

Update on the “No Babies Behind the Bar” Campaign

200 days of arbitrary detention already!

Demand for the immediate release of mothers detained with their babies at Bamenda Central Prison - Cameroon

UPDATE ON THE DETENTION OF BABIES AT BAMENDA CENTRAL PRISON

A – CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ARREST

According to well documented facts, on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, around 11 a.m., Mr. Julius WEYANG, a Mechanic at the Upper Noun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA) Ndop, was arrested without a warrant or judicial order at his Ndop garage. He was taken to Bamessing Village, where 06 other unarmed family members, including 02 newborn babies, were also arrested by defense and security forces.

The arrestees were detained at Ndop Gendarmerie Brigade in Ngoketunjia division, North west region for about 21 days. Those arrested include:

- Mrs. Seraph WOH (68)
- Julius WEYANG (39)
- Joycelyn NDUM (22, mother of a 4-month-old baby)
- Blanche YOCNTEH (22, mother of a 3-month-old baby)
- Justine BECHU (24).

These arrests followed the kidnapping of about 14 unarmed civilian travelers by an armed separatist group under "General A Nova Die" command earlier that day, around 7 a.m., at Sabga Hill, Turbah Sub division, North West Region. The kidnapped civilians were later released after ransom payment, except for one person identified as a Gendarme Officer serving at Ndop Company Gendarmerie.

The aforementioned unarmed civilians, including two (2) newborn babies, arrested by Cameroon defense and security forces are all relatives of "General A Nova Die" and played no role in the kidnapping of the 14 civilians.

The Senior Divisional Officer of Ngoketunjia division, **Mr. KONGEH Henderson QWETONG**, when urgently seized of the matter by the Organization "Conscience Africaine", first indicated that he had called upon benevolent mediators, including Catholic Reverend Father **Michael Mua** and Pastor **Vincent**, to resolve the matter peacefully, before threatening to publicly execute the arrested civilians if the gendarme was not released, as had always been the case with some unarmed persons arrested in connection to the Anglophone crisis at his jurisdiction.

The seven unarmed civilians, including two babies aged 3 and 4 months while arbitrarily detained at Ndop Gendarmerie Brigade were subjected to inhuman treatments, deprived for several days of any contact with their families and friends.

On the morning of **Tuesday 8 July 2025**, the lifeless body of the kidnapped gendarme was found near Mile 25, Ndop along the road. In reaction, the army invaded Bamessing village again, killing two alleged armed separatists, one of whom was burned alive beyond recognition, and their bodies were exposed at the Total Filling Station in Ndop.

In **Prefectoral Order No. 213/PO/L31/CA/PS/2025** of 27 June 2025, the Senior Divisional Officer ordered the **administrative detention** of one **Justine BECHANGU** at Bamenda Central Prison instead of Ndop-Prison, due to temporal closure of Ndop Principal Prison for a renewable period of 15 days on grounds of “deliberate and voluntary financing and complicity in banditry in Bamessing village, Ndop Subdivision, including highway robbery on National Road No. 11, illegal taxation of the population, kidnapping of passengers for ransom, hostage taking, physical and psychological torture of victims and their families, etc.” Though the fact finding mission clearly observed that none of the persons arrested bore the name Justine BECHANGU.

To express their dissatisfaction with the continued detention of the seven unarmed civilians, including babies, armed separatists at Ngoketunjia, Bui and Donga Mantung Divisions, North West region jointly declared an indefinite lockdown, leading to paralysis of movement and economic activity, further worsening the suffering of vulnerable populations already affected by the armed conflict.

The armed Separatists through a voice message circulating online also threatened to kidnap relatives of members of the defence and security forces in Ngoketunjia division if the seven unarmed civilians were not released promptly, forcing many such families to flee their villages.

The "No Babies Behind the Bar" Consortium confirms that the arbitrarily detained persons, showing numerous injuries from torture inflicted by defence and security forces, were eventually brought before the State Prosecutor (Cocommissaire du Gouvernement) at the Bamenda Military Tribunal after about 21 days of abusive custody. The detainees were forced to sign confession statements under duress without reading them and equally deprived of proper medical care. They were tortured using machete blows, simulated drowning, beatings with batons and boots etc. The torture was under the authority of the Senior Divisional Officer of Ngoketunjia.

By an order of pre-trial detention for six renewable months issued by a State Prosecutor at the Bamenda Military Tribunal, the seven unarmed civilians are currently detained at Bamenda Central Prison after being charged with offenses such as failure to report, harbouring offenders, lack of national ID card, although they were in no way involved in the activities of “General A Nova Die” and his men.

Mandela Center International affirms that these acts constitute illegal arrest, arbitrary detention, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, which gravely violate human dignity and are prohibited by all international human rights instruments ratified by the State of Cameroon.

B – ACTIONS TAKEN

- **Public Statement**

In Information Note No. 127/MCI of 14 July 2025, Mandela Center International, on behalf of the “No Babies Behind the Bar” Consortium, firmly demanded that Cameroonian authorities conduct investigations in accordance with national law and transparency, in line with the 2022 Istanbul Protocol, and called for the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained persons and the immediate

dismissal of the Senior Divisional Officer of Ngoketunjia, Mr. KONGEH Henderson QWETONG, for serious misconduct and repeated failure to fulfil his sovereign duties.

- **Complaint lodged Against Defence and Security Forces**

A complaint was filed by Mandela Center International with the Government Commissioner at the Bamenda Military Tribunal against:

1. Commander of the Ndop Territorial Gendarmerie Brigade,
2. Officers serving at the Ndop Territorial Gendarmerie Brigade (unidentified),
3. Mr. KONGEH Henderson QWETONG, Senior Divisional Officer of Ngoketunjia division, and
4. The State of Cameroon (Ministry of Defence – civilly liable)

For the following offenses:

- Abuse of office (Article 140)
- Torture (Article 277-3)
- Arrest and unlawful detention (Article 291)
- Breach of orders (Article 40)
- Complicity (Article 97)
- And any other offences revealed during investigation

The complaint was registered under No. 14 at the office of the State Prosecutor on 14 August 2025, and no action has been taken to date.

- **Application for Release**

On 25 November 2025, Barrister Gaby Ambo, Executive Director of Finders Group Initiative, a civil society organization based in Bamenda and member of the Consortium, filed an application before the President of the Bamenda Military Tribunal requesting release of the detainees, stressing that under Cameroonian law and international conventions ratified by Cameroon, criminal liability is individual.

- **Official launch of the “No Babies Behind the Bar” Campaign**

The Consortium of CSOs, led by **All Women Together (AWT)** and **Conscience Africaine**, launched a large scale international campaign demanding the release of mothers and infants arbitrarily detained. An international petition was initiated; **5,000 campaign leaflets** were printed and distributed; dedicated Facebook pages and other social media spaces were created. AWT leveraged the **UN 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence** campaign to amplify “**No Babies Behind the Bar**”.

- **Second Fact-Finding Mission**

On Tuesday 23rd December 2025, a mission of the Consortium led by Conscience Africaine, Mandela Center International, and Nouveaux Droits de l’Homme travelled to Bamenda and confirmed that the victims had still not been thoroughly questioned by the military investigating judge, whose chambers were allegedly demanding about 1.5 million CFA francs per victim to hear their cases and bring them to trial.

The mission also observed that the mothers and their babies are detained in deplorable conditions and that the complaint filed against the Gendarmes for torture and illegal arrest has not progressed due to instructions from the military hierarchy, thereby constituting a serious denial of justice.

• Consortium Demands

The national and international human rights NGOs Consortium:

- Demands the immediate and unconditional release of Joycelyn Ndum and her 4-month-old baby, Blanche Yocntek and her 3-month-old baby, as well as Mrs. Seraph Woh, Julius Weyang, Justine Bechu, and the other illegally detained civilians
- Calls on Cameroonian authorities to end illegal arrests and arbitrary detention of breastfeeding mothers and mothers accompanied by infants
- Issues a strong appeal to Cameroonian and global citizens to massively sign the international petition for the immediate release of the victims.

No Reaction from Judicial Authorities of the North West region

To date, **no action** has been observed either from the State Prosecutor or from the President of the Bamenda Military Tribunal.

The Consortium is therefore considering bringing the **Head of State** and relevant Cameroonian authorities, including the Ministers of Justice and of Family Affairs, before their responsibilities.

List of Consortium Member Organisations

- All Women Together (AWT)
- Conscience Africaine
- Mandela Center International (MCI)
- Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme
- *Réseau des Défenseurs des droits Humains en Afrique Centrale* (REDHAC)
- Positive Generation
- Hope Rise Africa
- *Fondation Internationale pour la Paix, les Droits de l'Homme et la Démocratie* (FIPADHD)
- Finders Group Initiative (FGI)
- New Human Rights (NHR USA)
- Community Initiative for Peace, Social Cohesion and Development Association (CIPSCDA)