



Submission of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) for the Universal Periodic Review of Cameroon **September 2008**

CHRI's work on Cameroon is limited. This submission is based on information gathered CHRI's human rights monitoring section and based on research undertaken for CHRI's annual report on the Commonwealth members of the UN Human Rights Council. Most of the information is from secondary sources.

A. Consultation process

1. CHRI has not received any information on government consultations on the UPR.

B. The current normative and institutional framework of the country under review

- *Elections*

2. Cameroon's legislative and council elections in July 2007 took place amid claims of vote-rigging and fraud by the opposition and some foreign diplomats.ⁱ Over 100 petitions were filed to the Supreme Court disputing the results,ⁱⁱ but the Court confirmed in early August that President Paul Biya's party had won a large majority.ⁱⁱⁱ It was feared that a large majority would allow President Biya to push a constitutional amendment through parliament and end the limit on the number of terms a president can serve. The 1996 Constitution would have forced him to step down in 2011, at the end of his second seven-year term. In his New Year's address President Biya announced that it was his intention to push for the end on such a limit, and that his party's two-thirds majority in Parliament would allow the amendment to pass. His announcement has been heavily condemned by the civil society, opposition groups and foreign diplomats, who see it as another attempt by Biya to maintain his stranglehold on power, which has continued uninterrupted since 1982.^{iv} When asked in a meeting of the ruling party's senior officials, whether a referendum would be held on the issue, a senior party official allegedly said that the MPs, as representatives of the people, would decide for them in Parliament.^v Between 25 and 29 February 2008, discontent with government policies turned into large-scale demonstrations and rioting. As of 10 March 2008, official government figures placed the number of deaths at 40,^{vi} although this has been disputed by human rights groups, who claim that over 100 civilians lost their lives. Furthermore, it has been reported that about 1500 arrests were made of which 50 people were found guilty.^{vii} Despite widespread opposition to this Bill, on 10 April 2008, the Cameroonian assembly voted overwhelmingly to pass the amendment (after the opposition parties staged a walk-out). The amendment provided providing immunity to the President from prosecution and the ability to run for unlimited re-elections, among other radical changes.^{viii} On 13 May 2008, over two months after the riots, media sources reported that some children arrested during the riots were still languishing in prisons, despite a 2007

amendment to the country's penal law that made detention of minors for misdemeanours illegal.^{ix}

- *National Human Rights Institutions*

3. Cameroon's national human rights institution (NHRI), the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) is reportedly under-funded for a country of Cameroon's size. According to the head of the NCHRF, Ghana, which has a comparable population to Cameroon, has an NHRI with 700 employees, while Cameroon's only has 35 employees including security guards and drivers. The UNDP has reportedly renewed its technical assistance program for the commission.^x

C. The implementation and efficiency of the normative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights

- *Media Freedom*

4. CHRI has observed that the media continues to face threats, violence and arrest at the hands of Cameroon's security forces.^{xi} Cameroon's 1990 press law stipulates depositing copies of newspapers with the local prosecutor prior to sale and distribution, which a spokesperson for the national press union says is a law used intermittently to censor content of which local authorities disapprove.^{xii} It has been alleged that since the operating licenses was introduced in 2005, no media broadcasters had complied with all of the regime's requirements but some who are critical of the government have been restricted under this licensing system.^{xiii} On the eve of the elections held on 22 July 22 2007, the Communication ministry also reportedly banned a slot for opposition political parties dubbed the "political forum" on state television and radio.^{xiv} According to reports in February 2008, three media outlets, Equinoxe TV, Radio Equinoxe and Magic FM, were summarily shutdown due to critical and wide coverage of the public demonstrations against the government that claimed to protest against mismanagement in the economy and rising fuel prices.^{xv}

- *Minority and Sexuality Rights*

5. CHRI has observed reports that indicate that homosexuality continues to be criminalised and punishable by law with a prison sentence of up to five years. Arrests of suspected homosexuals are reported on an alarmingly regular basis. It has been reported that in the past two years, over 30 people have been arrested, and dozens of students, particularly young women, have been expelled from schools as a result of their perceived sexual orientation.^{xvi}
6. Despite Cameroon's pre-election pledge to the UN Human Rights Council, which states that indigenous freedoms have been granted by its constitution, the Mbororo indigenous group has reportedly suffered for over 20 years at the hands of a multi-millionaire businessman, Alhaji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, who allegedly has with connections to the ruling party. Baba reportedly built a ranch on Mbororo grazing land in the 1980s and has been acting as an oligarch in the region ever since. According to the report of an anonymous organisation working in Cameroon, the Mbororo have been victims of the seizure of their grazing lands without due compensation, unjust arrest, torture, extortion and detention of Mbororo pastoralists, seizure of livestock and money, forced marriage to the multi-millionaire businessman and his family, and the systematic destabilization of their culture and traditional institutions. Most recently, following the death of one of the Mbororo leaders in June, Baba

handpicked his successor, over the wishes of the local Mbororo community.^{xvii} Furthermore, a number of Mbororos reportedly fled to Yaounde to seek refuge outside the American Embassy.^{xviii} The Cameroon government issued an order banning the appointment of Baba's candidate as successor, but he has allegedly used his connections in the local government to ignore this order.^{xix} According to reports in another blatant violation of the freedom of association and indigenous rights, the Divisional Officer of Tubah recently banned the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association, (MBOSCUDA) and issued an order to cease all its activities. Established in 1992, with ECOSOC consultative status, the MBOSCUDA has reportedly embarked on a host of socio-economic activities designed to empower the marginalized Mbororos.^{xx}

- **Security**

7. CHRI has also observed reports that suggest that security forces continue to act against civilians with excessive violence.

D. Cooperation of the country under review with human rights mechanisms

8. Cameroon has not extended an open invitation to the UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures

ⁱ http://apanews.net/apa.php?page=show_article_eng&id_article=39908 - Diplomats criticise Cameroon elections as "fraught with irregularities" – 2007-08-21 – African Press Agency

ⁱⁱ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6910434.stm> - 'Low turnout' in Cameroon voting - Sunday, 22 July 2007 – BBC News

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2007-07-30-more-than-100-petitions-filed-against-cameroon-election> - More than 100 petitions filed against Cameroon election – 30 June 2007 – Mail and Guardian Online

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.spm.gov.cm/detail_art.php?id_art=1384&type=artune&lang=fr - Les résultats des législatives du 22 juillet 2007 proclamés. – Government of Cameroon Website

^{iv} <http://www.afrol.com/articles/27636> - Biya to extend mandate- Jan 3 2008– Afrol News

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200801071608.html> - "Biya is Incoherent -Human Rights Activist" – The Post – January 7 2008
<http://www.postnewsline.com/2008/01/cavod-condemns.html> - CAVOD Condemns Biya's Bid To Revise Constitution - Walter Wilson Nana – January 17 2008– The Post News Online

<http://www.postnewsline.com/2008/02/well-make-camer.html> - "We'll Make Cameroon Ungovernable For Biya - CDP Chairman" - Feb 16 2008– The Post Online – Elvis Tah

^v <http://www.postnewsline.com/2008/02/constitutiona-1.html> - Constitutional Amendment:CPDM Castigates US Ambassador's Stance - Kini Nsom – February 15 2008

^{vi} "Facts and Figures of the Tragic Protests", *Cameroon Tribune*, 11th March 2008, URL: <http://www.cameroon-tribune.net/article.php?lang=Fr&oled=j11032008&idart=9281&olarch=>

^{vii} A local NGO *Maison des Droits de L'Homme* issued a statement saying they were aware of 'more than 100 deaths'. See "Cameroon government raises violence death toll to 40", *Agence France Presse*, 10th March 2008, URL: <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jJqZqCOMhiBm7XKvnTzefuzqvNMQ>

^{viii} "Cameroon assembly clears way for Biya third term", *Reuters AlertNet*, 10th April 2008, URL: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L10840480.htm>

^{ix} "Two months after riots, children remain in prison", *IRIN*, 13th May 2008, URL: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78181>

^x <http://allafrica.com/stories/200706150884.html> - Human Rights Commission Condemns Oku/Mbesa Conflict – 14 June – The Post

^{xi} <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/85104> - Journalist attacked during opposition demonstration – JED News Alert – July 25 2007

^{xii} <http://www.cpj.org/news/2007/africa/cameroon28aug07na.html> - Cameroonian publisher sentenced to jail in absentia – August 28 2007– CPJ News Alert

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=23474 - Editor sentenced in absentia to a year in prison, father arrested instead - 30 August 2007 – RSF press release

-
- ^{xiii} http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=25881 - Communication minister suspends TV station – 22 February 2008–RSF press release
- ^{xiv} “Opposition Parties criticize Minister’s ban on political forum”, *The Post*, 7th July 2008, URL: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200807072018.html>
- ^{xv} “In Cameroon, third broadcaster closed within a week over coverage”, *CPJ News Alert*, 28th February 2008. URL: <http://www.cpj.org/news/2008/africa/cameroon28feb08na.html>
- ^{xvi} “Human Rights Activists Protest Continued Arrests of Gay Men in Cameroon: Demonstrations in Paris, Pretoria and Washington, D.C.”, *IGLHRC*, 10th December 2007, URL: <http://www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/section.php?id=5&detail=810>
- ^{xvii} REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE AGAINST MBORORO PASTORALISTS IN NORTH WEST CAMEROON – 22 August 2007 – Bamende, Cameroon <http://www.theoneworldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/human-rights-abuses-against-the-mbororo.pdf>
- PASTORALISTS IN NORTH WEST CAMEROON – 22 August 2007 – Bamende, Cameroon
- ^{xviii} General Assembly Distr. GENERAL A/HRC/6/15/Add.1 20 November 2007 HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL Sixth session Item 3 of the agenda PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Rodolfo Stavenhagen. Pages 24-28.
- ^{xix} REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE AGAINST MBORORO PASTORALISTS IN NORTH WEST CAMEROON – 22 August 2007 – Bamende, Cameroon <http://www.theoneworldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/human-rights-abuses-against-the-mbororo.pdf>
- ^{xx} “MBOSCUDA activities banned”, *The Post Newsline*, 27th June 2008. URL: <http://www.postnewsline.com/2008/06/mboscuda-activi.html#more>