (CIMENCAM) was attacked in Bonaberi.

NOTE 5:
650 CFA francs is equivalent to approximately 1 euro.
DIFFERENT ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Analysis of a number of cases such as infringements of human rights was carried out. These cases were identified by associations which are members of the National Human Rights Observer. They noticed the recurrence of brutal methods employed by the government to quell the crowd. It is clear that the heavy loss of human lives was mainly caused by illegitimate use of excessive force by the police. In some cases summary executions were carried out. These cases of execution of people who did not, in any way, threaten the security forces were particularly preoccupying.

EXCESIVE USE OF FORCE AND KILLING OF UNARMED PROTESTERS

The Cameroonian authorities are responsible for maintaining public order in the country and protecting the population. This investigative report, therefore, does not undermine the need for police investigation of crimes committed in the course of the strike action of February 2008, which resulted in deaths.

However, evidence collected on the field established clearly that the police used excessive force in trying to maintain law and order. The manner with which the police acted was in violation of the Cameroonian law and international norms applicable to strike actions.
NATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL NORMS REGARDING THE USE OF DEADLY WEAPONS

In accordance with relevant provisions of the law in Cameroon, the use of force by the State authorities responsible for law and order is strictly regulated: the police are authorized to use force only when it is absolutely necessary and also in a proportional manner. Prior to using firearms, warnings must be made. The Basic Principles of the United Nations Convention to resort to force and the use of firearms by those responsible for law enforcement (1990), provides important guidelines restricting the use of force in the circumstances of civil unrest. Although these principles are not binding, they reflect a high level of consensus by the international community about appropriate norms on conduct by state officials in such a context. The principle states that whenever the legitimate use of force or firearms is unavoidable, those responsible for the enforcement of law:

a) will use them sparingly and their action will be proportionate to the seriousness of the offense and the legitimate objective to be achieved;

b) will cause only minimal injury as well as damage to physical integrity and to respect and preserve human life;

c) Ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to those injured and others affected as soon as possible;

d) Ensure that relatives or those related to the injured person or affected are notified as soon as possible. Finally, any arbitrary or abusive use of deadly weapons by the law enforcement agents must be punished as a criminal offense.

NOTE

• 6 Self-defense or other defense against persons on imminent risk of serious injury or death

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN DOUALA

AN ABUSIVE RESORT TO DEADLY WEAPONS

In order to put the demonstrators under control, the government quickly decided to call in the army and special units of forces (GSO, GIGN, BIR, BTAP) to give support to the police in maintaining law and order. The Groupement Special Operation (GSO) anti-terrorist unit based in Yaounde was deployed in Douala from 25 February 2008. The choice to resort to military battalions had very negative consequences on the use of excessive firearms. Most battalions deployed on the field had received essentially military and not police training in techniques of anti-riot.

THE USE OF DEADLY WEAPONS

The authorities responsible for law enforcement used water canon trucks, tear gas, deafening grenades and some had with them batons and shields. They also used firearms in a repeated and inappropriate manner leading to serious violations of human rights. Cartridges were recovered in different cities and at different times. The police used mainly AK47. This weapon is unacceptable in maintaining law against people who do not hold firearms. It is a weapon of war with a significant fire power (of 450 shots per minute) and far-reaching distance of 300 meters. Testimonies were also given in the use of pistols.

Even more disturbing is the use of light machine guns which were mounted on pick-ups during the operations to maintain order in places like Bonaberi and Kumba. These weapons whose fire power may reach 600 rounds per minute and whose scope may be around 450 meters are designed and normally used in operations of war. Light machine guns are totally inappropriate in operations that have to do with arresting unarmed persons.

The use of firearms could also be due to panic by the police in the face of a large and angry crowd. Such weapons were used on numerous occasions and at different places against unarmed civilians; this was a clear violation. On several occasions, military weapons were used by security forces in the cities and in highly populated residential areas for no justifiable reason. Security forces also opened fire indiscriminately and without prior warning or consideration on which part of the body to hit.
CASES OF EXCESSIVE USE OF DEADLY WEAPONS

25 February 2008: (in Douala)
The shooting to dead of Mr. Stephen Dibaben. The strike degenerated at Bessengue traffic lights junction when six policemen in a van began throwing tear gas into a large crowd that was burning tyres. A female gendarme was disarmed by the demonstrators and briefly held up. Within minutes more soldiers arrived in their numbers (two truck loads and a water canon) and fired live bullets into the crowd even as they raised their hands as a sign of surrendering. The protesters had released the female gendarme even before reinforcement arrived. She was not maltreated. At about 10 p.m. Etienne Dibaben chatting in front of his house with neighbors when he was hit in the head by bullet. He died on the spot. He left behind five children.

27 February 2008: (Douala)
Massacre on the Wouri bridge.
In the morning of Wednesday 27 February 2008, thousands of young people from various neighbourhoods of Bonaberi carried placards with messages of peace; they were marching peacefully to meet the governor of the Littoral province to hand their grievances. Their grievances were: violence meted on youths during the two days strike action, high cost of living, unemployment, etc.. At the cemetery, the Divisional Officer of the Douala IV district met them. He tried to convince them not to visit the administrative headquarters at Bonanjo neighbourhood. He proposed to receive their grievances and transmit them to the governor. When the youths turned down his request, the Divisional Officer offered to accompany the youths to the Governor’s office. He led them in their peaceful match using his service vehicle. As they got to the Wouri bridge on the side of Bonaberi, the Divisional Officer parked his car and stepped aside for the protesters to cross the bridge first. As they moved onto the bridge, water canons closed in from both ends of the bridge. They were virtually sandwiched by the police. The canons started pouring water on them. Tear gas was also being thrown into the crowd from the land and the air. The officers also fired live bullets into the crowd. There was total panic. The youths who were leading the march tried to flee to one end of the bridge. They were unfortunately sandwiched by the officers. Faced with this dilemma, many youths had to jump into the river in an attempt to run away from the tear gas, bullets and from being trampled upon. Many of them did not know how to swim and thus drowned. Others were arrested by the police on the banks. The youths were stripped naked and told to lie face-down.

TEAR GAS WAS THROWN ON THE CROWD A HELICOPTER ALSO FIRED TEAR GAS ON THEM. SOME LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS FIRED LIVE BULLETS INTO THE CROWD

They immediately started molesting them. They walked on them and kicked them and beat them with various objects (sticks, batons, machetes, branches of eucalyptus trees). After several hours of torture, the youths were thrown into trucks led by the police, gendarmerie and army to various detention centres (naval base, GMI, Gendarmerie Legion, Provincial Delegation of the judicial police, the Central Police Station nº 01 of the city of Douala, the squadron of the gendarmerie, Mboppi etc).

They were then molested up to the middle of the night. Some parents managed to get their children released after paying the law enforcement officers. The crackdown on the bridge of Wouri claimed many lives. It is difficult to estimate the loss. Witnesses spoke of more than twenty bodies that were found downstream by fishermen. Meanwhile, the government did forbid fishermen from making any statement on the matter.

NOTE 7:
The Wouri bridge in Douala connects Bonaberi to Deido (roundabout), a distance of approximately 1.5 km.
27 February 2008: (in Douala). Njanteng Ngantchou and Nono beach were both shot dead. After the speech by President Paul Biya, Njanteng Ngantchou (a lower sixth student of series F of a government secondary school) was out in the residential area of Ndogpassi 3, located at about 1.5 km from the Yaounde – Douala road. In the middle of the night, he was confronted by a detachment of fifteen soldiers and police officers of GSO patrolling team. The security officers fired indiscriminately into the crowd several times as they chased the youths. This is how Njanteng Ngantchou and Nono Laplage were hit by bullets as they were trying to flee. They died on the spot. The military left the scene and no longer returned.

The information gathered in several cities, especially Kumba, finally confirmed that civilians were deliberately targeted by officers without any apparent reason.

ARBITRARY EXECUTIONS

Allegations of dozens of arbitrary executions were received by the Observatory. These allegations were sufficiently corroborated by reliable witnesses. Some demonstrators were deliberately targeted by the police and executed at close range in the head or the abdomen, whereas, these people would have simply been arrested. They fired even at people who were just watching the demonstrating crowd. In both cases, it appeared that summary executions was intended to punish the population for daring to express their frustration in a manner that tarnished the image of Cameroon and its political elites.

CASE OF ARBITRARY EXECUTIONS

On Wednesday 27 February in Loum, Aya Patrick Lionel, an eleven-year-old boy, was killed by bullets in front of their home. He was the son of Kameni De Vinci (Joe La Conscience), an artist committed to the fight against the constitutional amendment. The carpentry workshop of his uncle was also ransacked by the police.

On Thursday 28 February 2008 at about 9:00 a.m., Mr. Jacques Ngintedem Tiwa, born in 1972, left his home to buy some bread for his family. Close to the Court building at Ndokoti, a soldier came out of a truck and, without being provoked, fired at Mr. Tiwa around his abdomen. Some passers-by transported him to the Laquintinie hospital. Mr. Tiwa died thirty minutes later.

According to several testimonies from human rights defenders, there exists a list of people to be killed under the cover of social unrest.

Mr. Jacques Ngintedem Tiwa was a former leader of the students’ parliament in the early ‘90s. This movement demanded better students conditions of living. In 1992, just like many of his comrades, he fled Cameroon because of repression. After living on exile in West Africa (1992-2003), he decided to return home. He was married and had two children. The family of the deceased did not lay a complaint for fear of possible reprisals. They simply preferred to move house after having received anonymous phone calls.

AYA PATRICK LIONEL, ELEVEN YEARS OLD WAS KILLED BY BULLETS IN FRONT OF THEIR HOME. HE WAS THE SON OF A COMMITTED ARTIST.
SYSTEMATIC ARRESTS AND ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

Nearly 3,000 arrests were made among the civilian population, including a number of minors whose names on the list of those who took part in the strike action of late February 2008. In the Littoral province, approximately 2,000 people were arrested, and in the West Province, at least 384 (Bafoussam: 213, Bafang: 85, Dschang: 65, Bandjoun: 4, Bahamas: 17). The arrests began on Monday 25 February 2008 and intensified on Tuesday 26, Wednesday 27, Thursday 28 and Friday 29 February 2008. Certain people were arrested in the act of looting or stealing. But the vast majority of people were arbitrarily arrested from street gatherings. Many of those arrested happened to have been in groups or in shabby or strange attires. Children as young as ten years and even in their school uniforms had been arrested in the street. In popular neighbourhoods, individuals were also arrested in their homes. They broke in and picked them up without showing any warrant of arrest. It just suffices to be a youth or pointed at for you to be picked up. These people were subsequently convicted of act of looting. In order to arrest youths for offenses of flagrant misdemeanor, the officers needed to just cook-up evidences most of the time. Youths moving in town were, for example, forced to undress and made to roll in the dust. They were both forcefully carried away and released after being beaten; sometimes the people are re-arrested by other officers. Those arrested were held mostly in improvised detention centers: units of the gendarmerie, police and army. In Douala, a number of barracks had served as detention centres: gendarmerie legion, Bonanjo, gendarmerie squadron, Mboppi, research brigade of the gendarmerie, 2nd District of Groupe Mobile Intervention (GMI), of Littoral, provincial division of the Littoral judicial police (PJ), military naval base, etc. Many families were not even aware of the arrest of any of theirs. You just needed to notice that your child did not come home at the end of the day; all you needed to do was to go out and look for him in all the detention centres.
During the strike action of late February 2008, many people had been subjected to acts of torture. The law enforcement officers violently arrested a number of people on the streets or during police raids. While in detention, they were subjected to beatings and some either died in the process or were somehow maimed. In the University hostel of the Yaounde University I and on the night of February 27, at least 5 students were victims of ill-treatment by the military; they incurred injuries on the heads and legs.

These acts contravene the international standards against torture to which Cameroon is a party, especially the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which stipulates in Article 7 that: “No one shall be subjected to torture, pains or cruel treatment, inhuman or degrading ...” In the Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments, it is expected of all Member States to take effective measures to prevent acts of torture.

NO MEDICAL CARE WAS PROVIDED TO THE INJURED BY THE GOVERNMENT

Many people who were hit by bullets should normally have received immediate medical attention. However, the police did not fulfil their obligation to provide medical assistance to those injured as well as informed members of their families. The population had to be responsible for the transportation of the injured to hospitals. Because of the government’s failure to take charge of the wounded, several people died from their injuries.

RANSOM DEMANDED BY OFFICERS

A number of undisciplined and underpaid officers also participated in the looting of private property (money, phones laptops, bags of rice and sugar ...) and even intimidated those arrested in order to make some quick money during the strike action. Many parents were subjected to extortion of big sums of money by the officers to secure the release of their children. It was the same scenario even in the mortuary. The mortuary staff took advantage of the pain and distress of the families of victims or lost ones to ask for ransom.
At the mortuary of the Laquintinie hospital, an unusual additional amount ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 FCFA had to be paid to the mortuary staff before families were allowed to identify the bodies of their relatives.

A NUMBER OF INDISCIPLINE AND UNDERPAID LAW ENFORCEMENTS OFFICERS EQUALLY PARTICIPATED IN THE LOOTING OF PRIVATE PROPERTIES

On 21 February 2008, the Minister of Communication, Biyiti Bi Essam, signed an order suspending the private television station Équinoxe TV based in Douala on the grounds that the channel had not paid the caution of 100 million francs CFA (about 150,000 euros) for them to operate. This implies that they were operating illegally. All local radio and television stations were sealed by police officers. As if that was not enough, they ordered journalists to quit the premises of their radio stations. Since the liberalization of the audiovisual sector in 2005, no television channel or radio station has completed all the formalities imposed by government. The government simply hung on the caution as a reason to justify the suspension of Équinoxe TV. This was a pretext to muzzle the media that did not toe the official line. On several occasions, Équinoxe TV broadcast debates and interviews of people opposing the constitutional amendment; particularly, the removal of the clause limiting the number of mandates of the President of the Republic. The channel had also broadcast images showing security forces in the process of beating sympathisers of the opposition during a demonstration against the draft constitutional reform in Douala. Before its suspension, Équinoxe TV had already received admonitions and threats from the administrative authorities in Douala and Yaounde.

On 28 February the Minister of Communication invited the publishers of newspapers in his office in Yaoundé. The aim was to enjoin them “to show responsibility” and “not publish information that would inflame the crisis.” Already being put under custody, most of the media and journalists exhibited extreme caution in monitoring the clashes thereafter. On the same day, a dozen gendarmes entered the premises of the private radio station Magic FM in Yaounde, and ordered its closure without a warrant. The police also confiscated broadcasting equipment, and told journalists that they had behaved irresponsibly by letting callers analyze the speech of the Head of State. On the eve, shortly after the televised speech of President Paul Biya, Magic FM had organized a debate in which the president had been severely criticized on how he was handling the crisis and his determination to amend the constitution. In the morning of 28 February, during the program Magic Attitude, some listeners felt that the speech of the Head of State in which he promised to use “all legal means” to restore order, was “more bellicose than appeasing” and it did not “meet the expectations of the people.” The owner of the radio, Mr. Gregoire Mbida Ndjana and presenter of Radio France International Douala, was forced to go back into hiding for several days, following threats he and his family had received.

Finally, four journalists covering the strike action in Douala, were assaulted by agents of law enforcement, namely:

• David Nouwou, Editor-in-chief and, delegate of the private daily La Nouvelle
Expression, Mr. Patient Ebwele correspondent of the private daily Le Jour and Cathy Yvonne Nken journalist of Canal 2 International were attacked on the streets of Douala, by the police; other journalists were,

- Mr. Eric Golf Kouatchoua, cameraman of the private channel, Canal 2 International in addition to being beaten, was briefly detained on 27 February by the agents of Groupe Mobile Intervention (GMI). His camera was destroyed and he was only released after paying the sum of 56 000 francs CFA (about 83 euros). Of course, no receipt was issued for this. Beatings of journalists, intimidation and censorship of media were denounced by the National Syndicate of Cameroonian Journalists (SNJC). International media such as Reporters Without Borders (RWB) and the Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also the move. Mr. Jean Marc Soboth, 1st National Secretary of SNJC also condemned the attacks against journalists. He too received threats from security forces for decrying the attacks. Equinox TV, Magic FM and Equinoxe FM resumed broadcasting in July 2008, after more than six months of suspension.

ACAT-LITTORAL, DOUALA OFFICE

BEATINGS OF JOURNALISTS, INTIMIDATION AND CENSORSHIP OF MEDIA WERE DENOUNCED BY THE NATIONAL SYNDICATE OF CAMEROONIAN JOURNALISTS (SNJC) AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA. AS A RESULT OF HIS STATEMENTS, THE FIRST NATIONAL SECRETARY OF SNJC RECEIVED THREATS FROM THE SECURITY FORCES

THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

For denouncing violations of human rights perpetrated at the end of February 2008 in the international media and to have also undertaken investigations to this effect, Mrs. Madeleine Afite, President of the Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-Littoral) and the Cameroonian Human Rights House (MDHC) were intimidated several times in March 2008. Her car was ransacked on the night of 5 to 6 March 2008. Mrs. Madeleine Afite was clearly intimidated for having done and continued to do her job as a defender of human rights, in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration on the Defense of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly.

According to Article 12.2 of the Declaration on human rights defenders, the State of Cameroon should have taken “all necessary measures to ensure that the competent authorities protect Mrs. Madeleine Afite against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in this Declaration.” However, on 7 March 2008 Mrs. Madeleine Afite was denigrated on Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) – a public media, at the 13:00 p.m. news by François Marc Modzom in quote - “an unknown woman who claims to be a defender of human rights and who is heard on the international level but says nothing about the truth...” unquote

Other human rights defenders were harassed and denounced as instigators of riots, including:
- Njaru Philippe, Director of Friends network of the press, because of the part he played in defending the rights of the population.
- Zambo Amougou, Ndzana Olongo, Mbom Mefe, Essiga Benedict and Zechariah Mendogo and trade unionists were all harassed because of they demanded for real negotiation of the price of fuel with the government.
ARBITRARY DETENTIONS AND POOR CONDITIONS IN PRISON

Overcrowding, poor sanitation, promiscuity, diseases, malnutrition, violence, lack of staff management, lack of training for prison staff: the terribly poor conditions of detention in Cameroon prisons; these and more are the conditions under which detainees and prisoners are kept. These conditions create room for the violation of the United Nations Principles on the Minimum Standard for the treatment of detainees. Deaths of prisoners are common. On 7 March 2008, four deaths were registered in a single day at the Central Prison in Yaounde.

With the raids and arrests of February 2008, several thousand of young people have been incarcerated in the already tight prisons. This has contributed to worsen the conditions of detention. Among the detainees are many minors who were imprisoned for crimes that do not warrant prison terms.

WITH THE RAIDS AND ARRESTS OF FEBRUARY 2008, SEVERAL THOUSAND OF YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED IN THE ALREADY TIGHT PRISONS. THIS HAS CONTRIBUTED IN WORSENING THE CONDITIONS OF DETENTION.

According to the Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code which became law in 2007, Minors between 14 – 18 years may be detained in cases of crime and those under 14 years in murder cases. However, many minors were incarcerated for « delinquencies». At the central prisons in Douala, young prisoners are living under deplorable conditions. They sleep on the soil in the central courtyard. The prison was built to accommodate a maximum of 800 inmates but today it began house more than 3 825 people. In 2003, the United Nations Committee against Torture recommended that minors in Cameroon’s prisons should be separated from adults and that the State should build special prisons designed to accommodate them. Our investigation established the non-existence of such structures up-to-date. The systems of separation between minors and adults exist, but are ineffective. Minors have regular contacts with adult prisoners.
While justice in Cameroon is known for its slowness, the legal procedures carried out against the suspected rioters of February 2008 were quickly implemented during special trials. They were charged for “flagrant misdemeanour.” The defendants, were tried in groups (approximately 5 to 10 people). Many were dragged to court just hours after their arrests. Some hearings lasted for just five minutes. The were not given full hearing which is even against our penal code.

We also observed the following:

• No information was given to the defendants on their rights to a lawyer or to remain silent when they were picked up in accordance with the provisions of Section 116 (sub. 3) of the Criminal Procedure Code which states that:

  “The Judicial Police officer shall upon the opening of the preliminary investigation, and under the pain of nullity, informed the suspect of his right to be assisted by a counsel or his right to remain silent”

• The absence in court of complainants and witnesses for the prosecution.

The poor identification of the accused (age, name) because of the absence of many defendants, identification papers and the possibility of non-submission of birth certificates. All of this happened because of the hasty nature of the trial. The court was thus contented with oral information from the accused. Many defendants were tried in a rush.
There were no lawyers in court to defend the accused. Minors were tried just like adults and sentenced on flagrant misdemeanour when they should have been tried as minors.

• The non-signing of the minutes of the investigation by the accused.

• Non-establishment of minutes by prosecutors.

• Failure to respect the right of defendants by not preparing their court file. The defendants have not had time to prepare their defence as required by Article 300 of the Criminal Procedure Code: “When they appear in court for the first hearing, the accused were informed by the judge that they had the right to request for a period of three days to prepare their defence.” The judges did not take into account this provision of the law. Almost all the defendants were tried during one hearing and the cases were placed under deliberation after which sessions were generally held two days later.

• The lack of physical evidence against the defendants. The judges preferred to cite the concept of relativity of evidence rather than the rule of relax (Section 365 sub.3), considering that the evidence adduced by the prosecution were sufficient for defendants to be brought before the court.

• Non-compliance of the procedures in the drafting of the minutes. The minutes were prepared by judicial police officers and not by the prosecutor as required by law. Criminal Procedure Code states in Section 91 states that: “Unless otherwise provided by law, the minutes prepared by the judicial police officer are valued as simply information.” In proceedings of flagrant misdemeanour, “the suspect arrested in flagrant misdemeanour is presented by the Police Officer before the prosecutor who proceeds with his identification, brief questioning and, if he engages in pursuits, remands in custody, or left at large with or without bail.” Section 114, sub. 2 of this article states: “In all cases, the Prosecutor takes minutes of all his investigations, and in case of prosecution, the suspect is brought to the court in the next hearing.

• The failure to consult the suspect’s criminal record before sentencing them to prison, and the impossibility of knowing the past criminal records of the defendants because of the rapid procedures were disturbing. The defendants were accused of: staging a protest match on the streets, riotous assembly, looting, theft, destruction, arson, being in possession of weapons, group rebellion and violence on civil servants.” All of these charges were levied in an expeditious manner, even though, most of them pleaded not guilty. The first sentences against the defendants were heavy: fines and prison sentences of up to 5 years. No lawyer subsequently was present in their defence. Many lawyers and other members of human rights associations quickly mobilized to defend the accused so that justice should take its course despite external pressures. As soon as lawyers stepped in, the convictions became less severe (prison sentences of less than 2 years). However, due to the implementation of the “Default” fines which could not be paid by defendants were replaced by penalties such as supplementary imprisonment.

THE FIRST SENTENCES AGAINST THE ACCUSED WERE HEAVY. NO LAWYER WAS THERE TO ENSURE THEIR DEFENSE.

The manner of expeditious judgments and repeated violations of the provisions of Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code and regional and international conventions that guarantee the rights of defence suggest that pressures were exerted on the judicial bodies by the regime. The judges did not have free hands in the execution of the law.
One of the most flagrant case of injustice was observed in Bafoussam where six young men (Parfait Zubdom, Séverin Sado Saha, Synclair Tadde, Calvin Fotie, Chancelin Fowokon, Leonela Kamgang) were arrested respectively on 25, 26 and 27 February. They were sentenced to thirty-six months imprisonment, for looting from Orange shop located at the Auberge junction. The looting actually took place on the night of Friday 29 February 2008. The six young men were instead hired to guard the shop.

On 25 March 2008, the Deputy Prime Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals, Mr. Amadou Ali, declared that there were a total of 1 137 people arrested in the five provinces in connection with the unrest. 729 people were sentenced to between three months and six years in prison, 466 of the people have appealed. 251 people were released and 157 are still awaiting trial.

COMMUTATIONS AND REMISSIONS OF SENTENCES

On 20 May 2008, President Paul Biya signed two decrees (n° 2008/0174 and n° 2008/0175) on commutation and remission of sentences for people convicted for the riots of February 2008 in Cameroon. The presidential decree stipulated that persons sentenced to imprisonment of less than one year would serve their full sentence while those sentenced for more than one year imprisonment were reduced by half. However, the prisoners who were sentenced because they could not pay their fines could not regain their freedom. This is also applicable to those who appealed because they were not yet condemned. Well, almost all persons sentenced to imprisonment equally had pecuniary punishment (fines and costs). Most of them could not pay or appeal; consequently, few prisoners could benefit from these remissions and commutations of sentences, while an amnesty (wiping out sentences from their criminal record) would have repaired the damage suffered by these youths before they could benefit the amnesty.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE STATE OF CAMEROON DID NOT RESPECT ANY OF ITS OBLIGATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT OPENED ANY INQUIRY AS TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE USE OF FIREARMS BY THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

IMPUNITY: THE ONLY RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNMENT IN REACTION TO THE VIOLENCE COMMITTED BY THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

According to the Constitution of Cameroon, the international and regional norms relating to human rights especially the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Cameroonian government is compelled to guarantee the right to life, the right to physical integrity, the right to liberty and security of person, freedoms of expression, association and assembly. They equally expect the Cameroon government to punish as a criminal offence the officers who arbitrary used firearms to enforce the laws. On several occasions, families of victims are also demanding that officers should be punished as well, for the harassment they had from this same officers after the violence of February 2008. The Cameroonian government should have carried out investigation on the allegations of arbitrary use of force and firearms by the officers concerned. They are equally expected to declare publicly that the perpetrators of such crimes would be tried and punished severely. Unfortunately, the State of Cameroon has not complied with any of its obligations. The government authorities have not carried out any investigation about the circumstances that led to the use of firearms by the law officers. None of them has been brought to justice so far. No element of the security forces responsible for violence has been subjected to disciplinary or administrative action. Finally, no compensation, or indemnity has been provided to victims and their families. Only judicial pursuits of a large extent were brought against civilians, presumed authors of public disorder. The Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, in his press briefing of Monday 10 March 2008, congratulated the officers for exercising a lot of restraint in the use of their weapons in the face of intense provocations from the crowd.” He noted that “all the casualties were not as result of police shootings.” He went ahead to declare that many died as a result of fighting between bands of gangsters who infiltrated the crowd of rioters as they were sharing the booty acquired through looting, so this is what led to violent disputes.

IN CAMEROON, DEMONSTRATIONS ARE REGULARLY REPRESSED IN A BLOODY MANNER BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS WHO DO NOT HESITATE SHOOTING LIVE BULLET AT AN UNARMED POPULATION
between bandits. Some, he said, were victims of the phenomenon of popular justice. This is what we deplore.” In Cameroon, demonstrations, whatever the objective is, are regularly repressed in a bloody manner by the officers who do not hesitate to shoot live bullets at an unarmed population. In response to the disproportionate police brutality, the symbols of the State were being targeted by demonstrators.

There are many examples of police violence which have remained unpunished between 2005 and 2007:

• In April 2005, two students from the University of Buea were killed by bullets. A commission of enquiry was created to determine the facts and responsibilities. The conclusions of the findings of the Commission have never been made public.

• In November 2006, four people were killed in Buea during a student demonstrations.

• Two government secondary school students (Marcel Bertrand Mvogo Awono and Jean Jaurès Shimp Pougou Zok) were killed by bullets and many others were injured during a crackdown during a protest march against the deprivation of electricity in Abong Mbang on September 17 2007. The enquiry prescribed by the Government has never been made public.

• On 5 October 2007, Yaoundé, two people were killed by bullets, and several others injured when the police open fire on Mokolo market traders who took to the streets to protest against burglary of many of their stores.

• To have protested against police harassment, four persons, including a pregnant woman and two taxi drivers (Simon and Ambe Patrick Nche Tabong) were killed in Bamenda on 16 October 2007.

• Two students were killed by the bullets on 9 November 2007 in Kumba during the repression of a demonstration of students protesting against frequent power cuts. Many others were injured.

No police officer has been punished or judged in any of these cases.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S RESPONSE TO THE ABUSES COMMITTED

While the repression of demonstrations in other parts of the world, particularly Nepal and Burma, did not go without international indignation, the bloody events that took place in Cameroon in late February 2008 passed almost unnoticed.

The main partners of Cameroon most certainly denounced violence of the end February 2008:

• On 25 February 2008, the spokesman of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs regretted “the dramatic outcome experienced during the demonstration of Saturday 23 February 2008” called by the SDF and affirmed that France wants the political debate in Cameroon to proceed in a peaceful and democratic manner.

• On 27 March 2008, the European Union denounced in a declaration from the presidency stating that the violence of February was as a result of ethnic manipulation.

• On 28 February 2008, France declared that they are “very concerned about the violence and unacceptable wherever they come ” and called for the return of calm. But these statements were vague and were not directed to the perpetrators of major violence and had no effect on the policy of repression undertaken by the Cameroon authorities. Only Great Britain presented a more developed opinion on the Cameroon crisis. This view has been presented to members of the upper House of Parliament, on 27 March 2008 by Minister of State for External Relations and Department of the Commonwealth, Lord Malloch-Brown: “We attribute the recent popular agitations and disorder in Cameroon to the dissatisfaction of some citizens due to poor economic performance of the country, a degradation of the living conditions of thousands of citizens who have enormous difficulties to survive, to the living conditions that are increasingly unbearable for the poor, frustration and the total absence of open and fair discussion about the possible amendments to reduce the presidential term, modify the constitution, and above all, be disturbed seeing President Paul Biya readjust the constitution in order to remain in power.”

At the end of the violence, while the international community should have held Cameroon authorities accountable for the abuses, the main international donors such as France, Great Britain, the United States United States and the European Union, did not call for the putting in place of an independent commission of enquiry, in Cameroon or at the international level. International bodies such as African Union (AU) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) also remained silent on the subject. There was lack of genuine commitment within the international community in asking for investigations on violations of human rights that led to the death of more than one hundred people, the Cameroonians authorities did nothing to bring to justice the culprits or to establish the truth about these events.

These events, which could tarnish the image of the country, went relatively unnoticed on the International media.
CONCLUSION

The riots that rocked Cameroon from 25 to 29 February 2008 are the result of an economic, social and political crisis that was triggered by the transporters’ unions strike. The government authorities interpreted the expression of anger by the population to be a real breach of security of the state, as well as an attempted to overthrow President Paul Biya. The demonstrators, mostly youths, were regarded as rioters were manipulated by political parties.

The police, gendarmerie and army were mobilized to brutally suppress the demonstrators; it was as if Cameroon was in a state of insurrection. The use of deadly weapon was unjustified, excessive, indiscriminate and reckless, during and after the strike action, the peaceful demonstration was transformed into riots in response to provocations from security forces. At least 139 people died after being hit by bullets, or to a lesser extent, because of beatings, drowning and trampling. Massive human rights violations were noted:

- Civilians were summarily executed;
- Incidents of looting were committed by the demonstrators but also by the security forces;
- Arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions and unfair judgments was very prevalent;
- A large number of detainees were subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- Many acts of intimidation and harassment were committed against members of the political parties, journalists and defenders of human Rights.

If the crisis today is a thing of the past, the stability of Cameroon is still on hold. The brutality displayed by the Cameroonian security forces with impunity, shows that Cameroon is not a real state of law - an indispensable prerequisite to building a more stable future. The international community must ensure that the Cameroonian authorities put an end to impunity that encourages abuses.
RECOMMANDATIONS

TO THE CAMEROONIAN GOVERNMENT

• Recognize and publicly condemn the excessive use of force by security forces of the State during the demonstrations of late February 2008.
• Conduct a judicial, independent and impartial enquiry, on crimes and serious human rights violations committed in late February 2008, so that those responsible be tried and sentenced according to the law. The report and results of this enquiry must be made public.
• Immediately release all those who are still in detention and who were arbitrarily arrested, illegally detained or unjustly convicted during and after the events of February 2008.
• Ensure that the injured receive medical care and psychological support necessary to ensure that all victims received adequate reparations.
• Cooperate fully with any international commission of enquiry if and when it is put in place.
• Provide better protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, create a conducive environment for the holding of a free, open, democratic and transparent presidential elections in 2011.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY FRANCE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

• In accordance with international standards, call the Cameroonian government publicly and privately to create a judicial, independent, and impartial commission of enquiry to investigate abuses committed during the events in late February 2008, and maintain pressure on the Cameroonian government throughout the judicial process.
• Provide technical assistance and financial support to Cameroonian civil society organisation currently trying to document the abuses of February 2008.
• Support programs designed to strengthen the rule of law which include:
  - Training of police and other security forces on issues related to human rights (legal interrogation techniques are appropriate, crowd control, appropriate use of force). All courses must conform to international human rights standards, as the Minimum Rules on the use of force and firearms and the Code of Conduct of United Nations officials responsible for enforcing the law.
  - Strengthening the judiciary apparatus, especially through training, staffing and equipment to ensure the independence and credibility of justice.
• Require the Cameroonian government to compensate families of victims of the strike action of February 2008.

TO THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

Deploy special reporters and interested groups in order to collect information on human rights violations committed in February 2008 that would enable the establishment of truth, justice and reparations for victims.
• Provide technical assistance and financial support to Cameroonian civil society organisations currently trying to document the abuses of February 2008.
<table>
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<td>23 February 2008</td>
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<td>(Seller of Motor spare parts at Yabassi Quarter)</td>
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<td>053 Prudencia Bih</td>
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<tr>
<td>054 A Motorcycle taxi rider</td>
<td>22 years</td>
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<td>29 February 2008</td>
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From the 25 to 29 February 2008, Cameroon was the scene of violent demonstrations which observers called « The Hunger Riots ».

In contrast to many other African countries that have experienced the same type of strike, ours was motivated by political factor – the proposed constitutional amendment coupled with the rising prices of fuel and basic commodities triggered the uprising.

As a result of the call for a strike action, people stormed the streets of the main cities of the southern parts of Cameroon claiming socio-economic, civic and political rights. Given the scale of the strike action, the security forces engaged in a bloody crackdowns and committed serious human rights causing the deaths of at least 139 persons.

No member of the security forces suspected of committing human rights violations has been subjected to sanctions or prosecution. No commission of enquiry has been put in place to establish the truth about the four days of violence.

Against this backdrop, several associations that are members of the National Human Rights Observer decided to proceed with the documentation of human rights violations committed in late February 2008. They were conducted on the field in an impartial and independent manner. Investigations and interviews were conducted with many victims and witnesses.

The report titled « Cameroon – 25-29 February 2008: A discreetly bloody crackdown » is a summary of these investigations and interviews.

A REPORT WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY

THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER WITH
ASSISTANCE FROM ACAT-LITTORAL AND ACAT-FRANCE