

# CCDHR

## Cameroon Center for Democracy Human Rights

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### Highlights of CCDHR Achievements for the Year 2010

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The year 2010 was significant in the four year existence of the Cameroon Center for Democracy and Human Rights, *formerly* Progressive Initiative for Cameroon (PICAM). In spite of this relatively short existence; CCDHR played a critical role in advocating for democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, good governance, and public accountability in Cameroon. The organization remained committed to these principles and was unwavering in its criticism and publicity of abuses perpetuated on the people of Cameroon. We have provided below is a brief portrait of our activities during the year 2010 and how these helped elevate discussions on democratic governance to the forefront of public debates on Cameroon.

#### **1. CamLaws**

In 2010, hundreds of visitors to our website accessed important Cameroonian legislations and relevant international instruments. We are happy to have been a resource to these many people and are encouraged to do even more. Among the most accessed Cameroonian legislations on our website in the year 2010 were the *Law on the Creation of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM)*, the *Law on the Orientation of Decentralization*, and the *Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code*. Our website will continue to hosts important documents including various Cameroon legislations and links to important United Nations and African Union conventions and declarations. This year, we will continue to update this webpage to make our website more resourceful to everyone researching issues covering democracy, human rights, good governance, and public accountability in Cameroon. As part of our equal justice for all and access to information drive, we belief this effort facilitated access to important national and international laws by bringing them closer to those who needed them most. To visit our CamLaws page, please go to <http://www.ccdhr.org/cameroonlaws.htm>.

#### **2. Research/Publications**

Besides regular educational press releases and statements, PICAM remained very active in scholarly pursuit on democracy and human rights through the publication of the *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights (CJDHR)*. CJDHR was created to address the real and critical absence of a reliable academic legal publication in Cameroon, and the shortage of a repository of literature specifically dealing with democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, and public accountability in Cameroon. Most importantly, the journal is freely accessible online to everyone without any subscription. This ambitious project by CCDHR just rounded its fourth year with the publication of Vol. 4, No. 2 in December 2010.

CCDHR is proud to state that our initial evaluation of the impact of the journal is very positive. Many Cameroonian writers, students, faculties, researchers, and other professionals view the Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights as a viable alternative to international journals for several reasons. CJDHR provides a clear guideline and easy house style; CJDHR is freely availability and has wider accessibility among Cameroonians; and

CJDHR is focused on Cameroon thereby creating a direct impact on authors' fatherland where such knowledge is most deserved. CJDHR has given several Cameroonian faculties and researchers the opportunity to have their articles published and read by a wider Cameroonian audience. Meanwhile, CJDHR has tremendously enriched the repository of available writings on democracy, human rights, and governance in Cameroon. To visit the journal website, please go to <http://www.cjdhr.org>.

### **3. Event/Conference**

Last year, CCDHR organized its first international event under the theme "International Conference on the State of Democracy in Cameroon 50 Years after Independence: Understanding the Dynamics and Fostering the Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in Cameroon". The conference held on March 6, 2010 at American University, Washington DC, and drew participants from across the United States, Africa, and Europe.

The conference entailed a thorough reflection of 50 years of independence of Cameroon and presented an important and necessary opportunity to address the gaping lack of democracy and human rights within the political structures in Cameroon. It also entailed a critical evaluation of the democratization process in Cameroon with a view to reinvigorate national and international debate on Cameroon's democratization efforts. The conference speakers were enlightened professionals and the discussions were extremely constructive.

At the end of the conference CCDHR presented a 14 point conference declaration. Among other issues, this declaration called for a sober reflection on the enormous challenges facing Cameroon; called for the release of all political prisoners in Cameroon; recognized the resilience of Cameroonian youths in the face of incredible odds; called on political parties to exhibit greater democracy through avenues for leadership changes; called for the immediate dissolution of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM); called on President Paul Biya to retire at the end of his current term in office in 2011; and recommended the establishment of a transitional government in Cameroon in 2011. To visit the conference webpage, please go to <http://www.ccdhr.org/events/democracy/home.htm>.

### **4. Position Statements**

As an independent organization committed to promoting democracy, human rights, and the building of a strong and effective civil society in Cameroon, CCDHR has never been shy of making public pronouncements when it considers that such statements are most deserved. The year 2010 was no different as we made two important position statements directly relevant to democratic governance in Cameroon.

On October 4, 2010, CCDHR issued a public appeal to "*Cameroonians to Register to Vote*". This position statement was not only timely, but the result of persistent demand from many stakeholders requesting to know CCDHR's position on the prevailing debate in the country on whether Cameroonians should register to vote. This statement recognized that voting is not only our right, but also our responsibility as citizens. It affirmed that change occurs because people step-up and take part in the democratic process. To read this position statement, please go to <http://www.ccdhr.org/press-releases/2010/10-04-CamerooniansShouldRegisterToVote.htm>.

On November 16, 2010, CCDHR issued another position statement exposing the “*Sickening Reality of Democracy and Governance in Cameroon*”. This statement was in response to a high level delegation sent by the Government of Cameroon to the United States to lobby various foreign governments and inter-governmental organizations in an effort to gain eligibility for assistance by the US Millennium Challenge Corporation. CCDHR’s statement was therefore an alternate presentation regarding the situation of democracy and governance in Cameroon. To read this position statement, please go to <http://www.picam.org/press-releases/2010/11-16-TheRealityofDemocracyandGovernanceinCameroon.htm>.

## **5. Policy Paper/Campaign**

CCDHR staffs work on a daily basis to identify the most considerate challenges facing the Cameroonian society. CCDHR Policy Papers seek to elevate issues of national challenge to the forefront of public discuss and influence public policies and actions in ways that address the common good of all Cameroonians. CCDHR's Campaigns on the other hand are designed to give a coherent public voice to issues confronting the Cameroonian society in recognition of the fact that true accountability cannot be achieved in governance if the people are not given an opportunity to voice their concerns.

On April 15, 2010, CCDHR issued a policy paper on “*The Need to Recognize Dual Citizenship in Cameroon: Cameroon's Current Nationality Law is Unnecessarily Restrictive*”. This was immediately followed by the launching of CCDHR’s “*Campaign for the Recognition of Dual Citizenship in Cameroon*”. The policy paper and subsequent campaign were premised on the fact that the negative ramifications of prohibiting Cameroonian nationals from acquiring concurrent foreign citizenship span a broad and deep set of quandaries stretching from personal and family trauma, to macroeconomic inclinations, which affect the potentials of the country and those of its nationals.

CCDHR recognized that globalization has created the possibility of ‘global citizens’ and world migration data demonstrate the undeniable presence of individuals who may today call two countries home. It noted that current Cameroon nationality law fails to take advantage of world economic integration trends and interrelationship between countries. Using the policy paper and campaign, CCDHR called on the Government of Cameroon to urgently reconsider Cameroon nationality law as it would be more beneficial to the country and its people to allow Cameroonians to maintain concurrent nationalities.

To visit our campaigns page, please go to <http://www.ccdhr.org/campaigns/home.htm>.

To visit our policy papers page, please go to <http://www.ccdhr.org/policy-papers/home.htm>.

## **6. CCDHR Press Releases**

The primary objectives of CCDHR press releases are to inform, educate, publicize, and advocate. We INFORM the public about the prevailing circumstances pertaining to the principles we promote and defend through our programs. We EDUCATE the public on the laws and regulations in force and what they ought to be with specific reference to the situation at hand. We PUBLICIZE violations of the principles of democracy and human rights on the belief that the timely denunciation and exposure of violations is essential to prevent abuses from escalating or continue unnoticed. We ADVOCATE for respect of the principles of

democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, and public accountability because these will serve the greater good of the people of Cameroon.

Throughout the year 2010, our staffs worked assiduously on a daily basis to produce logical and forceful press releases on several pertinent issues relevant to democratic governance in Cameroon. For instance, in response to President Paul Biya's annual youth day message in February 2010, CCDHR challenged the President to actually start implementing the ideas he has been reciting to the youths since ascending to power in 1982. CCDHR noted that Cameroonian youths continue to live in deplorable conditions from chronic poverty and lack of employment opportunities, and they need a leader with a vision for them, not empty annual youth day rhetoric. CCDHR noted that President Biya's has led the once prosperous Cameroon into a state of decay, where youths have no possibility of contributing to decision making and the management of state affairs.

In April 2010, CCDHR strongly condemned the death of imprisoned journalist, Germain Ngota in the notorious Kondengui prison in Yaounde, and called for a transparent and independent investigation into his death. CCDHR used this opportunity to expose and publicize the fact that acts of mistreatment of prisoners of conscience - including torture, starvation, detention in filthy cells, denials of medical attention, and other crude forms of dehumanizing treatments were routine occurrences at the Kondengui prison facility and other prisons across the country. CCDHR also called for the immediate and unconditional release of other prisoners of conscience still languishing in prisons across Cameroon, including Harrys Robert Mintya of *Le Devoir Newspaper* and Serge Sabouang of *La Nation Newspaper* who had been arrested and imprisoned alongside Germain Ngota.

In May 2010, CCDHR indicated its supports to the broad interpretation of the mandate of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate and prosecute atrocities that may amount to crimes against humanity, including acts of violence conducted as part of an electoral process. This followed remarks by ICC Chief Prosecutor, Louis Moreno Ocampo at a curtain-raiser conference ahead of the ICC review conference in Kampala, during which he noted that rigging elections is often the root cause of violent conflicts and the ensuing commission of atrocities against innocent civilians in the contest for political power, a matter for which the ICC is moving to deal with. He revealed that the ICC plans to prosecute politicians who rig elections and those who use the power of incumbency to fraudulently stay in power, pointing out that politicians who commit crime through the electoral process may end up facing justice in The Hague instead of getting into office. CCDHR applauded this prospect of justice and called on the ICC to take a closer look at Cameroon.

In September 2010, CCDHR condemned the use of lawlessness and intimidation by the Government of Cameroon as a political strategy to create fear among Cameroonians. This followed a raid on the business premises of Hon. Paul Ayah situated along the Mile 17-Muea road in Buea by armed uniform police officers, the disruption of business activities, the brutalization of business personnel, and the firing of gun shots on August 29, 2010. CCDHR pointed out the fact that Hon. Paul Ayah was the only CPDM Member of Parliament who opposed and remained outspoken against the April 2008 amendment of the Cameroon Constitution, which eliminated Presidential term limit and effectively paved the way for Paul

Biya to rule Cameroon for life. Because of his continued opposition to the manipulation of the country's constitution, Hon. Paul Ayah suffered a great deal - including harassment in 2009 at the hands of elements of the Mobile Intervention Unit along the Buea-Kumba road and the subsequent grounding of his car for several weeks by the Police. CCDHR noted that the vandalism on Hon. Paul Ayah's business premise appeared to be another calculated attempt to create lawlessness, fear, and intimidate the MP to tow party line on every issue.

Following President Barack Obama's address to the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, CCDHR issued a press release on September 24, 2010, alluding to President Obama's messages to the world's dictators as a direct appeal to Paul Biya to reverse his authoritarian tendencies in Cameroon. Among the various themes of his UN speech, President Obama dwelled on civil liberties, democracy, human rights, and good governance, while forcefully denouncing dictators of the world. CCDHR noted that Cameroonians are well acquainted to tyranny and the speech of President Obama was an added impetus to the persistent calls by the Cameroonian civil society for the respect of human rights and democratic principles in Cameroon. In his speech, President Obama also publicly denounced constitutional maneuvers that have led to the elimination of Presidential term limits. CCDHR pointed to the fact that this was a direct reprimand to Paul Biya and the illegal constitutional move forced upon the People of Cameroon in April 2008. CCDHR then used this opportunity to reiterate its unequivocal opposition to the 2008 constitutional amendment in Cameroon that effectively gave President Paul Biya the possibility of seeking endless terms as President.

## **CONCLUSION**

We start the year 2011 acknowledging that the challenges for Cameroon abound. Therefore, the resources, commitment, and leadership of every Cameroonian is indispensable to making Cameroon a beckon of envy to others around the world. With the prospect of Presidential elections in 2011, CCDHR will continue to advocate for the rights of every Cameroonian to cast a ballot in a free, fair, and transparent election, and to have that ballot counted as cast. We have questioned the integrity of the electoral process in Cameroon and we hold strongly that very little has been done to ameliorate the system. CCDHR will continue to cry foul as long as the rights of Cameroonians to free democratic participation remain suppressed.