

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT

1997

This report
covers the period
January to December
1996

against those convicted. They were prisoners of conscience.

Officials and members of other opposition parties, in particular the SDF, were intimidated, arrested and detained. Six SDF members arrested in Mbanga, Littoral Province, during the January elections were charged with public order offences; they were conditionally released in August. In March, dozens of SDF members and supporters were arrested in Limbe, South-West Province, following demonstrations against the appointment of government representatives to replace elected mayors; 32 were held in administrative detention in Buea for six weeks, despite a court order that they be released. In June, shots were fired by security forces at the home of SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi in Bamenda, North-West Province. Also in June, Joseph Lavoisier Tsapy, a lawyer and SDF local government leader in Bafoussam, West Province, was abducted and held for four days by unidentified men, apparently members of the security forces; and Ndang George Achu, an SDF official in Santa, North-West Province, was held for two weeks under legislation introduced in December 1990 which allows administrative detention without safeguards against arbitrary imprisonment.

Suspected government opponents were frequently held longer than the 72 hours allowed by law before being referred to a judicial authority or released. In May, up to 30 striking teachers were arrested in Bafoussam; two women were reportedly seriously injured during beatings by the security forces. Most were released without charge after a week, but four trade union officials were charged with public order offences.

In June, up to 200 striking students at the University of Yaoundé were arrested. The arrests followed violent confrontations between students and security forces, and also a vigilante group known as *auto-défense* operating with the acquiescence of the university authorities and the security services. University buildings were burned and a university lecturer was assaulted. Most of the students were released shortly afterwards, but others remained held, in various places of detention, by police, the *Centre national d'études et de recherches* (the security police) and special units of the security forces. They were held until mid-July

before being charged and conditionally released. Further arrests of students accused of provoking continuing unrest were made in October. Several students were detained overnight at the university by members of *auto-défense*, and were then transferred to the Ministry of Defence; all visits were refused for a week. They were later charged with public order offences. None had been tried by the end of the year.

At least three people arrested in 1995 during the collection of signatures for a referendum on independence for Cameroon's English-speaking provinces, organized by the Southern Cameroons National Council, remained held without charge in the Central Prison in Yaoundé, known as Nkondengui Prison, throughout the year (see *Amnesty International Report 1996*).

The case against four members of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Association was dismissed by a court in Bamenda in September, after their trial on charges of defamation and abuse was repeatedly adjourned because the complainant failed to appear in court. The charges related to tracts critical of an influential landowner and businessman who was also a prominent CPDM member (see *Amnesty International Report 1996*). However, the same charges were brought two months later and the trial was adjourned until early 1997.

In northern Cameroon, traditional rulers known as *lamibe* continued to illegally detain political opponents with the tacit approval of the government and to operate unofficial prisons in residences of the *lamido* and local dignitaries. At least seven men, two of them held since 1992, remained held on the orders of the *lamido* of Rey Bouba, North Province, a prominent supporter of the CPDM (see previous *Amnesty International Reports*). Some of those detained were reported to have died in detention as a result of ill-treatment and neglect.

Torture and ill-treatment of both political detainees and criminal suspects by the security forces remained routine. Beatings of detainees, who were often stripped, held in severely overcrowded cells and denied sanitary facilities, were common. Torture and ill-treatment of students arrested in June and October included beatings to the head, buttocks and feet, and electric shocks to the genitals. A student died in June, apparently after being stabbed and