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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

### PETITIONS CONCERNING THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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I. Petition from Mr. Victor Nantia (T/PET.5/858)

1. In his letter dated 6 February 1956, Mr. Nantia, a political refugee in the British zone since the events of May 1955, states that he returned secretly to Dschang to see his sick child. During the night from 1 to 2 February, the Chief Subdivisional Officer and the officer in command of the gendarmerie, accompanied by twenty Cameroonian guards, entered his home to arrest him. When they did not find him, they seized his younger brother, Paul Lematrop, beat him and removed him to prison; they also took a sum of 113,000 francs, which was inside the cover of his sewing machine.

2. The peittioner protests against his brother's arrest: under French law the penalty can only be imposed on the person guilty of the offence. He asks the United Nations to approach the French authorities with a view to securing his brother's release and the return of the stolen money.

3. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/85, section 4) that there is absolutely no justification for the petitioner's allegations concerning the arrest of his brother, Lematrop Paul, the brutalities to which he says he was subjected or the disappearance of a sum of 113,000 francs. The gendarmes were looking for Nantia Victor in order to execute a warrant of arrest issued on 26 August 1955 by the Examining Magistrate at Dschang. They merely checked the identity of the individual Lematrop Paul, whom they did not know; he was taken to the police station for the purpose, and he left rather less than an hour later. No policemen, Cameroonian guard or soldier, entered the petitioner's house.

II. Petition from Mr. Gilbert Thomas Bitjah (T/PET.5/860 and Add.1)

1. In his letter of 24 October 1955 to the Visiting Mission, the petitioner states that he has "had his family allowances ruthlessly disccrtinued" for the children of the first husband of one of his wives although he is definitely responsible for the maintenance of the children. He adds that, as he has three children by his second wife, his income is insufficient to enable him to bring up so large a family and he protests against this interpretation of the Laminé-Guèye Act.

2. In his letter of 16 May 1956, the petitioner states that on the death of the guardian who had brought him up after his father's death in 1924, the guardian's

wife and five children, the eldest of whom was born in 1940, had been left in his charge, as he was the customary heir of the deceased, a status recognized by the Eséka Civil Court of First Instance. At a family council, which was attended by more than 150 persons, it was decided, with the consent of the widow that their marital union should be sanctioned by a civil marriage contract, which was registered on 29 December 1953. The petitioner adds that the family council made him "entirely responsible for the maintenance and education of the children" but that the Court had denied him the status of legal guardian to the five orphan children on the ground that his marriage does not entitle him to draw "family allowance".

3. The petitioner also states that having been sent from Eséka to Yagoua (Northern Cameroons) in April 1954, he submitted an application for family allowance for the five children in question and the allowances were granted to him with effect from 1 January 1954 by a decision of 25 February 1954. He adds that in June 1955, the Chief Subdivisional Officer of Yagoua had received orders to stop payment of the family allowance because they had been awarded in error and to recover the amounts already paid.

4. The petitioner states that he unsuccessfully applied to the Finance Department asking for fair treatment. The Department replied that the provisions regarding the re-marriage, to a civil servant, of a widow with children did not apply to civil servants whose status was not in accordance with French civil law.

5. The petitioner states that he placed the matter before the Administrative Disputes Board in October 1955 and that the administrative judgement of 25 February 1956 did not recognize his paternal authority over the orphan children on the ground that he did not offer any evidence that he personally contributed to their maintenance and education. The petitioner points out that in the eyes of Bassa custom, by which he is governed, he has paternal authority over the children of his deceased first cousin.

6. Lastly the petitioner states that his salary, from which deductions are made in repayment of the allowances received in error is insufficient for the maintenance of the eight children left at Eséka and that, despite the repeated requests of his two wives, the Administration refuses to repost him to the Southern Cameroons before the completion of the statutory three-year period.

7. The Administering Authority observes (T/OBS.5/85, section 5) that the dispute to which the petitioner refers has been decided by an order of the Disputes Board. In the absence of any fresh evidence the Administering Authority cannot reopen the case and the petitioner cannot appeal against a judgement which has become final.

### III. Petition from Joseph Biti (T/PET.5/861)

1. In a letter dated 8 November 1955, the petitioner states that on 17 October 1949, when he was only sixteen years old, he lost his right foot in an industrial accident which occurred at the works of the Hersent Company, where he was employed, in the presence of the works foreman. When he left the hospital, the Company would have nothing more to do with him. He adds that all his attempts to obtain re-employment have been unsuccessful because the Company alleges that he is not fit "for heavy work".

2. The petitioner states that for various reasons, several employers not only refuse to give him work, but contrive to prevent him from obtaining employment elsewhere. Thus a certain Bernard Georges allegedly prevented him from obtaining work because he "would not give him his fiancée as a mistress".

3. The petitioner also states that the Administration, to which he has applied several times, is completely uninterested in what happens to him. He asks the United Nations to intercede with the Administration with a view to his being given employment "in the canteen of Edéa Dredging or of Alucam as a cook", a trade he knows.

4. The Administering Authority agrees (T/OBS.5/85, section 6) that Mr. Joseph Biti had his right leg amputated above the knee as the result of an accident which he suffered at work in 1948 while employed by the Hersent Company. On the other hand it is not true that his employers left him without help of any kind. At the time the Hersent Company paid him compensation amounting to 33,000 francs CFA, in accordance with the regulations on industrial accidents. The company later had a prosthetic appliance made for him, although they had no legal obligation to do so. In view of his disability it is rather difficult to re-employ the petitioner. The Administering Authority recently offered Mr. Joseph Biti employment as a night watchman, which would be suitable work for him with his disability, but he refused the offer.



IV. Petition from Mr. Pierre Ndjock (T/PET.5/863)

1. In a letter dated 1 November 1955 and transmitted by the Visiting Mission, the petitioner, a regional guard at Abong-Mbang, complains that despite his seniority in the service (he enlisted in August 1941) and despite the three children he put into the service, his small pay does not allow him to maintain his family decently. He adds that he has had no promotion since 1949 and that he is now threatened with dismissal without any reason. He asks the United Nations to "clear up his situation".
2. The Administering Authority points out (T/OBS.5/85, section 7) that since 1950 the petitioner, who was a regional guard in service at Abong-Mbang, had received very bad reports from his superiors. He was therefore one of the first people to be affected by the budget cuts introduced as a result of the unfavourable economic situation obtaining in recent years and he was dismissed by decision No. 586/RHN of 12 December 1955, which was taken in due form, with effect from 15 December 1955. Before he left he was paid termination indemnity equal to one month's salary in accordance with the regulations applicable to staff in his category.

V. Petition from Cameroonian Ex-Servicemen (T/PET.5/864)

1. In a letter dated 1 November 1955, the petitioners, six Cameroonian ex-servicemen, now assistant regional guards in service in the Abong-Mbang Subdivision, complain that since their demobilization they have received no privileges and that they live in dire poverty. They state that having re-enlisted as regional guards they are no longer regarded as ex-servicemen and have consequently lost all their seniority in the army, while civilian employees are treated differently.
2. The petitioners add that a long time ago they asked for authorization to buy sporting guns but that they have so far received no reply. They ask the United Nations to take action in support of their case.
3. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/85, section 8) that of the six petitioners only three are officially recognized ex-servicemen, that is to say have belonged to a "fighting" unit for at least three months. These are Djambielo Luc, Mbaiko David and Ntouangue Jean. Mbaiko David was dismissed for "consistently poor performance". The other five petitioners have been kept on in the auxiliary service. Ntouangue Jean is the only one who has received the

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seniority bonus provided for by the regulations granting special advantages to ex-servicemen. His colleagues failed to submit their claims within the prescribed time-limit, although the circulars describing the operation of these regulations were communicated to them. As for the promotion which the petitioners claim, they forget that promotion to a higher grade is not automatic but depends on seniority and performance.

4. The Administering Authority adds that authorization to carry a gun is a reward for the most deserving officials and the petitioners do not fall into this category.

VI. Petition from Mr. Jean Stamboldjis (T/PET.5/870)

1. In a letter dated 8 November 1955, the petitioner, a Greek national settled in the Cameroons, states that the architect's licence for which he applied on 17 July 1948 was not granted until 8 March 1950 and that permission to reside in the Territory, for which he applied on 15 July 1948, has not yet been formally granted to him. He points out that his professional activities are systematically hampered by this delay and that the Administering Authority has created a monopoly in favour of its own nationals by giving Administration contracts exclusively to French architects.

2. The petitioner draws the Trusteeship Council's attention to the fact that the Administering Authority does not always ensure the strict application of article 8 of the Trusteeship Agreement which imposes on it the obligation to ensure equal treatment in economic, industrial and commercial matters for all States Members of the United Nations and their nationals.

3. The petitioner requests the Trusteeship Council to arrange for an inquiry to be conducted into the manner in which he has been treated; to protect him against "any improper measures which may be taken against him", and to secure compensation for him for the damage he has suffered as a result of the Administering Authority's infringements of the provisions of article 8 of the Trusteeship Agreement. He suggests the establishment of a kind of ad hoc international court sitting in the Cameroons to ensure the strict application of the provisions of the Trusteeship Agreement relating to private interests.

4. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/85, section 10) that the regulations governing the profession of architect in the Cameroons are those in force in France. In order to practise every architect must be a registered member of the Association of Architects, to which he is admitted after examination of his degrees and professional diplomas. Although Mr. Stamboldjis is not yet a registered member of the Association, the Administering Authority has in fact allowed him to practise in the Territory. Mr. Stamboldjis is not the victim of any discriminatory measure; on the contrary, he has been treated with a leniency for which there is no provision in the relevant legislation but which is justifiable because of the time required to regularize his position.

VII. Petitions from Mr. Basile Moneyembong Nkoulou (T/PET.5/871) and Mr. Sylvestre Akono (T/PET.5/872)

1. These two petitions, the first dated 5 November 1955 and the second undated, refer to the "abuses" alleged to have been committed by the Cantonal Chief of Messok, with the support of the Administration.
2. The first petitioner states (T/PET.5/871) that the situation described in his previous petition (T/PET.5/146, Trusteeship Council resolution 914 (XIII)) continues. He accuses the Cantonal Chief of maintaining a prison farm on his plantation at Mbometaa and gives the names of six persons whom the Chief allegedly had recruited on 27 October 1955 to go and work for him. The petitioner notes that a registered letter sent on 31 October 1955 about "this forced labour" has so far elicited no reply.
3. The petitioner attaches to his letter four statements by persons testifying that they were made to pay for their marriage certificates.
4. The petitioner adds that four villages in the canton have been abandoned as a result of the departure of a large number of inhabitants who have gone elsewhere for better treatment. He demands the removal of the Cantonal Chief, as an oppressor of the people he administers.
5. Together with this petition, the Visiting Mission received four communications from persons mentioned by Mr. Moneyembong complaining that they had paid for marriage certificates, and six communications from persons also mentioned by the petitioner complaining that they had had to do two weeks' forced labour at Mbometaa.

6. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/88, section 6) that the charges preferred by Mr. Moneyembong against Chief Mfoula Alemare are absolutely unfounded and that four administrative investigations have been conducted without producing any results. Moreover, no complaint was ever lodged by anyone. Furthermore, at its 519th meeting on 18 March 1954 the Trusteeship Council noted the statement of the Administering Authority in resolution 914 (XIII) that no evidence had been found to corroborate the petitioner's complaints.

7. The second petitioner states (T/PET.5/872) that the Canton of Messok is the only one which is still "under the domination of a cruel Chief, who has the support of the authorities". He says that the abuses reported by him in a previous petition (T/PET.5/140, Trusteeship Council resolution 914 (XIII)) have gotten worse, and cites the case of Nji Ntyoo, who is alleged to have been given fifty strokes for refusing to ferry a white man across the river after 6 p.m. in November 1954 although the regulations forbid any ferrying after that hour.

8. The petitioner also cites cases of thefts and requisitioning of chickens during the census of August 1954 and adds that the Administration's messengers demand recompense before they will deliver summonses. He also mentions various other specific cases of abuses of this kind.

9. The petitioner complains that as a result of repression and forced labour, four villages in the canton have lost their village status since 1929 because they have too few taxpayers, and that the population has dwindled in the remaining villages.

10. The petitioner also complains that a file signed by the Paramount Chief has to be obtained before a licence to purchase firearms is granted, and that in some cases as much as 50,000 francs has to be paid for the file.

11. The petitioner also states that the Cantonal Chief is supported in these abuses by certain administrators who hate the blacks, such as the Chief Subdivisional Officer, who is alleged to have beaten three persons, whose names are given, kept the headman of the village of Biba, wrongfully accused by the Paramount Chief, under guard under home arrest, and taken to court a man named Evini Mengous, seen smoking hashish by the police.

12. The petitioner gives the names and addresses of twenty-eight persons alleged to have been put on forced labour at Messok.

13. The petitioner says that the Cameroons should get rid of the old colonialist administrators and that it is too soon for France to ask for the integration of the Cameroons in the French Union.



14. Together with this second petition, the Visiting Mission received eighteen other communications containing the same charges against Chief Mfoula Aleme.
15. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/88, section 7) that Mr. Akono's charges against Chief Alem are false. The man named Nji Ntyoo has never lodged any complaint with the administrative or legal authorities and no theft of poultry has ever been reported. No instance of extortion on the part of the messengers of the Sangmelima Subdivision has been brought to the Administering Authority's attention up to the present.
16. The Administering Authority observes that the Labour Code in the French Overseas Territories prohibits any commandeering of manpower and any forced or unpaid labour. The issue of permits to carry firearms is the prerogative of the Chief Regional Officers and it is obvious that a customary chief could play no part in this purely administrative matter.
17. The Administering Authority adds that the Canton of Messok comprises twenty-four villages, three of which were regrouped into one village in 1940 as the result of an administrative reform. In twenty years the population of the canton has decreased by 567 as a result of migration to the towns. These population movements are not peculiar to the Cameroons.
18. The Administering Authority also points out that Group Chief Mfoula Alem owns a plantation of 11,400 cocoa bushes and has recently been made a chevalier du mérite agricole. Furthermore, he has a house built of solid material, with other buildings made of local materials grouped round it, and it is not surprising therefore that his material possessions should arouse envy.

VIII. Petition from the small farmers of the Boubou Canton of Dja (T/PET.5/873)\*

1. This petition, dated 10 August 1955 and signed by sixty-seven persons, lists the claims of the small farmers of the Boubou Canton of Dja. The petitioners complain that they built a dispensary and three other buildings and have not been paid for their work; they state that the same applies to the building of the road from Bissombo to Metome, but that the people of the Bengbis Canton have already been given their wages. The petitioners say that whenever they ask for remuneration for work done they are told that it is to their own advantage.



2. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/88, section 8) that it is true that the people of the canton of Dja voluntarily participated in the construction of a dispensary, which was built at their request. It was also at their request that work on the construction of a bridge across the Dja River was started about thirteen months ago for the purpose of linking two cantons.

3. The Administering Authority adds that under the Petit Equipement Rural plan, the principles of which are set forth in the Annual Report, when the members of a community want such projects to be carried out they can obtain funds for the purchase of materials and the payment of technicians but they must supply the manpower. The community does not, therefore, receive any remuneration and the work is organized in accordance with the customary traditions. This work, which is readily agreed to by the people and whose results they appreciate, tends, moreover, to be balanced by the increasing contributions from the budgets of the Sociétés Africaines de Prévoyance and the communes. The fact remains that the most dynamic communities continue to apply for administrative (Petit Equipement Rural) aid for new projects and that their requests are granted as far as possible.

#### IX. Petition from Chief Tettey Codjoe (T/PET.5/874)

1. The petitioner, in a letter dated 3 November 1955, declares, in the name of Africans from the Gold Coast resident at Douala, that he would be grateful if the Government would arrange to restore to his compatriots the space allocated to them in the Accra Quarter in New-Bell. He explains that his people have scattered all over Douala owing to the lack of building space in New-Bell and that the proposed action would enable him to get in touch with them more easily in the event of a call by the Government and give them better protection against unlawful aggression.

2. The Administering Authority confirms (T/OBS.5/88, section 9) that a piece of land was set aside at Douala especially for Gold Coast nationals as early as 1917. Later on, however, some of them sold the huts they had built to indigenous inhabitants of the French Cameroons, with the result that there is now a mixture of populations in what is known as the Accra Quarter. It is obviously impossible to cancel these voluntary transfers and although the Administration originally

encouraged the grouping of indigenous or allogeneous populations in clearly demarcated quarters round their traditional chiefs, it has no intention of maintaining a segregation which the inhabitants no longer need or of opposing the mixture of races in the Douala commune.

3. The Administering Authority further notes that the petitioner is afraid that his people will be evicted by the Douala population, which unceasingly declares its right to every part of the town. The Administration is following this situation very closely.

X. Petition from Mr. Samuel Ekwe (T/PET.5/875)

1. The petitioner, a former volunteer with the Free French Forces, with eight decorations, complains, in a letter dated 7 February 1956, about the repressive measures to which he has allegedly been subjected since he joined the national liberation movement: the imposition of crippling fines and the closing down of his bar without warning.

2. The petitioner adds that on 13 May 1955, while he was accompanying UPC members who had been charged with offences on political grounds to their hearing, he was arrested together with 136 of his fellow-countrymen; the latter were released the next day "following a vigorous protest by the population", but he was sentenced for assault against the police to fifteen months' imprisonment and sent to Mckolo on 29 May. The petitioner attributes his conviction to the active part he played in the UPC and refers to a warning alleged to have been given him by the representative of the High Commissioner in 1954.

3. The petitioner also states that a few days after the dissolution of the UPC, armed soldiers broke into his dwelling without any notice or search warrant, broke open cupboards and chests, and removed a sum of 473,000 francs under the pretext of looking for UPC documents. After his release, the petitioner claimed reimbursement of that sum from the local authorities, but to no effect. He reiterates his support for the concrete proposals submitted to the United Nations by the UPC for the immediate unity and independence of the Cameroons.

4. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/88, section 10) that it is true that Mr. Samuel Ekwe is an ex-serviceman of the Free French Forces, with a brilliant military record, so that a liquor licence was immediately granted to him when he applied for one in 1952. On 23 May 1955, he was arrested in the act of committing assault and battery against the police. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment by the Yaoundé Court of Appeal and was released on 14 November 1955. That, moreover, was not the first time, that he had come up against the law, for in 1953 his bar was closed for eight days as the result of a brawl in his establishment. He was also reprimanded by the Chief Officer of the administrative sector following a large unlawful assembly of people on the public highway outside his bar. These offences are mentioned in the reply of the Administering Authority to petition T/PET.5/297 from Mr. Ekwe (see T/OBS.5/39 and Trusteeship Council resolution 1179 (XV)).

5. The Administering Authority further states that Mr. Ekwe's residence was never searched and his establishment was closed only because of his imprisonment. As a favour, however, his wife, Mrs. Lydie Ekwe, was authorized in September 1955 to use his licence, after making a request to do so.

XI. Petition from the Paramount Chief of the Wouri Valley (T/PET.5/880)

1. The petitioner, complains, in a letter dated 24 October 1955, that the population of Wouri are still without an administrative post in their canton, despite their repeated requests that one should be set up. This creates difficulties for the people of the Wouri Valley, because they are a great distance from Yabassi, the subdivision to which they now belong; and Douala, their former subdivision, from which they were detached. He points out that there are a number of administrative posts in the suburbs of Douala, despite their nearness to the centre.

2. The petitioner deplores the emmigration which has taken place from the Wouri Valley to Douala, and observes that these emmigrants, unable to find land for planting or work in offices or small businesses, "have become real disturbers of the peace in the town of Douala", whereas in their own region the land is uncultivated, the roads ill-kept and the villages isolated. Since the immigrants

are not sedentary, many of them escape the census and do not pay their taxes in all cases. He asks the United Nations, in conjunction with the local authorities, to replace this emmigration by "compulsory permanent immigration".

3. The petitioner requests that the upper reaches of the Wouri River, known as the Nkahn, be dredged, and says that it takes two days to cover the sixty km from Douala to Yabassi.

4. The petitioner states that the monthly salary of 4,000 francs paid to the Paramount Chiefs of the Nkam Region is insufficient for the various tasks they have to perform: they have to entertain notables almost every day, give hospitality to various personages in their concessions, take part correctly dressed in festivities and official entertainments and travel long distances to fulfil their duties. He adds that the Yabassi Chiefs have "become positive beggars", and an impecunious Chief can "easily swindle his people in order to make ends meet", whereas the Douala Chiefs receive quite large monthly salaries.

5. In conclusion, the petitioner protests that although the Nkam Region is one of the oldest and most extensive in the Territory, it lacks not only administrative posts but also communications, schools and dispensaries.

6. The Administering Authority states (T/OBS.5/89, section 1) that the establishment of an administrative post in the Nkam Valley could not be justified or even considered, in view of the sparse population of the region (4,000 inhabitants). There is no doubt that the rural sectors of Nkam are being abandoned and that there is a movement of the population towards Douala. This phenomenon is not peculiar to this Territory: it is happening in many countries all over the world. Nevertheless, the local Administration is endeavouring to remedy this state of affairs by the building of motor roads, the extension of the Société de Prévoyance Africaine and an attempt at African colonization.

7. The Administering Authority adds that generally speaking the Nkam River is navigable and that there is a regular thrice-weekly service between Douala and Yabassi. Dredging is, however, being carried out.

8. The Administering Authority state that the position of the Chiefs of Nkam Canton is similar to that of chiefs in the other regions. The petitioner's remuneration corresponds to the salary of a senior official.

9. The Administering Authority states, in conclusion, that the Nkam Region has not been abandoned to its fate and that great progress has been made in

administration, with the establishment of two administrative posts and an association of communes; in education, with two schools combining primary and secondary courses and seventeen rural primary schools having 2,400 pupils out of 40,000 inhabitants; and in health, with one hospital, three dispensaries, two maternity centres and one mobile service.

XII. Petition from Mr. Innocent Minko, Mr. J.K. Robertson and Mr. Martin Cye Minko (T/PET.5/887 and Add.1)

1. The petitioners, in a letter dated 21 May 1956 (T/PET.5/887), protest against the arrest on that date of a youth named James Robertson after a family quarrel. They say that the youth had always been mechanically-minded and had succeeded in making rifles and other implements without modern tools. The petitioners express surprise that France does not send this young "genius" to complete his training in Europe instead of leaving him in prison, and beg the United Nations to ask the Administering Authority to send his "handiwork" to United Nations Headquarters, with all the tools he used.
2. In a second letter dated 10 June 1956 (T/PET.5/887/Add.1), signed by five persons including James Robertson's brother, the petitioners attribute the administration's refusal to release the prisoner, on his mother's request, to the fact that his elder brother is in the UFC. They refer to a warning on those lines allegedly given to the youth's mother by a Catholic priest, who is quoted as having said that if James Robertson's brother tried to complain to the United Nations "he would seriously harm the youth, who might in that case be sentenced to at least ten years' imprisonment".
3. The petitioners request United Nations intervention in the case of James Robertson. They add that they have had enough of the "reign of terror, injustice and pillage" in the Cameroons and allege, as an example, that on 14 April 1956 a paramount chief of Sangmélima, accompanied by armed men, attacked the Bamilekés of the Dja and Lobo Region and looted all their goods, under the benevolent eye of the authorities. The petitioners call for the unification and the independence of the Cameroons.



4. The Administering Authority, in its observations on petition T/PET.5/887 (T/OBS.5/89, section 3), states that James Robertson was arrested on 21 May 1956 for assault and battery against his mother and was sentenced by the court at Djoum on 10 June to thirty days' imprisonment for illegally manufacturing and owning firearms. He was freed on 21 June and from that date resumed his work as a mechanic with SEMAC.

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