

CAMEROON: CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE ARBITRARY DETENTION OF TWO BABIES AT THE BAMENDA CENTRAL PRISON

Every day counts, 220 days in detention is 220 days too long. No child deserves to be behind bars

Meeting in Bafoussam, on the initiative of *Conscience Africaine*, a Human Rights organization within the framework of a capacity-building workshop for civil society organizations on Monitoring, Documentation and Reporting (MDR), national and international civil society actors expressed their deepest outrage at an extremely serious and unprecedented situation: two babies, aged three and four months at the time of their arrest, have been arbitrarily detained at the Bamenda Central Prison for 220 days.

These children, who have not committed any offense and are subject to no judicial proceedings, are being held behind bars in flagrant violation of national and international human rights standards, particularly those relating to children's rights, which have been ratified by the State of Cameroon.

On Tuesday, 24 June 2025, defense and security forces carried out a series of arrests without warrants or judicial orders in the locality of Ndop and the village of Bamessing, in the North-West Region. Among those arrested were two infants, aged three and four months respectively, arrested together with their mothers, Ms. Joycelyn Ndum (22 years old) and Ms. Blanche Yocnteh (22 years old).

These babies have been deprived of their liberty solely because of an alleged family link with an individual allegedly belonging to one of the separatist armed groups operating in the Ngoketunjia Division. Their arrest and arbitrary detention therefore constitute collective punishment, which is strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law and human rights protection instruments, especially since children's rights are among the most strongly protected rights worldwide.

Their initial detention at the Ndop Gendarmerie Brigade took place under conditions amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment. Subsequently, the infants were transferred to the Bamenda Central Prison on the basis of a 15 days administrative detention order renewable by the Senior Divisional Officer for Ngoketunjia division Mr Kongeh Handerson QWETONG against their mothers, an order which cannot under any circumstances justify the arbitrary detention of babies.

Despite repeated alerts, filed petitions, requests for release, and interventions by civil society, no effective measures have been taken to put an end to this situation. Civil society strongly condemns the passive attitude of the Cameroonian judiciary, as well as the complicit silence of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission.

The State thus faces international responsibility for the arbitrary detention of children, failure to fulfill its special protection obligation, and violation of the international conventions it has freely ratified, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention against Torture.

In view of the extreme gravity of the facts, civil society:

- Firmly demands the immediate and unconditional release of the two babies, as well as the establishment of alternative measures guaranteeing their protection, health, and well-being;
- Strongly condemns the use of infants as human shields in security strategies or acts of reprisal;
- Clearly calls for the opening of an independent and impartial investigation to establish responsibility for the arbitrary detention of these two children;
- Recalls that the detention of babies is prohibited by all international human rights legal instruments.

Done in Bafoussam, on 30 January 2026

Contact : Conscience Africaine, Amadu TARNTEH, Conscience Africaine –
Tel: 676-477-383 / conscienceafricainenw@yahoo.com

For Civil Society Organizations

Mr. **Amadu TARNTEH**, Conscience Africaine – Tel: 676-477-383
 Ms. **Cyrille Rolande BECHON**, Nouveaux Droits de l’Homme – Tel: 675-447-418
 Mr. **Jean Claude FOGNO**, Mandela Center International – Tel: 699-258-777
 Mr. **Blaise CHAMANGO**, Human is Right
 Dr. **Hugues POJUME**, Association des Amis du Droits
 Dr. **Hilaire KAMGA**, Plate-Forme
 Ms. **Merveille MAKAM TSEWUI**, HURAC
 Ms. **Birwe MAÏBA’A**, ASDPRODH / CNOU
 Mr. **Pride NUKAMYA T. ADE**, Bamendankwe Rural Development Organization
 Mr. **Jean De Dieu TAGNE**, Solution Cameroun
 Mr. **Joseph Joël POBOU**, Lawyer – ADD
 Ms. **Gisèle Laure SOPPE**
 Ms. **William K. BILLIZ**, VOCONU
 Mr. **Ali GARGA BI GIDADO**, MBOSCUDA
 Mr. **Magnus NGONG**, Human Rights Officer (IPC)
 Mr. **Edouard TANTOH**, Activist
 Mr. **Roland GILAR NGWAYI**, Cap sur
 Mr. **Frankline BERINYUY**, CODEHS
 Mr. **Zacharie CHASSEM KEMGNE**, Civil Society Platform for Democracy
 Mr. **Adolf MBONYAM**, CASAF
 Mr. **Parfait SOUOPGWI**, GYDA
 Ms. **Hezelle NANGE**, RADA
 Ms. **Houmamatou AYOUOGNIGNI**, CRADED
 Mr. **Michel MAYI KONG**, Centre CEFODEP
 Mr. **Cajetan BERINYUY**, Ethical and Sustainable Future for All (ESFA)
 Ms. **Laura JINGKOH**, REWAC
 Mr. **Abah TITUS FOTOH**, CHRAC
 Mr. **Nestor KINDZEKA**, Refugee Welfare Association
 Ms. **DJANABA Pascale K.**, RENADH
 Ms. **Ideline Weguem**, All Women Together