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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY-FIRST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 9 January 1956, at 10.45 a.m.

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Cameroons under French Administration (T/C.2/L.192) (continued)

PRESENT:

Chairman:

Mr. JAIPAL

India

Members:

Mr. HAMILTON

Australia

Mr. MASSONET

Belgium

Mr. de CAMARET

France

Mr. KOVALENKO

Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics

Also present:

Mr. LEFEVRE

Special Representative of the
Administering Authority
for the Trust Territory of
the Cameroons under French
Administration

Secretariat:

Mr. BERENDSEN

Secretary of the Committee

EXAMINATION OF PETITIONS CONCERNING THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE CAMEROONS UNDER
FRENCH ADMINISTRATION (T/C.2/L.192) (continued)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Lefevre, Special Representative of the Administering Authority for the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under French Administration, took a seat at the Committee table.

III. Petitions relating to certain incidents at Bafang (T/PET.5/380, 398, 403, 410)

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted that the Administering Authority's observations did not cover the complaints about the state of the Bafang dispensary in document T/PET.5/410. Further information would be welcome.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that there was a large 160-bed hospital at Bafang, with the most up-to-date equipment.

✓ In reply to questions by the CHAIRMAN and Mr. HAMILTON (Australia), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that the land to which the petitioners referred had been transferred to Mr. Mboda over fifteen years previously. The transfer had not, however, been questioned until quite recently and the demonstrations had come as a complete surprise to the Administering Authority. In his opinion the land question was being exploited for political purposes.

None of the demonstrators had had the use of the land before it had been transferred to Mr. Mboda, for they were all persons who had been living far from the Bafang Subdivision for many years. They were mostly Bamiléké, who were spread throughout the Territory, and they had arrived in cars and lorries.

To the best of his knowledge, none of the people arrested had been a member of the local community or a resident of Bafang.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) presumed that land disputes could be taken up by the local courts. He wondered whether any legal proceedings had been initiated.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) emphasized that there was really no land dispute; it had simply been a political demonstration.

The CHAIRMAN considered that the petitioners might nevertheless be advised that, so far as their complaint about Mr. Mboda's use of the land was concerned, they should seek redress through the normal legal channels in the Territory.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) observed that some of the petitioners had protested against the system of "classified forests". It might be well to draw their attention to the recommendation concerning deforestation and soil erosion adopted by the Trusteeship Council at its fifteenth session (A/2933, page 162).

The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would prepare a draft resolution taking into account the suggestions that had been made.

IV. Petitions complaining of conditions in the Babimbi Subdivision (T/PET.385, 393, 401, 409, 419, 464, 470, 526)

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) regretted that he was unable to give the Administering Authority's observations on the petitions in documents T/PET.5/526 and T/PET.5/401. An investigation into the allegations made in those documents had been ordered but it had been delayed by the far more serious events that had occurred in the Subdivision in May 1955.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should defer consideration of the petitions in question until the Administering Authority's observations were received.

It was so decided.

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked what measures the Administering Authority had taken to improve conditions in the Babimbi Subdivision in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Council at its thirteenth session.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that communications posed a serious problem in the Babimbi Subdivision, which was a mountainous forest area isolated to the north of the river Sanaga.

As far as social facilities were concerned the Subdivision was not particularly backward, although it was relatively backward compared with the neighbouring Subdivisions of Edea and Eseka. Approximately 50 per cent of the children of school age attended school - an excellent achievement in an area where communications were so difficult.

The Subdivision admittedly lagged behind the rest of the country in the matter of roads and bridges. The first part of a communications improvement programme had been undertaken three years previously with the building of the bridge over the Sanaga at Kikot. The related programme of road improvement had been under way since 1954. While the inhabitants were justified in complaining about the lack of roads, active measures were being adopted to improve the situation. Credits had been made available in 1954 and 1955 and three very important roads were being built which would bring all the inhabitants within twelve kilometres of a motor trail.

A related question that had been raised in a number of petitions was the need for a bridge at Sakbayeme. It should be stressed that the ferry disaster at that point had been the result of an accident and could not be attributed to the poor condition of the ferry, a powerful modern one. While the demand for a bridge was justified by the importance of the road link at Sakbayeme, it had been found that the cost of building the bridge would be prohibitive. The whole Ngambe area could be linked to Edea and Douala at less cost by building a new road to the north of the river. The necessary surveying had been carried out and much of the work had already been completed.

All the new roads to which he had referred would be open to vehicular traffic by the end of 1956 or the beginning of 1957.

In reply to a question by the CHAIRMAN, Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that Mr. Pierre Penda's appeal to the Court of Cassation had been rejected. To the best of his knowledge Mr. Penda had recently been released, having served his sentence.

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) remarked that petition T/PET.5/393 gave the impression that malaria was endemic in the Babimbi Subdivision. It would be interesting to hear what measures the Administering Authority was taking to combat malaria there.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that the Subdivision was mainly mountainous. It had a relatively healthy climate and malaria took a comparatively benign form. Given the difficult terrain, medical facilities were fairly satisfactory. The Health Services' reports did not indicate a particularly high incidence of malaria in the Subdivision, although there were of course some cases, as everywhere in the Region.

In reply to questions by Mr. HAMILTON (Australia), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the anti-anopheles campaign undertaken by the Health Services in conjunction with the World Health Organization and the International Children's Fund did not extend to the Babimbi Subdivision, which was not one of the most seriously affected areas. He could not predict whether those measures would subsequently be extended to cover it; that would depend on the credits available. It should be noted, however, that malaria control formed part of the Health Services' general work.

The CHAIRMAN wondered whether the inhabitants of the Babimbi Subdivision were in the habit of visiting the plains, contracting malaria there and then transmitting it to their neighbours at home.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied in the negative. The Subdivision was a southern forest zone and the richest areas for growing coffee and cocoa were situated on the flanks of the mountains, where plenty of running water was available. There was no need for the inhabitants to descend to the valley bottoms.

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that according to document T/PET.5/409 there were about 30,000 women in the Babimbi area and only one medical centre with forty-eight beds for maternity and surgical and other cases.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that there were only about 55,000 inhabitants in the whole of the Babimbi Subdivision; the figure of 30,000 women was a considerable exaggeration. There were two hospitals in the Subdivision, one at Sakbayeme and one at Ngambé; he could not say exactly how many maternity hospitals there were but he knew there were more than five. The maternity services were therefore about equivalent to those in other areas, with the exception of the highly developed urban areas.

Until recently the problem had been less to provide medical facilities than to get people to make use of them. Most women had refused to go to maternity hospitals because they had preferred their customary methods of childbirth. The Administration was glad to say that there had now been a change in that respect.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) hoped that when drawing up a draft resolution the Secretariat would refer to Trusteeship Council resolutions 1340 (XVI) and 1344 (XVI).

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) suggested that there should also be a reference to Trusteeship Council resolution 983 (XIII), which concerned the area in question.

The CHAIRMAN agreed; he thought the resolution could also note with interest the Special Representative's statement, especially with regard to the bridge over the Sanaga River, and should express the hope that the development projects by the Administering Authority would be carried out at an early date.

V. Petitions from the Bureau of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (T/PET.5/391) and from the Union des Syndicats confédérés du Cameroun (T/PET.5/427)

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the two petitions before the Committee related to the same incidents as were referred to in section III of document T/C.2/L.191. They concerned the searches which had been carried out following the Lawrence affair, referred to in document T/PET.5/523. A search warrant had been issued by a magistrate and the searches had been carried out in accordance with the regular procedure. The allegation that Mr. Bene Sende and others had been driven from their concessions at night was untrue. The documents seized at Mr. Andjongo's house during the search had been sent from Maroua to Yaoundé so that they could be opened in the presence of Mr. Andjongo.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that in preparing the draft resolution the Secretariat should take full note of the observations made by the Special Representative and that a reference should be made to the decisions taken with regard to the petitions grouped in section III of document T/C.2/L.191.

VI. Petition from the "Syndicat des Petits Planteurs" at Mandjap (T/PET.5/386)

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether it was true that fifty huts had been destroyed by wild animals and, if so, whether any compensation had been paid to the owners.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that an inquiry carried out in the Mandjap Region showed that there was no truth in the allegation that huts had been destroyed by wild animals. The petitioners also claimed that people had been killed and injured by elephants; for two or three years, however, no one had been injured and to the best of his belief no deaths had ever been caused by elephants in that part of the country. The people tended to exaggerate the depredations caused by elephants, because they wanted to obtain a licence in order to kill them for meat. Occasionally damage was caused in the area and in that event a professional hunter was given a licence to own a rifle. Not one African in fifty was bold enough to hunt elephants; each village had its own hunter and the number of firearms licences issued by the Administering Authority was more than adequate for the number of possible and competent elephant hunters.

Mr. Etcundi had not been deprived of a rifle; he had been refused a licence to purchase a twelve-bore gun, which would be no use for shooting elephants but could be used only for rabbits and small game.

There was no provision for compensation for huts destroyed by wild animals, because such damage was relatively rare; moreover, the huts in the forest area were mostly rebuilt every year and building costs were very low.

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Since the question of taxation was frequently raised in petitions, he pointed out that the personal tax rate was voted on and adopted by the Territorial Assembly. The Administration did not intervene except by moving proposals which could be freely amended by the Territorial Assembly. So far as he knew no proposal had so far been submitted to the Territorial Assembly to allocate credits to meet damage caused by wild animals to huts or plantations.

In reply to a question by the Chairman, he said he had no figures of the membership of the Syndicat des Petits Planteurs at Mandjap but since Mandjap was only a small hamlet the union probably consisted of not more than ten members.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether it was true, as stated in the petition, that the killing of elephants was punishable by five years' imprisonment and 100,000 francs fine.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) confirmed that the killing of elephants was prohibited by law and that the maximum penalties were as stated in the petition.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether any measures were taken by forest rangers to prevent elephants from coming too close to human habitations.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that there was no specific legislation on that point. When elephants appeared near a village, however, the inhabitants brought the matter to the attention of the Chief Subdivisional Officer or called in the nearest hunter. In a sparsely populated area it was difficult to get rid of elephants without killing them; African elephants were very wild and could not be frightened away.

The CHAIRMAN asked for the Special Representative's comments on the allegation that logs were transported through plantations, doing damage to the crops.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that on the contrary the timber companies built trails, which were used also by the inhabitants of the area. Generally speaking, the technical methods used for forestry exploitation would be unlikely to lead to such abuses as those mentioned in the petition.

In reply to a question by Mr. HAMILTON (Australia), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that people who felt they had been wrongly taxed could appeal to the Disputes Board (Conseil des Contentieux).

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) asked whether elephants were particularly numerous in the area in question.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that elephants were relatively numerous in the region in which Mandjap was situated. It was impossible, however, to form any estimate of the number, which planters always tended to exaggerate. The Administration was anxious to protect the species, which was becoming rare in the Southern Cameroons.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) understood that no compensation had ever been paid for damage to crops by elephants. He asked whether it was difficult for such payments to be made, to whom complaints in that respect were properly addressed and whether the Special Representative considered that the interests of the indigenous inhabitants in the matter were adequately safeguarded.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) did not know exactly how the compensation system worked, since it was hardly ever used in that case. He pointed out, however, that the petition under consideration did not establish that any significant damage had been done by elephants.

The only method of reducing depredations by elephants was by limited hunting, as was practised in the area. Elephants rapidly withdrew from a danger area to regions where there were few inhabitants and little cultivation. Hence damage in cultivated areas was becoming progressively more rare.

The CHAIRMAN said the Secretariat would prepare a draft resolution taking into account the observations of the Special Representative.

VII. Petition from the Local Committee of the Union des Populations du Cameroun at Mbanjok (T/PET.5/387)

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the Administering Authority had investigated the allegation that two persons had been torn to pieces by animals. One of the two names given in the petition was that of an

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old man who had recently died a natural death in the region, while it had been impossible to trace anybody bearing the other name. The allegation was therefore totally untrue. The ten authorizations issued for the purchase of arms by inhabitants would be amply sufficient for their protection.

Regarding the complaint about inadequate communications, he expressed the view that the road now being built near Mbanjok would reach that village before the end of the year.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would prepare a draft resolution taking into account the Special Representative's observations.

VIII. Petitions from Mr. Thomas Nolla (T/PET.5/388) and from Mr. Jacques Bouckel (T/PET.5/389)

In reply to a question by Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the first petitioner could not possibly have been kept in darkness during his imprisonment; his allegation that he had gone blind as a result was therefore unfounded. Persons detained in Cameroonian prisons were employed on light work outside or in the prison yard.

Mr. KOVALENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether it was true that the second petitioner had been kept in prison for a period longer than the ten months' term to which he had been sentenced.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that he would try to obtain the exact dates of the second petitioner's imprisonment and discharge.

Mr. de CAMARET (France) proposed that action by the Committee should be postponed until that information was available.

It was so decided.

IX. Petition from the Men of Ndogbianga Canton (T/PET.5/392)

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that the SAFA Company was operating under a permit authorizing it to exploit timber in the Canton. That permit in no way implied ownership of land nor did it in any way affect the inhabitants' right to plant and gather crops. Moreover, in its reply to an

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earlier petition (T/PET.5/261) the Administering Authority had clearly stated that the local inhabitants were allowed to collect a portion of the timber felled. They also obtained a tax rebate on the basis of the revenue collected from SAFA.

Mr. BERENDSEN (Secretary of the Committee) pointed out that the inhabitants of one village had been granted a rebate of 45,000 francs following the operations of SAFA.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) admitted that communications in the Canton were poor and that there was no road from Kpongo to Bafia. Economic considerations made it impossible to give priority to the building of such a road and the inhabitants would have to use the existing forestry footpaths for the time being.

Mr. BERENDSEN (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Administering Authority had already pointed out that there were some roads in the Edea Subdivision. Apart from existing roads, a number had been built by the forest companies and two dry roads were to be constructed under a four-year plan which was now in operation. As far as hospitals were concerned, Ndogbianga was 45 kilometres from a medical post and 20 kilometres from Sakbayeme, where there was a large mission hospital.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) suggested that the draft resolution to be prepared by the Secretariat should draw the petitioners' attention to the Trusteeship Council's recommendation for the classification of forests. The Administering Authority's views in that matter, which were shared by the Trusteeship Council, were either not clearly understood by the indigenous inhabitants or were misrepresented.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) agreed with the Australian representative. Since 1949, the Territorial Assembly had refused every application for the classification of forests, because such a measure was always unpopular. In the Western Cameroons, all non-classified forests were gradually disappearing and he appealed to the Committee to help the Administering Authority protect the country's forests.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.