

Cultural Survival



Partnering with Indigenous Peoples to defend their lands, languages, and cultures

May 22, 2013

Mr. Philémon Yang
Prime Minister
Star Building
PO Box 1000 Yaounde
Cameroun

Tél. : (+237) 22 23 92 54 / 22 23 57 60 / 22 23 57 50/ 22 21 00 42
Fax : (+237) 22 23 57 65

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Dear Mr. Yang,

Cultural Survival is deeply concerned about the allegations against Musa Usman Ndamba, vice-president of Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), a social organisation championing the rights, including land rights, of Mbororo pastoralists in north-western Cameroon since the 1990s.

On May 10, 2013, human rights defender Mr. Musa Usman Ndamba appeared before the Court of First Instance in Bamenda, on charges related to unsubstantiated allegations of misinformation. At the heart of the case is a complaint filed by a local wealthy landowner, Mr Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, whose agents have reportedly threatened the human rights defender and his colleagues on a number of occasions.

As the court hearing began, Mr. Musa Usman Ndamba was read four charges listed on a formal summons which was drafted in mid-April but served to him just one day before the hearing. Specifically, the prosecutor alleged that Musa Usman Ndamba had propagated false information capable of damaging the reputation of public authorities, and had made false declarations in a court of law whilst being under oath. It was also alleged that the human rights defender had made false allegations against Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, and had as a result injured his reputation. Musa Usman Ndamba, who was accompanied by his counsel, denied all the allegations and pleaded not guilty to all four counts. His counsel eventually secured his bail before the hearing was adjourned to May 27, 2013.

MBOSCUDA also reports that at least five members of its staff have been forced to go into hiding after appearing as witnesses in an investigation into the attempted murder of Mr Jeidoh Duni, a Mbororo activist and also a MBOSCUDA paralegal. In an apparent act of retaliation against their testimony, false charges related to the “possession of fire arms” have been levelled against them and arrest warrants issued

Cultural Survival, PO Box 381569, Cambridge, MA 02238 USA

2769 Iris Avenue, Suite 101, Boulder CO 80304 USA

5a calle 14-35, Zona 3, Apartamento 202, Edificio Las Tapias, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 09001

Phone: 617-441-5400 Fax 617-441-5417 Email: culturalsurvival@cs.org Web: www.cs.org

against them by the military tribunal of Bafoussam. In Cameroon, any crime that involves fire-arms comes under the jurisdiction of the military tribunal. MBOSCUA has maintained that those who shot and injured Jeidoh Duni were hired killers and has demanded full justice in this case. Of the five suspects who were arrested after the incident, three confessed to the crime and one even went so far as mentioning landowner Baba Ahmadou Danpullo as being behind the attack. However, all the suspects were released soon after they were handed over to the Gendarme authorities of the North-West Legion.

MBOSCUA has recently drafted a Universal Periodic Review submission to the UN in which they detail the sorts of threats that members of their community, and particularly those active within MBOSCUA, face. The claims articulated within this submission are believed to have contributed to the worsening harassment of MBOSCUA leaders. Usman Musa Ndamba's case is far from being an isolated incident of judicial harassment of Mbororo leaders; other Mbororo leaders presently undergoing judicial harassment as a result of their activism include Mr Lamido Roufai Dahirou, a prominent MBOSCUA member and community leader, as well as Messrs Sule Buba Dicko and Useini Adamu, both of whom are leaders of the Mbororo Aku organisation ACUDA.

Cultural Survival is concerned that the unsubstantiated allegations being brought against Musa Usman are in retaliation for his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights, particularly land rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Mbororo pastoralists. Cultural Survival also believes that the ongoing campaign of intimidation against MBOSCUA leaders is related to their collaboration with international organisations and to their participation in the aforementioned investigation.

Cultural Survival urges the authorities in Cameroon to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Musa Usman and other leaders of MBOSCUA as it is believed they are solely motivated by their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out a thorough, impartial and immediate investigation into the threats and attacks against members of MBOSCUA, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Cameroon are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Cultural Survival is a global leader in the fight to protect Indigenous lands, languages, and cultures around the world. In partnership with Indigenous Peoples, we advocate for Indigenous communities whose rights, cultures, and dignity are under threat. For more information go to www.cs.org

Sincerely,



Suzanne Benally
Executive Director

Cultural Survival, PO Box 381569, Cambridge, MA 02238 USA

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Phone: 617-441-5400 Fax 617-441-5417 Email: culturalsurvival@cs.org Web: www.cs.org

cc:

Mr. Paul Biya
President of the Republic
PO Box 1000 Yaounde
contact@presidenceducameroun.com
Twitter : @PR_Paul_Biya

Mr. Laurent ESSO
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Justice & Keeper of the Seals
PO Box 1000 Yaounde
Cameroun

Mr. Ferdinand NGOH NGOH
Secretary General
Presidency of the Republic
PO Box 1000 Yaounde
Cameroun

Dr. Chemuta Divine Banda
Chairman
National Commission on Human Rights and
Freedoms
B.P. 20317 Yaounde
Cameroon
+(237) 22 22 61 17
Fax : +(237) 22 22 60 82
Email: cmdhl@iccnet.cm

Rev. Dieudonné MASSI GAMS
Chairman National Anti-Corruption Commission
B.P. 33200 Yaoundé
Cameroon
Fax: (+237) 22 20 37 30
infos@conac-cameroun.net

Cultural Survival, PO Box 381569, Cambridge, MA 02238 USA
2769 Iris Avenue, Suite 101, Boulder CO 80304 USA
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