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Dual Distribution

9. | WA

PETITIONS FROM THE SOUTH-WESTERN FEDERATION⁽¹⁾
BATIBO, THE BAMENDA IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION⁽²⁾
MR. GODLOVE NDANGBI AND MR. M. M. GAFONGBE,⁽³⁾ THE
KOM IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION⁽⁴⁾ AND THE FON,
VILLAGE HEADS AND COUNCIL OF KOM⁽⁵⁾ CONCERNING
THE CAMEROONS UNDER BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

Observations of the Administering Authority

Note by the Secretariat: The following observations were communicated to the Secretariat on 3 March 1950 by the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the Trusteeship Council.

1. Apart from the land-claims and other complaints against the Bali people referred to in the petition of the South Western Federation, which have received detailed treatment in the Administering Authority's observations on document T/PET.4/5/Add.2, these petitions all relate to general questions affecting the Bamenda Province and may conveniently be considered together.
2. Perhaps the most important issue raised is contained in the brief petition of the Fon, Village Heads and Council of Kom, who ask whether they are administered by direct or indirect rule and, if by the latter, whether they should "go according to Native Law and Custom". The people of the Bamenda grasslands have just reached a stage of development at which their traditional society is being assailed in earnest by the spread of western ideas. The Kom petitioners are no doubt more acutely conscious of this than others; on

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- (1) T/PET.4/57
 - (2) T/PET.4/52
 - (3) T/PET.4/50
 - (4) T/PET.4/35
 - (5) T/PET.4/36

account of the evidence they have had of foreign criticism of their traditional customs, but throughout the Province there is the same conflict between new ideas and old, and the same problem of how to modernize the indigenous society without destroying its spirit. Paragraph 2(e) of the Kon Improvement Association petition illustrates another aspect of the conflict. In this fundamental matter the aim of the Administration is to avoid making any direct attack upon traditional custom, except when cruelty is involved, but to bring about progress by methods of persuasion and example, and by creating conditions in which native society, without self-destruction, will welcome and assimilate the ideas of the new age. In the field of local government the Administration has succeeded in introducing the young literate element to a certain extent, and women are now represented in all Native Authority Councils in the Province, but public opinion has a long way to go before the literate representatives are credited with any influence comparable with that of the traditional leaders.

3. As regards development the Bamenda Province, recently raised to provincial status with an increased administrative staff, is entering upon a new phase as a new motor road encircling the Province nears completion. The following are comments on the specific representations made in these petitions:

- (i) Education. The educational facilities of the Province were conveniently described at pages 31-32 of the handbook prepared for the use of the Visiting Mission to West Africa in November 1949. The suggestion that the Administration neglects education, leaving nearly all the effort to the Missions, is refuted at paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Administering Authority's observations on document T/PET.4/16, where the Government policy of extending primary education by subsidization of voluntary agencies is explained. The people of the Bamenda Province have equal opportunities with those of the rest of Nigeria to avail themselves of a liberal provision of scholarships for higher education, in Nigeria or overseas: in addition they have open to them scholarships offered by the Cameroons Development Corporation. So far the difficulty has been to secure suitably qualified candidates and the Corporation has not yet been able to dispose of as many scholarships for higher education as it is prepared to award.

(ii) Medical Services. There is a General Hospital of 96 beds at Bamenda and this is to be replaced in the very near future by a modern hospital of 120 beds. A hospital of 33 beds run by the Baptist Mission exists at Bansa, 66 miles from Bamenda, with an American doctor in charge. There are ten Native Administration dispensaries and one Mission dispensary in the Province. There is a Government Medical Officer stationed at Bamenda who tours the outlying dispensaries at intervals. A Medical Field Unit in charge of a European Medical Officer and a European assistant is at present touring the Province, conducting research into prevalent diseases and treating disease on the spot. One ambulance under the orders of the Medical Officer is stationed at Bamenda. One travelling Native Administration dispensary has recently been established, and others will operate if this first one proves a success. The improvement now being effected in communications will make expansion of the medical services possible.

(iii) Communications. The matter of road communications is raised by the South-Western Federation and the Kom Improvement Association. In this respect the South-Western area is by far better off than any other area in the Province. The following all season roads are located in the South-Western area:

Mamfe-Bamenda	- 30 miles approximately.
Bamenda-Santa	- 16 miles approximately.
Bamenda-Mbengwi	- 20 miles approximately.
Bamenda-Bafut	(part of Ring Road).
Bamenda-Bansa	(part of Ring Road).

Proposals have been put forward for a feeder road to connect Batibo and Mbengwi.

Regarding the roads mentioned in paragraph 2 (a) of the Kom Improvement Association petition, the Bamenda Njinikom road, which is a fair motorable route, is maintained from Native Administration funds: it was surveyed by a District Officer in 1924 and constructed by the voluntary labour of the villagers along the route.

A proposal to construct twenty miles of road from Njinikom to Wum by the same method has recently been under consideration and was enthusiastically supported by the elders of the villages concerned: it has become clear, however, that the voluntary labour required of the young men will not be forthcoming and the scheme has been dropped. The assertion in the Kom Improvement Association petition that there is no Post Office nearer to Njinikom than 40 miles away (Bamenda) is correct. A voluntary letter distribution service has however been operated with success since 1946 by a missionary at Njinikom and the Native Administration employs a mail-runner plying between Njinikom and Bamenda. The provision of a postal agency at Njinikom is under consideration by the Kom Council.

(iv) Trade. The Bamenda Improvement Association is mistaken in suggesting that no other European firm than the United Africa Company is permitted to operate in the area. Other firms would be extremely welcome but it is, of course, for them and not the Administration to judge whether they should undertake the venture. Both the Kom Improvement Association and the Bamenda Improvement Association complain of low produce prices, particularly in comparison with the prices received by the producer in the French Cameroons, and it is suggested that Government gives no encouragement to coffee growers. The price of coffee in French Trusteeship Territory is quoted as being 7/9d against 9d at Bamenda and it is said that facilities by way of free transport are provided there. No information is available of the assistance given by Government to growers in French Trusteeship Territory. The price there in 1948 was said to be 10d per pound. At Bamenda the price is 9d per pound and the coffee is sold to the public at 9.2d per lb. It is doubtful if a higher price could be paid, at ruling world market prices, for coffee for export, owing to the high cost of transport to sea ports. Plans are almost complete for the building of a coffee Processing Plant which could be handed over in due course to a Coffee Growers Cooperative Society should one be formed. As regards the profits made by local growers, information made

available to the Schedule II Tax Committees that reasonable profits are made.

- (v) Preventive Service. The position regarding frontier controls is discussed in paragraph 51 to 54 of the Administering Authority's observations on document T/PET.4/16.

There can be no question of the abolition of the Frontier Preventive Service, but it is understood that there is little interference with normal indigenous trading activities across the frontier. Complaints of excesses by officers of the Preventive Service have been made at intervals, particularly complaints regarding the raiding of markets, but no complaints have been received of women being stripped for search and there has been no occasion in the Bamenda Province, and only one in the Southern Cameroons, in recent years when a preventive official has been obliged to shoot. The Collector of Customs has found no evidence that his officers have exceeded their powers and is confident that markets are only inspected when there are good indications that smuggled articles are displayed for sale. There is undoubtedly considerable traffic of dutiable articles across the frontier.

- (vi) Forest Reserves. The Bamenda Improvement Association protest that Reserves have been established in an unconstitutional manner, that unfarmed lands should be reserved and not farm lands, and that the acquisition should be made only after consultation with tribal organization and not through a single chief who holds the land in trust for his people. In particular the Bagangu land under reserve is referred to (the Bafut-Ngamba Reserve).

All Forest Reserves in the Province have been constituted in a legal manner and Gazetted. In every case an enquiry has been held by Administrative and Forestry Officers and a properly appointed Reserve Settlement Officer has submitted a report to which the marks or signatures of the land owners are affixed. The case of the Bagangu portion of the Bafut-Ngamba Reserve is discussed in detail in the Administering Authority's observations on the petition of the Bangangu-Ikum community.

(vii) Position of Chiefs. This subject is referred to by both the Bamenda Improvement Association and the South-Western Federation. The election and deposition of chiefs is in fact governed by Native Law and Custom. Their remuneration is a matter for decision when Native Authority Councils frame their annual estimates.

The South-Western Native Authority, at a full meeting, decided to pay salaries or allowances only to councillors and Tax Collectors and to discontinue salary payments to Village Heads. The majority of Village Heads are in fact either tax collectors or Councillors, or both. Salaries to be paid under Heads I, II and III of the 1950-51 estimates will be slightly less than 10% of the South-Western Treasury's revenue of £12,270 :

Councillors are to receive £610.

Tax Collectors are to receive £550.

(viii) Liquor. The inclusion of what is now the Bamenda Province among the "prohibited areas" under the Liquor Ordinance (Cap.131) is governed by international treaty. As this control was designed to apply to Mohammedan areas, and does not exist in areas neighbouring on the Bamenda Province which have a similar way of life, it is not unnatural that its application to the Bamenda Province is felt to be anomalous.

(ix) Native Courts. The working of the Native Court system is about to be reviewed by a Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Governor of Nigeria. The Native Courts are an integral part of the judicial system of the territory, and, despite their shortcomings, records and statistics show that they do a substantial measure of justice. Complaints of unjust or biased decisions in the Native Courts are by no means numerous, and the great majority of the people are well aware of their remedies by way of review or appeal; those who do not know the procedure invariably complain to an Administrative Officer

and are then advised what to do. The statement of Mr. Godlove Ndingbi and Mr. M.M.Gafongbe that Native Court decisions are always upheld on review or appeal by District Officers is incorrect; moreover, the District Officer's decisions in such cases are not final, and parties dissatisfied with them are well aware that they can take their case to the Resident.

- (x) Petitions. The allegation made by the Bamenda Improvement Association that petitions "are often withheld by the local authorities from reaching the authorities concerned" has no foundation in fact. Officers of the Administration are meticulous in respecting the right to petition. The majority of petitions received refer to Native Court judgments, and where the petitioner has an avenue of appeal or review the application is invariably forwarded. If he has no legal right to take his case further his petition is returned with a letter to explain why it is not being forwarded and this may provide the explanation of the Bamenda Improvement Association's complaint.