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## THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CAMEROON

### ISSUE

Cameroon is a country where human rights violations are neither systematic nor flagrant, but where isolated miscarriages and abuses do occur. The 1992 parliamentary and presidential elections saw some regrettable incidents occur, including the house arrest of the opposition's main presidential candidate.

### BACKGROUND

Cameroon is emerging from a lengthy period of single-party government. During this period, President Biya concentrated in his hands all the decision-making powers and made all the bureaucratic and political appointments. Theoretically, the National Assembly had the power to table and to debate proposed legislation, but in reality, pieces contrary to the Government's wishes were doomed to failure. The need to reflect the country's ethnic composition was one of the few elements that kept the abuses from being more widespread. Fraud was rampant. Faced with a rising tide of protest from an ever-increasing opposition made up of journalists, students, politicians of various stripes and the man in the street, President Biya was obliged to open up the political spectrum in 1990.

The years 1991 and 1992 were difficult ones. Violations of human rights rose with the tide of protest. The legislation concerning political parties in 1991, the campaign of phantom towns, ethnic and language disturbances, youth protests, the harassment of individuals and the failure of the tripartite meeting all contributed toward the creation of a climate of political turbulence that did little to further human rights.

There were instances of fraud and manipulation during the elections, but this did not prevent a majority of the population from voting for the parties and presidential candidates of the opposition.

However, since the electoral system allows a multiplicity of parties and candidates, the old single party and the former authoritarian President registered brief victories. The Opposition, feeling swindled, expressed its disagreement, triggering a repressive reaction on the part of the Government, which decreed a state of emergency in one region, placed John Fru Ndi, the second presidential candidate, under house arrest, and arrested journalists and opponents. The subsequent appointment of a national union government has quietened the internal situation somewhat. However, international funding agencies are waiting for concrete proof that Cameroon does indeed plan to return to a policy and to practices more respectful of human rights. Discontinuation of the state of emergency of December 31 was the first step in the right direction.