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PETITION FROM THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION
CONCERNING THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

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WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

13 Unter den Linden
BERLIN W8

Telegraphic Address:
FEDEINTFEM-BERLIN

Berlin, 14 October 1955

To the Secretary-General,
United Nations, New York

Sir,

We have the honour to send you herewith a memorandum concerning the
Cameroons.

We have the honour to be, etc.

(Signed) Angiola MINELLA
General Secretary

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

Berlin, 12 October 1955

The Women's International Democratic Federation, which speaks for 140 million women, draws the attention of the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly to a number of serious cases of repression in the Cameroons, a country under United Nations Trusteeship. The incidents have been brought to the notice of the Federation by the Union des femmes camerounaises in a series of documents which constitute a terrible indictment. The reign of terror throughout the Cameroons has been particularly hard on the women and children, who are still feeling its effects and fear the prospect of further bloodshed.

The incidents reported in the letters we have received are as follows:

A letter of 19 May 1955 states that: "since April last there has been a succession of bloody incidents, each worse than the last. At Garoua a woman who was seven months pregnant had a miscarriage as a result of the blows she received. On 14 May the police launched a violent attack during a demonstration in support of the leaders of the national organizations. Several people were injured; one woman fainted from a blow over the heart; another received a brutal and agonizing blow in the small of the back. Seventy-three people, including thirty-seven women, are in prison".

Here is an extract from a letter from Douala dated 4 June 1955: "The utmost barbarity prevails here; huts are set alight at night during curfew hours. You can imagine what is done to those who venture outside to escape the fire. It is quite frightful - they are shot. Arrests, clubbings - men and women alike - blows with rifle butts, wholesale murder!"

The same letter says that "on 26 May, Marthe Bahida was arrested, beaten with clubs and horribly tortured; her genital organs were burnt with a red hot iron. She was taken to hospital unconscious and removed four days later for deportation to the North.

A letter of 23 August reports that: "On 25 May, at Loum, Father Bernard killed a pregnant woman with a rifle bullet. At Ngambé, an entire village was destroyed and the population wiped out. For a whole week, a three-year-old child remained all alone beside the dead bodies of his parents... At Nombo, the village was destroyed and the inhabitants massacred... At Douala, injured women who were receiving treatment in the hospital were taken from their sick-beds and deported to Makolo before they had recovered... At Nkongsamba, Monique Kamen was beaten until she had a haemorrhage and fainted. In prison her only food was 250 grammes of flour and she had no water for washing. At Yaoundé, Marie Ybang, editor-manager of the newspaper Femmes Camerounaises was arrested, tortured and imprisoned at Douala simply because she had gone to Dr. Félix Roland Mounie, Chairman of the Union des Populations du Cameroun for treatment ...

The letter adds: "Nursing mothers feed their babies in disease-ridden forests... Children die of malnutrition or parasitic diseases. They seek shelter in flimsy huts with no protection against wild beasts. Countless children die; countless others have their health ruined, their lives jeopardized, and their schooling broken off."

A letter of 27 August states: "It is exactly like the Gestapo: house searches, mass arrests of Cameroonians suspected of being sympathetic towards their country's cause". The letter goes on to say that at Yaounde on 18 August a train was stopped, and after large-scale police operations, eighteen persons, including one woman, were arrested.

Such incidents arouse the indignation of all decent people. Women and mothers throughout the world feel deeply for the Cameroonian women and children in their grief and protest vehemently against acts of repression which aggravate the difficulties of a people aspiring, as is their right, to a better life.

WIDF also wishes to draw attention to the extreme gravity of the step taken by the French Government in dissolving the Union des Femmes Camerounaises (Decree of 13 July 1955), thus preventing the Cameroonian women from expressing their aspirations and claiming their own and their children's rights. This measure was enacted without regard for the provisions of the Trusteeship Agreement.

Acts of repression and intimidation do not create a favourable atmosphere for the work of the next United Nations Visiting Mission which is to investigate the origins and causes of the civil disturbances of last May.

In its letter of 28 July, the Union des Femmes Camerounaises assures us that the women of the Cameroons place great faith in this commission of investigation and intimates that they are disturbed to see certain preparations being made which might lead to bloodshed and prevent the representatives of the United Nations from carrying out their mission, and more particularly from receiving an accurate picture of events.

WIDF urges action by the United Nations to bring the repression to an end, to give the women and children of the Cameroons a chance to live in peace, and to ensure respect for the rights of a people under trusteeship; and it calls for the repeal of the measure dissolving the Union des Femmes Camerounaises.

WIDF would like to point out that the repression of people who, on the strength of the great principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, seek recognition of their rights, is condemned by the vast majority of men and women, who believe in the possibility of replacing repression and violence by a spirit of understanding and respect in which peaceful solutions can be found for all problems and respect for the rights of the individual can be assured.
