



Committee to Protect Journalists

**Joint Submission by the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Freedom House**

for the 44th Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, November 2023

**Cameroon**

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**Executive summary**

1. As organizations promoting freedom of expression and the rule of law, this submission focuses on Cameroon's compliance with international human rights obligations related to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press and on progress made since the last review in 2018.
2. In particular, the concerns raised in this submission relate to:
  - Killing, abduction, and torture of journalists<sup>2</sup>
  - Physical attacks and harassment of journalists

- Imprisonment of journalists
- Incommunicado holding and lengthy pre-trial and arbitrary detention of journalists
- Invocation of anti-terror law, anti-state and “false news” charges against journalists
- Criminal defamation legislation
- Prosecution of journalists in military court
- Denial to a right to a fair trial and appeals process
- Suspension of broadcast permissions and broadcasts, internet shutdown, and blocked access to social media, communication platforms, and journalism offices and studios

### **Human rights instruments referred to in this submission**

3. The Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (adopted in 1996) affirms Cameroon’s attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, including to principles of freedom of opinion and expression, and encompassing press freedom.<sup>3</sup> The right is therefore a fundamental right, but not unqualified. It is guaranteed “under the conditions fixed by the law” and hence may be limited to protect other rights.<sup>4</sup>
4. The Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (adopted by the African Commission on Human Rights in 2019) in its Preamble reaffirms “the fundamental importance of freedom of expression and access to information as individual human rights, as cornerstones of democracy and as means of ensuring respect for other human rights.”<sup>5</sup> It further highlights the “key role of the media and other means of communication in ensuring full respect for the right to freedom of expression, promoting the free flow of information and ideas, assisting individuals in making informed decisions and facilitating and strengthening democracy.”<sup>6</sup> It sets forth general principles including: (1) the importance of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information, (2) non-interference with freedom of opinion, (3) non-discrimination, (4) protection of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information online, and (5) protection of human rights defenders and others.<sup>7</sup> The protection and safety of journalists is enshrined in Principles 19 and 20 of the Declaration which affirm that states shall not subject the right to express oneself through the media to “undue legal restrictions”.<sup>8</sup> Rather, states are obligated to “guarantee the safety of journalists” and “take measures to prevent attacks on journalists and other media practitioners, including murder, extra-judicial killing, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, kidnapping, intimidation, threats and unlawful surveillance undertaken by State and non-State actors.”<sup>9</sup>
5. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1948) enshrines the principle of freedom of opinion and expression, noting that

“the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Articles 8, 9, 10, and 11 protect the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and the prohibition on arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

6. Cameroon ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (“the **African Charter**”) in 1989. Article 9 of the African Charter protects every individual’s right to receive information and to express and disseminate opinions within the law.<sup>10</sup> Article 7(1) protects the right to be tried within a reasonable time by an impartial court, and the right to an appeal.<sup>11</sup>
7. Cameroon ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“**the Covenant**”) in 1984. The Covenant sets forth the principle in its Article 19 that “[e]veryone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference” and to “freedom of expression” which includes “freedom to seek, receive and impart information.”<sup>12</sup> Those rights are subject to restriction only as provided by law and necessary for the respect of rights or reputations of others or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals.<sup>13</sup> Article 9(1) of the Covenant provides that no one shall be deprived of his or her liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law. Article 9(2) of the Covenant requires that anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his or her arrest. Article 9(3) of the Covenant provides that: “Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release.” The jurisprudence of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found that trial of civilians by military courts, and decisions taken by military courts that place civilians in pretrial detention, violate the Covenant and customary international law.<sup>14</sup> This principle is confirmed by the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Remedies and Procedures on the Right of Anyone Deprived of Their Liberty to Bring Proceedings Before a Court, which state that the arbitrariness and lawfulness of the detention of civilians may not be reviewed by military courts given that military judges and prosecutors do not meet fundamental requirements of independence and impartiality.<sup>15</sup> Article 14 of the Covenant also sets forth a right to a fair trial before an independent and impartial court.
8. The Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1988) provides in Principle 15 that “communication of the detained or imprisoned person with the outside world, and in particular his [or her] family or counsel, shall not be denied for more than a matter of days.”<sup>16</sup> Principle 17 provides the right to counsel which should be informed to him or her promptly after arrest.

## **Implementation of recommendations from previous review**

9. Our commentary on the recommendations supported from the previous Universal Periodic Review (“UPR”) cycle are contained in the matrix of relevant recommendations in Appendix 1. Five recommendations that were accepted or noted can be considered “partially achieved”. Those recommendations are contained in the following themes: (i) Recommendation 121.120 for Theme: D43 Freedom of opinion and expression, (ii) Recommendation 121.108 for Theme: D51 Administration of justice & fair trial, (iii), (iv), and (v) Recommendations 121.107, 121.116, and 121.118 for Theme: D25 Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. However, several other recommendations relevant to freedom of expression and press freedom and which were supported are “not implemented”.

## **Update on situation for freedom of expression since the last review**

### **General observations**

10. There are several areas of concern raised in this submission. Threats to freedom of expression and press freedom are occurring on multiple fronts: (i) the killing, physical attacks, abduction, torture, and harassment of journalists by police, intelligence agencies, military, and non-state actors which has a chilling effect on freedom of expression and press freedom, (ii) the arbitrary imprisonment of journalists coupled with incommunicado and lengthy pre-trial detention; (iii) the invocation of anti-terror, anti-state, and “false news” charges and allegations by the state, and criminal defamation legislation, (iv) the prosecution of journalists by military tribunals rather than impartial civilian courts and the denial of the right to a fair trial and appeals process, and (v) the suspension of broadcasts and broadcast permissions, internet shutdown, and blocked access to social media, communication platforms, and journalism offices and studios. All of these factors are limiting the right to freedom of expression and press freedom in Cameroon. These issues must be simultaneously addressed by the state in order to ensure the aforementioned rights.

### **Specific issues of concern**

11. For each of the themes below, a detailed list of incidents reported between 2018 and April 2023 is contained in Appendix 2.

### ***Killing, abduction, and torture of journalists***

12. Over the past five years, at least three journalists have been killed or have died in apparent relation to their work in Cameroon.<sup>17</sup> Others have been abducted and tortured with few

perpetrators ever held accountable. The killings, abduction, and torture silence the targeted journalists, and result in censorship and self-censorship which stifles media freedom and freedom of expression in Cameroon.

13. Of particular concern is the January 2023 murder of prominent journalist Martinez Zogo following his abduction by unidentified attackers.<sup>18</sup> As managing director and host of a popular current affairs show on the privately owned radio broadcasting station Amplitude FM, Zogo had recently reported on alleged public embezzlement that benefitted prominent businessman Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga.<sup>19</sup> Zogo was abducted near his home in Yaoundé, after being chased to the gate of the local police station where he had sought help.<sup>20</sup> Zogo's mutilated body was found on January 22, 2023.<sup>21</sup>
14. Cameroonian authorities announced an investigation and reportedly have since provisionally charged several individuals suspected of involvement in the murder, including directors of the General Directorate of External Intelligence (DGRE) and Belinga himself.<sup>22</sup>
15. Another murder of particular concern is that of journalist Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe, also known as Samuel Wazizi, who died in government custody after being held incommunicado.<sup>23</sup> He had been accused of having connections with armed separatists.<sup>24</sup> After his detention in August 2019, he was transferred to a military-run facility and died in government custody 15 days after his arrest.<sup>25</sup> Various reports alleged that he died after being tortured by security forces.<sup>26</sup> His death was not announced by the government until June 2020.<sup>27</sup> As of March 2023, a family spokesperson confirmed to CPJ that his family has still been unable to see or recover his remains, over two and a half years after his death was announced.<sup>28</sup>
16. Cameroonian and international organizations including CPJ called for an independent and impartial investigation into Wazizi's death.<sup>29</sup> President Biya reportedly promised the French Ambassador to Cameroon to open an investigation into Wazizi's death.<sup>30</sup> However, no progress on an investigation has been reported. CPJ has previously reported on opacity in another government inquiry of the 2010 death of journalist Germain Cyril (Bibi) Ngota Ngota while in government custody.<sup>31</sup> The inquiry, which ultimately found no wrongdoing by the government, was conducted by judges who had been involved in the initial arrests, among other irregularities.<sup>32</sup>
17. Other murders of journalists in Cameroon include that of Jean-Jacques Ola Bebe who was found killed on February 2, 2023, although it is unclear whether the motive for his killing related to his journalism.<sup>33</sup> In addition, new revelations have led CPJ to investigate whether the

November 4, 2011 car accident death of investigative journalist Jules Koum Koum was related to his journalism.<sup>34</sup> His exposure of a former defense minister recently resulted in a conviction in February 2023.<sup>35</sup> There is now heightened speculation that he was murdered for his reporting on corruption.<sup>36</sup>

18. There have been further reports of journalists being tortured while in custody.<sup>37</sup>
19. In the previous review, Cameroon supported recommendations to end the use of torture and other cruel treatment, particularly of detainees suspected of belonging to terrorist groups, and to investigate extrajudicial executions by government forces and armed groups against members of the English-speaking minority.<sup>38</sup> However, as noted above, journalists continue to be killed or die, including in government custody. While investigations of these murders have been opened in some instances, they often lack transparency and end up stalling.

### ***Physical attacks and harassment of journalists***

20. There have been multiple incidents over the past five years of journalists being physically assaulted, abducted, or verbally or physically harassed, including by receiving death threats. Reports note that the attacks, abductions, and threats have resulted in a self-censorship of journalists due to fear of reprisal from government and non-state armed actors, stifling media freedom and freedom of expression in Cameroon.<sup>39</sup>
21. During the incidents noted above and in Appendix 2, police officers and non-state aggressors have shown little regard for freedom of the press and freedom of expression. They have prevented journalists from covering events, confiscated journalists' equipment, and intimidated and assaulted journalists.<sup>40</sup>
22. The attacks have come from several sources. The National Communication Council ("CNC") is a media regulatory body with a history of harassing journalists and outlets.<sup>41</sup> Government authorities, including the gendarmerie, security police, military, and intelligence agents have also carried out such attacks.<sup>42</sup> Representatives of the communication ministry have also been involved in detention and harassment.<sup>43</sup>
23. There are reports of journalists being summoned and detained by authorities prior to their arrest.<sup>44</sup> Journalists' homes have been raided.<sup>45</sup> Several have received repeated death threats.<sup>46</sup> Others have been abducted from their homes and physically attacked.<sup>47</sup> Incidents of assault have included stabbings and beatings;<sup>48</sup> kicking and beatings with stones, bricks, a baton, and a whip,<sup>49</sup> among others. Female journalists have also faced particular threats of violence and

physical assault.<sup>50</sup>

24. Accusations associated with the attacks include allegations of separatist terrorism. For example, in a November 2017 raid of journalist Akumbom Elvis McCarthy's home, he was beaten and accused of being an "Amba terrorist," a slur referencing Ambazonia, the name that secessionists gave to English-speaking regions of Cameroon.<sup>51</sup>
25. In the previous review, Cameroon supported a recommendation to take all necessary measures to enable journalists (among others) to carry out their activities without fear of reprisal or restriction.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Imprisonment of journalists***

26. Over the past five years, there have been several incidents of journalists being arrested, often while reporting. Following a presidential pardon on December 15, 2018, the government released 289 prisoners who had been arrested and/or prosecuted in military tribunals, some of whom were journalists.<sup>53</sup> However, we remain concerned that the arbitrary imprisonment of journalists continues.
27. Cameroon continues to be one of the largest jailers of journalists in Africa. It is the second-worst jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa and has been featured on CPJ's annual "prison census" for every year since 2014.<sup>54</sup> Notably, it has not fared better since the last review in 2018, with a range of 5 to 9 journalists jailed in government custody per year from 2018 to 2022.<sup>55</sup>
28. The submitters have repeatedly petitioned international organizations regarding Cameroon's detention of journalists, including incommunicado, its use of torture on journalists, and the ongoing threats of arrest and attack for members of the media.<sup>56</sup>
29. Reports document the jailing of journalists under the following circumstances: (i) alleged violation of Law N°2014/028 on Repression of Acts of Terrorism ("**Law N°2014/028**") for crimes such as "non-denunciation of terrorism" and "laundering of the proceeds of terrorist acts,"<sup>57</sup> (ii) for the journalistic coverage of political rallies, opposition gatherings, or conducting interviews of protesters,<sup>58</sup> (iii) for reporting on political unrest and protests by Anglophone minority,<sup>59</sup> (iv) for criticizing in their reporting the government's treatment of the English-speaking minority population,<sup>60</sup> (v) for reporting on the deaths of Anglophone youth that had died in police custody,<sup>61</sup> (vi) for allegedly publishing secessionist information or collaborating with secessionists,<sup>62</sup> (vii) for filming police allegedly harassing taxi drivers and commuters in English-

speaking territories,<sup>63</sup> (viii) for allegedly illegally monitoring military activity,<sup>64</sup> (ix) for alleged defamation,<sup>65</sup> (x) for journalism criticizing President Biya and other government officials,<sup>66</sup> and (xi) for allegedly publishing “false news”.<sup>67</sup>

30. In February 2022, CPJ and others called on President Biya to release all those arbitrarily detained in Cameroon for acts of free expression, including at least four journalists. The letter stated that over 100 people have been detained, most for more than a year, and some for over five years, for simply “peacefully exercising their human rights.”<sup>68</sup>

### ***Incommunicado holding, lengthy pre-trial and arbitrary detention of journalists***

31. Over the past five years, there have been several reported incidents of journalists in Cameroon being held incommunicado or suffering lengthy pre-trial or arbitrary detention. The incidents involved arrest, detention without contact, lengthy holding prior to being charged and before trial, and repeated adjournments of proceedings.
32. Radio journalist Akumbom Elvis McCarthy was detained by judicial police for three weeks after his March 20, 2018 arrest, prior to appearing before a military tribunal which ordered his detention in the Bamenda Central Prison for a renewable six-month period while police investigated the allegations.<sup>69</sup> He spent seven months in detention without trial before being charged with attempted secession, illegal monitoring of military activity, and propagating false information.<sup>70</sup>
33. Journalist Kingsley Njoka was held in pre-trial detention for more than two years and is still awaiting trial before a newly constituted military tribunal.<sup>71</sup>
34. Journalist and former director of Cameroon’s public broadcaster Amadou Vamouké was arrested on July 29, 2016 and was denied bail on the alleged basis that he did not have a known address.<sup>72</sup> In May 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that the deprivation of liberty of Amadou Vamouké was arbitrary and violated Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 9 and 14 of the Covenant, calling upon Cameroon to immediately release Vamouké and accord him an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations.<sup>73</sup> His trial did not conclude until December 2022, at which point he had already been in prison for six years.
35. Journalist Mancho Bibixy was detained for 18 months prior to trial after being arrested without a warrant on January 17, 2017, during which he was only permitted minimal contact with his



family.<sup>74</sup> His hearings were postponed more than 14 times.<sup>75</sup> He was charged with spreading false news in relation to his journalistic work as well as other acts of terrorism and secession. At trial before a military tribunal, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

36. While his military appeal was pending for over two years, a July 22, 2019 protest by inmates at the maximum security Kondengui Central Prison over prison conditions resulted in Bibixy and several other prisoners being transferred to the Special Operations Group in Yaoundé and later to the State Secretariat for Defense, where he was held incommunicado.<sup>76</sup>
37. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that Bibixy was being arbitrarily detained and that his deprivation of liberty violated Articles 8, 9, 10, and 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Articles 2, 3, 9 and 14 of the Covenant.<sup>77</sup>
38. Journalist Tsi Conrad was detained without outside contact for over two weeks at the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance, the police's secretive intelligence arm, following his December 8, 2016 arrest and overnight transfer to Yaoundé.<sup>78</sup> His trial began on December 23, 2016 but continued for over a year, interrupted by at least 16 adjournments.<sup>79</sup> Following a July 22, 2019 protest by inmates at the Kondengui Central Prison over prison conditions, Conrad was transferred to the State Secretariat for Defense, where he was held incommunicado for two weeks.<sup>80</sup>
39. Journalists Wawa Jackson Nfor and Paul Chouta's respective trials were also repeatedly delayed following their respective arrests in 2018 and 2019 and until their release in 2021.<sup>81</sup>

#### ***Invocation of anti-terror law, anti-state, and "false news" charges against journalists***

40. In December 2014, the government enacted Law N°2014/028 as part of President Biya's effort to counter Boko Haram in Cameroon. The law carries a maximum penalty of the death sentence and permits authorities to indefinitely detain individuals accused of terrorism.<sup>82</sup>
41. We are concerned that Law N°2014/028 is overly broad with easy potential for abuse of political opponents and freedom of expression.<sup>83</sup> CPJ has documented a number of incidents where Cameroonian authorities have used the law against journalists who report on militants' activities, who have reported on unrest in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, or who are critical of President Biya's administration.<sup>84</sup>
42. Journalists report that the government conflates news coverage of militants or demonstrators with their support.<sup>85</sup> This practice has resulted in journalists anonymizing their publications or refraining from reporting on activities involving these groups for fear of reprisal.<sup>86</sup> The Special

Rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Council has reported that counter-terrorism and security are frequently cited as justification to cover for the adoption of high-risk and highly intrusive technologies.<sup>87</sup>

43. A presidential decree issued in August 2017 ended legal proceedings against at least four journalists then detained in Cameroon in connection with its Law N°2014/028,<sup>88</sup> however, the violations are far from resolved. A number of other journalists have been arrested or continue to be detained on alleged anti-terror grounds under Law N°2014/028.<sup>89</sup> Other journalists have been the subject of anti-state and false news charges.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Criminal defamation legislation***

44. Criminal defamation legislation continues to exist in Cameroon and journalists have been detained and prosecuted on charges of defamation. The crimes of libel, slander, defamation and blasphemy are treated as criminal offenses. Article 305 of Cameroon's Penal Code sets a maximum penalty of six months prison and two million CFA francs in damages for the crime of defamation.<sup>91</sup> Because the law places the burden of proof on the defendant, journalists may be disadvantaged in such suits for crimes punishable by prison terms and substantial fines.<sup>92</sup>
45. The Covenant and the African Charter guarantee the right to freedom of expression, subject only to limitations that are lawful, necessary, and proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim. Regarding the proportionality requirement, the UN Human Rights Committee has concluded that "imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty" for defamation.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the African Court has held that "violations of laws on freedom of speech and the press cannot be sanctioned by custodial sentences."<sup>94</sup>
46. There are several incidents involving the charging and detention of journalists for defamation. Approximately two years before his murder, journalist Martinez Zogo had been arrested on January 17, 2020 and charged with criminal defamation following a complaint filed by Sylvie Biye Essono, the ex-wife of a government official.<sup>95</sup> Journalist Paul Chouta was arrested on May 28, 2019 following a defamation complaint from a French-Cameroonian writer.<sup>96</sup> On November 7, 2019, journalist Adalbert Hiol was detained on charges of false news, defamation, and insult stemming from an April 2, 2019 defamation complaint filed by Louis Richard Njock.<sup>97</sup> Hiol was sentenced to 18 months in prison after being found guilty of the charges.<sup>98</sup> On February 22, 2022, journalist Malcom Barnabe Paho was arrested and investigated for criminal defamation following a complaint filed by pastor Boba Denis.<sup>99</sup>

### ***Prosecution of journalists in military court***

47. Law N°2014/028 provides for prosecution in military court.<sup>100</sup>
48. Following a presidential pardon on December 15, 2018, the government released 289 prisoners who had been arrested and prosecuted in military tribunals, some of whom were journalists.<sup>101</sup> However, we continue to be concerned that the prosecution in military court of journalists charged with violations of Law N°2014/028 presents potential for abuse.
49. Journalists have been charged and tried in military courts and their pre-trial detention has been evaluated by military court judges.<sup>102</sup> Journalists have been charged with various crimes in military court ranging from “non-denunciation of terrorism”, “laundering of the proceeds of terrorist acts”,<sup>103</sup> complicity in acts of terrorism,<sup>104</sup> hostility against the fatherland, secession, propagation of insurrection, incitement to civil war,<sup>105</sup> illegal monitoring of military activity, false news, and dissemination of secessionist propaganda on air.<sup>106</sup>
50. Journalists have been convicted by military tribunals to significant prison sentences of ten to fifteen years.<sup>107</sup>
51. Appeals before military tribunals have faced delays.<sup>108</sup> In one instance, an appeal before the military appeals tribunal in Yaoundé began on July 22, 2019 but was not ruled upon until August 29, 2021, nearly two years later.<sup>109</sup> An appeal was lodged with the Supreme Court despite the fact that a written judgment from the lower court still had not been issued.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Denial to a right of fair trial and appeals process***

52. In Cameroon, journalists have been denied a right to a fair trial and appeals process. This is because they are tried in many instances before military tribunals and not in civilian courts. Where they have been tried in civilian courts, they have also faced lengthy pre-trial detentions, repeated delays, and adjournments that have amounted to undue delay.
53. In multiple cases, courts ordered numerous adjournments or new proceedings despite significant delays in the original case.<sup>111</sup> Many of those delays have been reported to be frivolous. For example, in the trial of journalist Paul Chouta, various adjournments were the result of the prosecution’s failure to summon relevant parties to court, for failure to bring Chouta to court, because the complainant or her lawyer failed to appear in court, or because the judge was unable to locate the record of the proceedings or forgot to return the case file to the registrar to schedule the hearing.<sup>112</sup> There were also significant fair trial issues including violations of the right of journalists to adequately prepare their defense, failure to respect the presumption of innocence, and failure of the judge hearing the case to act impartially.<sup>113</sup>

***Suspension of broadcasts and broadcast permissions, internet shutdown, and blocked access to social media, communication platforms, and journalism offices and studios***

54. Cameroon has cracked down on the press in recent years, for example in 2016 amid the unrest in the English-speaking regions. We are concerned that these trends will continue.
55. Authorities have banned news outlets deemed sympathetic to Anglophone protesters, shut down internet in regions experiencing unrest, and prevented outside observers, including CPJ, from accessing the country by delaying the visa process.<sup>114</sup>
56. On April 1, 2022, the National Communication Council media regulator announced the suspension of Equinoxe TV CEO Séverin Tchouankeu and editor-in-chief and presenter Cédric Noufele from working as journalists for one month, and ordered that the outlet's "Droit de Réponse" ("Right of Reply") program be barred from airing during that time.<sup>115</sup>
57. The National Communication Council also issued suspensions and warnings to three journalists on July 5, 2021 for allegedly unprofessional conduct based on statements concerning heads of state and political officials.<sup>116</sup>
58. In addition, because the Ministry of Communication requires editors by law to submit copies of their newspapers within two hours after publication, journalists report self-censorship, particularly when a previous suspension has occurred.<sup>117</sup>
59. The government has also ordered internet shutdowns on more than one occasion in response to protests, strikes, and boycotts in the English-speaking regions. In 2017, the government ordered internet providers to shut down the internet for three months, blocking internet access in the two concerned Anglophone regions.<sup>118</sup> It also blocked social media networks in French-speaking regions in October 2017.<sup>119</sup> Over 4 million inhabitants were affected by the shutdown and internet blackouts have made reporting about the region difficult.<sup>120</sup> Separately, for 136 days between October 2017 and February 2018, the government ordered internet service providers to shut down the internet.<sup>121</sup> The internet shutdowns have been condemned in the past, including by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression.<sup>122</sup>
60. It has also been reported that the government engaged in surveillance activities, monitoring private online communications without appropriate legal authority.<sup>123</sup>

**Recommendations to the Republic of Cameroon by the submitting organizations**

***Killing, abduction, and torture of journalists***

61. Take measures to end all forms of torture and other ill-treatment inflicted on journalists.
62. Ensure prompt and thorough investigations into the torturing and killing of journalists, and bring all perpetrators, including conspirators, to justice in a fair trial to ensure accountability.
63. Ensure the government pursues and finalizes an independent, effective, and impartial investigation into the murder of journalist Martinez Zogo promptly and in full transparency, and brings all those responsible to justice in a fair trial to ensure accountability.
64. Ensure the government conducts an independent, effective, and impartial investigation into the death of journalist Samuel Wazizi promptly and in full transparency, including with respect to allegations of torture while in government custody, and brings all those responsible to justice in a fair trial to ensure accountability.
65. Ensure the government conducts an independent, effective, and impartial investigation into the murder of journalist Jacques Ola Bebe, and brings all those responsible to justice in a fair trial to ensure accountability.
66. Ensure the government conducts an independent, effective, and impartial investigation into the death of journalist Jules Koum Koum, particularly in relation to his exposure of a former defense minister's crimes.

#### ***Physical attacks and harassment of journalists***

67. Take measures to end kidnapping, intimidation, and threats to journalists by state and non-state actors.
68. Promptly and effectively investigate threats and attacks against journalists.
69. Establish an effective mechanism to protect at-risk journalists, in particular those covering activities of the Anglophone minority, terrorist activities, and political activities including elections, that is tailored to address the needs of journalists, with necessary budget and staffing allocations for its full implementation.

#### ***Imprisonment of journalists***

70. Take measures to end arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists.
71. Immediately release Tsi Conrad and accord him an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations.

72. Immediately release the four other journalists currently jailed in Kondengui Central Prison and accord them an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations.
73. Release all jailed journalists arbitrarily detained for acts of free expression and press coverage, and cease the practice of arresting journalists for such acts.

***Incommunicado holding, lengthy pre-trial and arbitrary detention of journalists***

74. Take measures to end incommunicado holding and lengthy pre-trial detention of journalists.
75. Release any journalists who continue to be in lengthy pre-trial detention.
76. Abolish detention without trial and ensure that arrests and detentions comply with international human rights law.
77. Conduct an investigation of the circumstances surrounding the incommunicado holding and lengthy pre-trial detention of journalists and take appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of rights.
78. Cease the practice of holding journalists incommunicado and detaining journalists for lengthy periods without trial.
79. Release any journalists in pre-trial detention who have not been brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law and/or have not been accorded a trial within a reasonable time in violation of Article 9(3) of the Covenant and/or are appealing their conviction.

***Invocation of anti-terror law, anti-state, and “false news” charges against journalists***

80. Amend Law N°2014/028 on Repression of Acts of Terrorism to include a public interest defense to protect journalists and other media workers, and otherwise align the act with international human rights standards.
81. Ensure that unnecessary and disproportionate limits to freedom of expression are removed from Law N°2014/028 on Repression of Acts of Terrorism such that they cannot be abused to jail or harass journalists in relation to their work, and foster an environment conducive to press freedom.
82. Stop the arrest and detention of journalists for covering events of separatists, militants, or terrorists. Adopt a policy which does not conflate coverage with support.

83. Ensure the Presidential decree issued in August 2017 is followed by a further Presidential decree to release other journalists being detained in connection with Law N°2014/028 on Repression of Acts of Terrorism.
84. End the authority for criminal prosecutions for the circulation of “false news”.
85. Repeal any law criminalizing disinformation and misinformation.
86. Ensure that allegations of “false news” are handled using a multi-stakeholder approach.
87. Ensure that security forces respect the confidentiality of journalists’ sources.
88. Commit to public transparency in government-decision making in all spheres of activity.

#### ***Criminal defamation legislation***

89. Stop using criminal defamation charges to prosecute journalists and media outlets.
90. Undertake necessary reforms to Cameroon’s penal code to comply with African Court jurisprudence to end prison sentences for defamation.
91. Undertake necessary reforms to Cameroon’s penal code to exclude the criminalization of defamation.

#### ***Prosecution of journalists in military court***

92. Promptly release any journalists whose placement in pre-trial detention or review of the arbitrariness and lawfulness of the detention was the result of a decision taken by a military court and not a civil judge in violation of Article 9(3) of the Covenant and the UN Basic Principles, and as such was not impartial and independent.
93. Promptly release any journalists whose placement in detention, assessment of detention, or conviction was the result of a decision taken or trial conducted by a military court and not a civil judge in violation of Article 9(3) of the Covenant and the UN Basic Principles, and as such was not impartial and independent.

### ***Right to a fair trial and appeals process***

94. Ensure that all journalists are granted the right to a fair trial before an independent and impartial court in a timely manner.
95. Ensure that the right of journalists to adequately prepare their defense is protected.
96. Ensure that the presumption of innocence of journalists is respected.
97. Amend Law N°2014/028 on Repression of Acts of Terrorism to provide a specific carve out for journalists and to prohibit journalists and other civilians from being tried by military tribunals.

### ***Suspension of broadcasts and broadcast permissions, internet shutdown, and blocked access to social media, communication platforms, and journalism offices and studios***

98. Abolish the National Communication Council media regulator and establish a new independent broadcast regulator with narrowly defined powers.
99. Allow the media to establish independent self-regulatory bodies without interference from government.
100. Ensure that independent and self-regulatory associations, such as the Consortium of Journalism Associations, are able to operate freely and without interference.

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<sup>1</sup> DISCLAIMER: ABA CHR staff have contributed to the drafting of the report and it reflects their own views. It has not been reviewed or approved by the House of Delegates or the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association and, therefore, should not be construed as representing the policy of the American Bar Association as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> The submitters define “journalists” as people who cover news or comment on public affairs in print, in photographs, on radio, on television, or online. Writers, editors, publishers, producers, technicians, photographers, camera operators, and directors of news organizations are all included. See Committee to Protect Journalists, “Frequently Asked Questions”, available at: <https://cpj.org/about/faq/>.

<sup>3</sup> See Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon, adopted on 18 January 1996, amended in 2008, Preamble, available at: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cameroon\\_2008.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cameroon_2008.pdf?lang=en).

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at p. 16, Principle 19(1).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at p. 16, Principles 20(1) and 20(2).



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<sup>10</sup> Organization of African Unity, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, p. 4, Article 9, available

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