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COMMUNICATION FROM MR. EDOUARD ESSOUMA CONCERNING THE  
CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

(Circulated in accordance with rule 24 of the rules of  
procedure for the Trusteeship Council)

Open letter to our elected representatives of the Cameroons.

Subject: EBOLOWA, headquarters of forced labour and oppression

EBOLOWA - fundamentally agricultural sub-division - do you see how your children are suffering under the scorching sun in order to lift you out of the rut? Your children, inured to primitive working methods, long to see you traversed by good roads and motor highways, so that your people need no longer transport the cocoa on their backs. Are we to understand that all this manual labour, which is, moreover, of a public nature, comes within the State's infra-structure plan? How many roads have been under construction for more than three years for which the humble workers have not received one penny? This is why the people have dubbed these roads "workshops of the volunteer workers". The road from EFOULAN to BIPINDI is a typical example. In view of the fact that work on these roads is called voluntary, is it logical, or even necessary, that a soldier, decked out in his uniform, symbolic of violence, should come along and feverishly speed up the work of the volunteers? This new form of forced labour warrants attention. You don't have to be a genius in order to know that these roads are being constructed in our interest. Alas, must we accept the fact that the development of a network of roads in our EBOLOWA entails the complete sacrifice of our individual liberty, of our freedom to work, of our dignity as human beings and, above all, of any reward for our labours in the budget item covering expenditure on infra-structure. Must we put aside our vision of the men who, bent double under

the merciless sun and armed with hoes, shovels, picks, hatchets and axes, have for three years been building this road from EFCULAN to BIPINDI with their own hands and are already awaiting all too impatiently the reward for their labour? Both in our own interest and in that of the ruling classes, public highways are the responsibility of the State, which administers its funds carefully and impartially in the public interest. At a time when they call us citizens of the French Union, would anyone believe that citizens of that "Union" carried on their heads, throughout long and arduous journeys, heavy cases, uniform-chests and other luggage belonging to an EBOLOWA official on his tour, which, moreover, went on for a long time, and that he, a representative of France, did not have the human decency to give these humble porters a penny, because their track from EFOULAN to BIPINDI was not a motor road? Dare one hope that a day will come when road workers and those engaged in repairing bridges will no longer be subject to rebukes and beatings, all because the roads are being built in our own interest, as happened in the case of the bridge at MENGONG on 19 August 1955. That day we witnessed a sad scene in which prisoners and villagers were again placed under the indigenat system, which was said to have been abolished by laws which are already dead-letters, as dead as the hopes that they inspired.

If we bring these questions to the notice of our representatives we are accused of being members of the UPC or of being anti-French, and thus the matter is quickly settled. Does this mean that the development of our EBOLOWA must entail violence and inhuman cruelty, just because we have not a penny unless it is given to us as a political gift? We can never cease to clamour, for to remain silent would be to perpetuate our afflictions and these acts of illegality and injustice; all this impels us to action. To this effect we place the entire responsibility on our representatives, who are already aware of the situation in that they have experienced it, and we hope for Union and Action.

(Signed) Essouma Edouard  
C.P. 165, Ebolowa, Cameroons.  
11 February 1956

Copies to:

The Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights  
The National Assembly  
The Senate  
The French Union

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