

Cameroon

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2006 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor March 6, 2007

The law provides for the arrest of homosexuals and persons not carrying identification cards.

Societal violence and discrimination against women; trafficking in persons, primarily children; discrimination against indigenous Pygmies and ethnic minorities; and discrimination against homosexuals were problems.

Citizens viewed police as ineffective, which frequently resulted in mob "justice" (see section 1.a.). It was widely believed that individuals paid bribes to law enforcement and the judiciary to secure their freedom. Police officers and members of the gendarmerie were widely viewed as corrupt officials who frequently and arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens. Police demanded bribes at checkpoints, and influential citizens reportedly paid police to make arrests or abuse individuals involved in personal disputes. Private disputes, such as feuds between business partners, frequently resulted in one party making allegations of impropriety or homosexuality about the other and involving the security forces.

On April 17, gendarmes from the Yaounde-Kondengui brigade arrested and briefly detained Alice Nkom, a prominent Douala-based lawyer. She was visiting her clients, alleged homosexuals who had been awaiting trial for several months, in the Yaounde central prison. Nkom took some pictures of her clients but was prevented from continuing by prison wardens, who claimed she had no right to take pictures. Nkom told them that there was no law prohibiting her actions. Unable to cite a law backing their claim, prison officials called the gendarmes to have Nkom removed.

During the year approximately 200 privately owned newspapers were published; however, only an estimated 25 were published on a regular basis, primarily for lack of funding. Mutations, La Nouvelle Expression, and Le Messenger were the only privately owned daily newspapers. Newspapers were distributed primarily in urban areas, and most continued to criticize the government and report on controversial issues, including corruption, human rights abuses, homosexuality, and economic policies. However, the government used criminal libel laws to inhibit the press by criminalizing the propagation of false information.

On March 3, a Yaounde court sentenced Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga, publisher of the Yaounde-based weekly L'Anecdote, to four months in jail on defamation charges. In February Belinga published a list of alleged homosexuals, which included Gregoire Owona, a government member, who filed a libel suit. The court ruling found only that the publisher could not substantiate his claim.

The law does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on race, language, or social status, but does prohibit discrimination based on gender and mandates that "everyone has equal rights and obligations." The government, however, did not enforce these provisions effectively. Violence and discrimination against women, trafficking in persons, discrimination against ethnic minorities, and discrimination against homosexuals were problems.

In May 2005 police arrested three members of a homosexual and pedophile network of child traffickers. The three were formally charged and put under detention in the Yaounde central prison pending trial.

Homosexual activity is illegal, with a possible prison sentence of six months to five years and a possible fine ranging from approximately \$40 to \$400 (20,000 to 200,000 CFA francs). While prosecution under this law was rare, homosexuals suffered from harassment and extortion by law enforcement officials. In addition, false allegations of homosexuality were used to harass enemies or to extort money.

There were new developments in the May 2005 arrest of 17 suspected homosexuals; five of whom were released shortly after their arrest for lack of evidence. On June 12, the Yaounde First Instance Court found the remaining men guilty of sodomy and sentenced them to 10 months in jail, although they were subsequently released for time served.

In June the administration of the Douala-based Eyengue Nkongo College, a private high school, expelled 34 students (including 12 females), alleging they were homosexuals. One female student was arrested upon her expulsion. One woman who lived near the school and two former schoolmates were also arrested. On July 7, the Douala First Instance Court released them after giving them a suspended three-year prison term and a fine of \$50 (25,000 CFA francs) on homosexuality charges.