



# CAMEROON'S SECRET TORTURE CHAMBERS:

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND WAR CRIMES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST  
BOKO HARAM.

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



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*Cover photo:* Illustration of "the swing", one of the torture positions used by Cameroon security forces.

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# GLOSSARY

WORD	DESCRIPTION
<b>ACHPR</b>	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BIR</b>	Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide
<b>CAT</b>	Centre anti terroriste
<b>DGRE</b>	Direction Générale de la Recherche Extérieure
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ESIR</b>	Equipes spéciales d'intervention rapide
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>MNJTf</b>	African Union-mandated Multi-National Joint Task Force
<b>SED</b>	Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, the armed group Boko Haram has killed over 1,500 civilians in the Far North region of Cameroon, through a series of brutal and often indiscriminate attacks, in addition to its kidnapping of women and girls and its widespread looting and destruction of property. Amnesty International believes that Boko Haram has been engaged in a non-international armed conflict with the Cameroonian security forces since at least 2014.

Faced with such atrocities, Amnesty International believes that the Government of Cameroon has the right and duty to protect civilians from attack, yet must also respect the human rights of the population – and Cameroon's obligations under national and international law – in doing so.

Reports published by Amnesty International in 2015 and 2016 highlighted how Cameroon's authorities and security forces often failed to respect these obligations, committing human rights violations and crimes under international law on a significant scale, including with arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, enforced disappearances, torture and deaths in custody.

This report delves deeper, documenting the cases of 101 individuals who, between March 2013 and March 2017, were held incommunicado, tortured, and sometimes killed by Cameroonian security forces in facilities run by the military and intelligence services. Despite such practices being in violation of both national and international law, the use of torture in Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram has become widespread and routine, and practiced with impunity. These constitute violations of international human rights law, as well as violations of international humanitarian law that amount to war crimes.

In all the cases investigated, victims of torture were individuals who had been accused – often with little or no evidence – of supporting Boko Haram. The majority were Cameroonian men aged 18 to 45 years old from the Far North region, with the Kanuri being the ethnic group most commonly targeted, but victims also included women, minors and people with physical and mental disabilities. In most cases, individuals were arrested either by soldiers from the regular Army, its elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide, BIR), or by unidentified men in civilian clothes – always without a warrant, and rarely providing a reason for the arrest.

Once arrested, the individuals were taken either directly or indirectly to one of a number of unofficial detention facilities, in which they were held without any access to the outside world, before eventually being transferred to a formal prison to await trial. The average time spent detained incommunicado was 32 weeks, though some were held up to two and a half years, and it is in these facilities, during these periods, that torture was regularly carried out.

Victims of torture described at least 24 different methods used to beat, break and humiliate those subjected to it, usually with the aim of forcing confessions or providing information, but also to punish, terrify or intimidate. Most commonly, detainees were severely beaten with various objects including electric cables, machetes and wooden sticks, forced into stress positions and suspended from poles in ways that caused extreme pain in the joints and muscles, and subjected to drowning. Most victims were subjected to a mixture of these methods on multiple occasions, while also suffering inhumane conditions of detention and the deprivation of food, water and medical treatment. The severity of torture has led to many deaths, with 32 of

the 101 victims saying that they had witnessed the deaths of others following torture.

The details of the torture techniques are chilling. In a common stress position described as 'the goat', the detainee's arms and legs are tied together behind his back and he is left on the ground and beaten. In a common suspension technique known as 'the swing', the victim's arms and legs are again tied behind his back, before he is lifted and suspended on a bar fitted between two poles or tripods, and further beaten. A number of victims bore the visible scars of this torture, with analysis by a forensic doctor providing Amnesty International additional corroboration of their testimonies. When provided details of such practices, a representative of the Minister of Defence denied it was torture, insisting it was merely "enhanced interrogation" ("exploitation approfondie").

Many victims were able to describe where they were held, and using multiple accounts corroborated with satellite imagery and other photographic and video evidence, Amnesty International was able to identify 20 sites where people were subjected to torture. In particular, these included two sites where torture was carried out in 80 of the 101 cases documented: the BIR headquarters in Salak, near Maroua, and a facility in Yaoundé called 'DGRE Lac' run by the General Directorate of External Research (Direction Générale de la Recherche Extérieure, DGRE), not far from the National Assembly.

Amnesty International's research also identified locations not usually associated with the security forces. Video evidence and witness testimonies identified, for example, a private residence in Kolofata and a school in Fotokol that have been used for illegal detention and torture.

Other facilities have also been used, including BIR bases in Kousseri, Mora, Kolofata, Fotokol, Waza and Ngaoundere, as well as another DGRE site near the military airport. Reports of torture in the 'Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense' (SED) and the base of the Presidential Guard in Yaoundé were also reported, as well as in stations of the police's special rapid intervention units known as "Equipes spéciales d'intervention rapide" (ESIR) in Kousseri and Maroua, in addition to other police and gendarmerie stations across the country.

In recent years, the Cameroonian authorities and security forces had denied that individuals were detained in military bases such as Salak, yet in February 2017, the Minister of Communications and representatives of the Ministry of Defence told Amnesty International that individuals were indeed being held in Salak. The government officials claimed that that it was legal to do so, but under Cameroonian and international law, however, people must be taken directly to recognized police or gendarmerie stations and must have immediate access to their lawyer and family.

Amnesty International's research also highlights the regular presence of military personnel from some of Cameroon's international military partners at the BIR's base at Salak, over the period where torture and incommunicado detention was routinely practiced. Although there is no evidence to suggest that any foreign military personnel from international partners were involved in the commission of torture, witness testimonies, analysis of photos and video gathered from social media and US military tendering documents all evidence the regular presence of US personnel at the Salak base, including some who happen to be accommodated within the camp. Amnesty International researchers also directly observed the presence of French personnel during one of their visits at Salak. The organisation is thus calling on the US and French governments to investigate the degree to which its personnel may have been aware of the widespread practices of illegal detention and torture at the base, and whether they took any measures to report it to their hierarchy and to the Cameroonian authorities.

Amnesty International believes that the evidence contained in this report provides a sufficient basis for Cameroonian authorities to initiate independent and impartial investigations into potential individual and command responsibility for crimes of torture, incommunicado detention and other human rights violations committed by various military officers and security service agents.

Indeed, many victims were also able to identify those that tortured them. While torture was usually directly carried out by mid-ranking BIR officers and DGRE agents, witness testimonies and analysis of the layout of the bases suggest that it would be improbable for high-ranking officers at Salak or DGRE Lac to be unaware of what was happening. In Salak, for example, over 50 victims were able to identify the room where they were most commonly tortured, which further analysis shows to be in the same building as offices used by senior officers, while cells where up to 70 people were detained at a time were located just 110 metres away from

the same offices. Higher-ranking DGRE officers were also identified by multiple victims as being involved in interrogations and torture.

This report concludes that incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment of people held on suspicion of supporting Boko Haram are widespread and routine in BIR 8 and DGRE-run facilities across Cameroon, as well as in other detention centres run by the Cameroonian security forces. The testimonies collected by Amnesty International from former detainees are disturbing and evoke a system designed to humiliate, degrade, and sometimes kill those trapped inside. These violations are committed in a climate of impunity. To Amnesty's knowledge, there have been no investigations into these practices, nor efforts to prevent such occurrences and to prosecute and punish the perpetrators.

Amnesty International has always sought to discuss our findings with the Cameroonian authorities to incorporate their responses and discuss ways to prevent violations from being committed. In addition to requesting to meet government representatives during field research missions, and sharing our findings with officials ahead of the publication of our reports in 2015 and 2016, the main findings of this report were also sent in writing to the authorities on 20 April 2017. An Amnesty International delegation also travelled to Yaoundé between 20-26 May 2017 seeking to meet government representatives to discuss our report, yet unfortunately no representative agreed to meet, no written response was provided, and the authorities even banned an Amnesty International press conference and civil society event.

Amnesty International believes that the Government of Cameroon has the right and duty to protect citizens from the atrocities committed by Boko Haram, but that its efforts to protect civilians should respect Cameroon's obligations under national law and international human rights and humanitarian law. Amnesty International also notes President Paul Biya's commitments to ensure that efforts to combat Boko Haram be carried out in full respect of Cameroon's international human rights obligations, and therefore calls on the Cameroonian authorities to, among others:

- Publicly order the security forces to end the practice of detaining and interrogating people outside of official detention sites, including BIR bases and DGRE facilities;
- End the practice of incommunicado detention, including those taking place on the premises of an officially recognized detention facility, and ensure all detainees can freely access a lawyer of their choice, their family and medical care;
- Grant independent international monitors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), unhindered access to all persons deprived of their liberty, and allow them to carry out unannounced inspection visits to all detention facilities, including military bases and buildings operated by the secret services, to investigate and monitor conditions;
- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture, incommunicado detention and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in all places of detention and ensure that guards, interrogators and other detention officials who are reasonably suspected of responsibility for the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners face disciplinary measures and criminal prosecution in fair trials before civilian courts without recourse to the death penalty.

Amnesty International also calls for action to be taken by Cameroon's international partners, ensuring that human rights violations and crimes under international law including torture and incommunicado detention are prioritized in discussions with Cameroonian authorities, and that any military co-operation with Cameroon, including training or technical advice, does not contribute to the perpetration of human rights violations. This is especially the case for countries including France and the USA who have provided military assistance to Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram, and who may have military personnel present on sites where torture is carried out.



# 2. BACKGROUND

Since 2014, the armed group Boko Haram has committed serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in the Far North region of Cameroon. Boko Haram insurgents have killed and abducted hundreds of civilians, attacked and burned towns and villages, looted and destroyed homes and properties<sup>1</sup>. Amnesty International considers that the situation in the Far North region of Cameroon has constituted a non-international armed conflict since at least 2014<sup>2</sup>.

Despite military pressure by both the Cameroonian and regional security forces including the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF)<sup>3</sup>, Boko Haram continued its violent attacks against civilians, showing its resilience and capacity to mobilize fighters and resources. Between July 2016 and June 2017, Boko Haram conducted at least 120 attacks, including 23 suicide bombings, in the Far North region of Cameroon, killing over 150 civilians<sup>4</sup>. For instance, on 19 May 2017, at about 6 am, in the town of Mora, located some 60 km from Maroua, the main city of the Far North region, two young female suicide bombers detonated their explosives, killing one civilian<sup>5</sup>. On 2 June 2017, in the town of Kolofata, located near the border between Cameroon and Nigeria, two female suicide bombers blew themselves up at a camp for internally displaced people, killing at least nine civilians and wounding dozens<sup>6</sup>.

As a result of Boko Haram's abuses, over 223,000 people from Cameroon, mostly women and children, have fled their homes and are now internally displaced across the Far North region. Cameroon also hosts approximately 63,000 refugees who have fled the armed group's attacks in Nigeria<sup>7</sup>.

Amnesty International has documented and repeatedly condemned Boko Haram's abuses and recommended that Cameroonian authorities use all lawful means to ensure civilians are protected, as well as to investigate promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially all reliable allegations of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations and abuses and crimes under international law by the armed group.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, Right cause, wrong means: Human rights violated and justice denied in Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram, (Index: AFR 17/4260/2016), [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/4260/2016/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/4260/2016/en/) (hereinafter: Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means); Amnesty International, Human rights under fire: Attacks and violations in Cameroon's struggle with Boko Haram, 16 September 2015, (Index: AFR 17/1991/2015), [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/1991/2015/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/1991/2015/en/) (hereinafter: Amnesty International, Human Rights Under Fire)

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, Human Rights Under Fire, p. 12

<sup>3</sup> The Communiqué of the 484th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) at the level of Heads of State and Government, held in Addis Ababa on 29 January 2015, authorized the deployment of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising up to 7,500 military and non-military staff, for an initial and renewable period of 12 months. See more at: [www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-484.com.boko.haram.29.1.2015.pdf](http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-484.com.boko.haram.29.1.2015.pdf). The PSC's position was endorsed by the AU Assembly at the AU 24th Summit, held in Addis Ababa on 30 and 31 January 2015. MNJTF was established in 1998 to counter transnational crime in the Lake Chad basin region, but was mostly dormant until 2012, when it was re-activated in order to deal with Boko Haram

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International timeline of Boko Haram attacks in the Far North of Cameroon, updated on 06 June 2017, based on media reports and information collected following field missions in the Far North of Cameroon.

<sup>5</sup> Cameroon-info.net, Terrorisme: Trois morts dans un attentat-suicide à Mora (Extrême-Nord), 19 May 2017, [www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-terrorisme-trois-morts-dans-un-attentat-suicide-a-mora-extreme-nord-289218.html](http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-terrorisme-trois-morts-dans-un-attentat-suicide-a-mora-extreme-nord-289218.html)

<sup>6</sup> Al Jazeera, Double bombing kills nine refugees in Kolofata camp, 2 June 2017, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/twin-bomb-blasts-kill-refugees-kolofata-camp-170602120910863.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/twin-bomb-blasts-kill-refugees-kolofata-camp-170602120910863.html)

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, Situation de l'Extrême-Nord du Cameroun: Sommaire des populations déplacées, 21 April 2017 [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CMR\\_EN\\_Situation\\_Extr%C3%AAme\\_Nord\\_21\\_Avril\\_2017%20%282%29.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CMR_EN_Situation_Extr%C3%AAme_Nord_21_Avril_2017%20%282%29.pdf)

However, in seeking to protect civilians from brutal attacks launched by Boko Haram insurgents, Cameroon's authorities and security forces, including the DGRE and the BIR<sup>8</sup>, have committed systematic human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law<sup>9</sup>.

Previous reports by the United Nations, as well as those published by Amnesty International in September 2015 and July 2016, have outlined the human rights violations committed by Cameroonian security forces, including arbitrary arrests, illegal and incommunicado detention, torture, enforced disappearances, extra-judicial executions, inhumane detention conditions and unfair trials. In these publications, as well as in meetings with and letters to authorities since 2015, Amnesty International has highlighted a number of recommendations and called for action to be taken to end these practices, prevent future violations and bring perpetrators to justice.

Following these calls, there have been a few examples where progress has been made, such as the acquittal and release of a number of individuals arbitrarily arrested and detained. These include the acquittal, in December 2016, of 18 men who were arbitrarily arrested at Maroua market in July 2014, and the acquittal of at least six men who were arbitrarily arrested in the village of Bornori in November 2014. In July 2015, Cameroonian authorities also released 84 children who had been detained for more than six months following a raid on their school in the village of Guirvidig in December 2014.

Yet most recommendations, including calls for investigations of enforced disappearances, killings and other violations committed by security forces, have not yet been addressed. One emblematic case, for example, is the enforced disappearance of at least 130 men and boys following a cordon-and-search operation by the Cameroon security forces in the villages of Magdeme and Double in December 2014. As outlined in Amnesty International's report in September 2015, they were among at least 200 men and boys who were arbitrarily arrested on 28 December 2014 and taken to the gendarmerie in Maroua, where authorities admit that at least 25 of them died in custody the same night. While 45 others were transferred to the prison in Maroua the following day, the fate of at least 130 men and boys – as well as the identities of those who died in the gendarmerie – remains unknown. There has been no investigation into the disappearance of these men and boys, nor into the unlawful killings of at least eight people, including a child, during the operation in Magdeme and Double or into the destruction of over 70 buildings.

Other emblematic cases documented in our July 2016 report include the killing by the BIR of seven people during a cordon-and-search operation in Bornori, in November 2014, and the killing of at least 30 people, many of whom were elderly, by members of the regular army in Achigachiya in January 2015<sup>16</sup>.

In July 2016, Amnesty International also documented 17 cases between April 2015 and February 2016 where security forces, usually the BIR, committed enforced disappearances of people accused of supporting Boko Haram in the Far North region. While information about these cases – including the names, circumstances and dates of their arrests – was submitted to the Cameroonian authorities, and information about their whereabouts requested, no response has ever been received<sup>17</sup>. Following investigations, Amnesty International was able to identify the whereabouts of two of these individuals, yet the others remain missing.

There has, as such, been a lack of accountability for human rights violations committed by Cameroonian security forces in recent years, with few instances of effective investigations, or prosecutions of those responsible. This is despite a commitment made in July 2016, when the State Secretary to the Minister of Defence in charge of the national gendarmerie told Amnesty International that a Commission of Inquiry would be set up to investigate crimes committed by the security forces engaged in operations against Boko Haram<sup>18</sup>. No further information on this Commission has yet been forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Both the BIR, the elite unit of the Cameroonian Army, and the DGRE, one of the several Cameroonian intelligence services, fall under the direct command of the President.

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, Right cause, wrong means; Human rights under fire.

<sup>10</sup> OHCHR, A/HRC/30/67, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the affected countries, 29 September 2015, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A-HRC-30-67\\_en.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A-HRC-30-67_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means; Human Rights Under Fire.

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International, Le Cameroun libère 84 enfants détenus depuis six mois au nord, [www.amnesty.sn/spip.php?article2121](http://www.amnesty.sn/spip.php?article2121) 14 August 2015

<sup>14</sup> Cameroun-Info.Net, Issa Tchiroma explique comment 25 suspects Boko Haram ont trouvé la mort dans une cellule à Maroua, 13 March 2015 [www.cameroun-info.net/article/cameroun-issa-tchiroma-explique-comment-25-suspects-boko-haram-ont-trouve-la-mort-dans-une-241080.html](http://www.cameroun-info.net/article/cameroun-issa-tchiroma-explique-comment-25-suspects-boko-haram-ont-trouve-la-mort-dans-une-241080.html)

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, Human Rights Under Fire; Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International interview with the State Secretary to the Minister of Defence in charge of the national gendarmerie, Yaoundé, July 2016.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

This report builds on Amnesty International's report 'Right Cause, Wrong Means', published in July 2016, documenting human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by the Cameroonian security forces and authorities. It includes previously unpublished research carried out by Amnesty International during five field missions in Cameroon between February 2016 and February 2017 and through hundreds of telephone interviews conducted from July 2016 to March 2017.

Amnesty International's delegates visited Yaoundé, Maroua and Mora. Research was also undertaken in several towns and villages of the Far North region, including Afade, Blangoua, Cherif Moussari, Double, Fotokol, Kolofata, Kousseri, Limani, Magdeme, Mora, Mokolo, Mozogo and Waza.

Over 140 interviews were conducted in person with victims and witnesses of human rights violations and families of victims, as well as with a wide range of key informants from different sectors, including lawyers, journalists, religious and traditional leaders, academics, human rights defenders, members of civil society, national and international human rights and security experts, and staff of the United Nations (UN) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). An additional 60 interviews with the above-mentioned stakeholders were conducted via telephone by Amnesty International's researchers or partners, and information was verified with multiple sources.

Overall, Amnesty International documented 101 cases of incommunicado detention and torture, specifically in detention facilities run by the Rapid Intervention Battalion (Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide, BIR) and the General Directorate of External Research (Direction Générale de la Recherche Extérieure, DGRE). The cases documented for this report include torture carried out between March 2013 and March 2017, with most cases documented involving people arrested in 2014 and 2015 and tortured between 2014 and 2016, but practices clearly continuing into 2017. Twenty-seven of these cases were included in the 2016 report 'Right Cause, Wrong Means'.

Interviews with victims and witnesses were conducted individually, in private homes, in several local languages, including Arabic Choa, Hausa, Kanuri, Mandara, and Fulfulde with the help of translators. Interviewees agreed that their statements would be used in this briefing and that their names, as well as other identifying information, would be redacted to protect them from intimidation and possible threats.

Amnesty International has made extensive efforts to engage with the Cameroonian authorities in the preparation of this and previous reports. Before the publication of Amnesty's reports in September 2015 and July 2016, Amnesty met authorities including the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Communication, and the Minister of External Relations to discuss its research findings. Meetings were also held with representatives of the security forces, including the head of the 4th Inter-Army Military Region, the head of the BIR, the head of the Gendarmerie, as well as with members of the judiciary and prison authorities, including the Presidents and Prosecutors of the Military Courts in Yaoundé and Maroua, and the heads of the Maroua central prison and of the 'Prison Principale' in Yaoundé. Detailed letters were also written and sent to the above-mentioned authorities prior to the publication of the reports 'Human Rights Under Fire' in 2015 and 'Right Cause, Wrong Means', in 2016, outlining our key findings and asking for responses, but no responses were provided.

During the research phase of this current report, meetings were requested with the President of Cameroon, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Communication, the Minister of External Relations, the head of the Gendarmerie and granted only with the Minister of Communication and the Secretary General of the Minister of Defence in February 2017. Three months prior to the publication of this report, Amnesty wrote to the authorities providing a summary of its findings and requesting a response (see appendix), but received no response. Between 20-26 May 2017, an Amnesty International delegation travelled to Yaoundé to collect feedback from the authorities on the findings of its research to be incorporated in this report, but no member of the government agreed to a meeting<sup>19</sup>. In addition, authorities banned an Amnesty International press conference scheduled to take place in Yaoundé on 24 May 2017, whose aim was to present more than 310,000 letters and petitions signed by people across the world, asking President Paul Biya to release three students imprisoned for 10 years simply for sharing a joke by SMS about Boko Haram<sup>20</sup>.

Amnesty International also wrote to the US and French Embassies in Cameroon on 23 June 2017, requesting further information about whether their personnel had been aware of illegal detention and torture practices at the BIR base in Salak, and whether they had reported any such allegations to the Cameroonian authorities. The US Embassy responded on 11 July 2017, [and their letter can be found in the appendix]. No response had been received from the French Embassy at the time of publication.

Amnesty International also attended over 20 trial proceedings between February 2016 and May 2017 involving cases of people accused of terrorism-related charges before Military Courts in Yaoundé and Maroua, and reviewed court documents both to evaluate the fairness of the court processes and to verify allegations of arbitrary and incommunicado detention.

Amnesty International also gathered and analysed three videos filmed over the past three years showing members of the security forces committing human rights violations, including acts of torture and extrajudicial executions. An extensive content analysis of these videos was conducted, extracting and examining specific features depicted in them. The analysis included the videos' metadata, image enhancement techniques, reviewing the videos in slow motion, using satellite imagery, maps and victims' drawings to identify the sites of the incidents. The location for two of the videos – a residence in Kolofata and a school in Fotokol - was identified by victims and experts, and verified through satellite imagery, and are presented in this report. The third video, showing the torture and extrajudicial execution of men in the countryside near the town of Mozogo, is not featured in this report. Further, Amnesty International received and analysed dozens of photographs showing the physical scars on bodies of victims who were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. In addition to verifying these images through interviews with the victims, relatives and witnesses, the images were also analysed by IT experts who confirmed they were not altered, as well as by a forensic specialist who confirmed that the photos were consistent with victims' accounts.

Amnesty International also received sketches of torture techniques and maps of detention centres drawn by former detainees themselves, who were able to identify key buildings and physical features of the detention sites where they were held. These sketches were matched against satellite imagery of the key bases and detention facilities operated by the BIR and DGRE in multiple areas.

Finally, Amnesty International collaborated with Forensic Architecture<sup>21</sup> to produce a 3D model of two of the unofficial detention facilities identified in this report (Salak and Fotokol, described in detail in Chapter 7).

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<sup>19</sup> On 27 April 2017, Amnesty International sent to several Cameroonian Ministers, other authorities and members of the security forces a letter presenting the findings from its recent research into the practices of arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture and death in custody committed by the Cameroonian security forces in the Far North region of Cameroon and across the country, and also noting other outstanding cases from previous reports. These letters were intended to be a basis for private discussion, and provided an opportunity to the Cameroonian authorities to both submit responses and take corrective measures that could have been included in future Amnesty International's publications. It is to be noted that, in all its previous publications, Amnesty International has written to share its research findings with Cameroonian authorities in advance and seek feedback. However, no response has ever been received.

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International, Authorities shut down an Amnesty International press conference, 24 May 2017, [www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/05/cameroun-les-autorits-interdisent-une-conference-de-presse-damnesty-international/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/05/cameroun-les-autorits-interdisent-une-conference-de-presse-damnesty-international/),

<sup>21</sup> Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. It includes a team of architects, scholars, filmmakers, designers, lawyers and scientists to undertake research that gathers and presents spatial analysis in legal and political forums. FA provides evidence for international prosecution teams, political organizations, NGOs, and the United Nations in various processes worldwide. Additionally, the agency undertakes historical and theoretical examinations of the history and present status of forensic practices in articulating notions of public truth. FA has already collaborated with Amnesty International for a project on Syria. For more information see: [www.forensic-architecture.org/](http://www.forensic-architecture.org/)

# 4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

## 4.1 ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION

Cameroon is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) whose Article 9 prohibits arbitrary arrest, and provides that those arrested shall be informed at the time of arrest of the reasons for their arrest and of any charges against them. The ICCPR further holds that persons charged with a criminal offence "shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release"<sup>22</sup>. These and other rights apply at all times and enable individuals to challenge their detention if they believe it is unlawful or unfounded. The UN Human Rights Committee states that "delays must not exceed a few days" before arrested persons are brought before a judicial body.

Cameroon has also signed and ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), whose Article 6 prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention<sup>23</sup>. The Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2003 also state that "arrest, detention or imprisonment shall only be carried out... pursuant to a warrant, on reasonable suspicion or for probable cause"<sup>24</sup>.

The Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code prescribes that "an arrest shall consist of apprehending a person for the purpose of bringing him without delay before the authority prescribed by law or by the warrant"<sup>25</sup>. The Criminal Procedure Code further outlines that defendants should be brought before a court within 48 hours, and provides that the time allowed for remand in custody is 48 hours, renewable twice<sup>26</sup>. For offences covered by Law n°2014/028 of 23 December 2014 repressing acts of terrorism, the anti-terror law, however, suspects can be held without charge for a period of 15 days, renewable indefinitely<sup>27</sup>. Amnesty International considers that such a long period of police custody violates international standards, and increases the risk of other human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment.

## 4.2 THE RIGHT TO HUMANE DETENTION CONDITIONS

Any person deprived of his or her liberty retains human rights and fundamental freedoms<sup>28</sup>, except for

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<sup>22</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976), 999 UNTS 171, Article 9.

<sup>23</sup> The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter), [www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/](http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/)

<sup>24</sup> Principles on Fair Trial in Africa, Section M (1)(b), [http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/principles-guidelines-right-fairtrial/achpr33\\_guide\\_fair\\_trial\\_legal\\_assistance\\_2003\\_eng.pdf](http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/principles-guidelines-right-fairtrial/achpr33_guide_fair_trial_legal_assistance_2003_eng.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Cameroon's Criminal Procedure Code, Law n°2005 of 27 July, Section 30 (1)

<sup>26</sup> Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code, Section 119.

<sup>27</sup> Law n° 2014/028 of 23 December 2014 repressing acts of terrorism, [princekmer.skyrock.com/3240467049-Loi-N-2014-028-du-23-de-cembre-2014-portant-repression-des-actes-de.html](http://princekmer.skyrock.com/3240467049-Loi-N-2014-028-du-23-de-cembre-2014-portant-repression-des-actes-de.html)

<sup>28</sup> UN Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, Principle 5, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/BasicPrinciplesTreatmentOfPrisoners.aspx>

restrictions required by the very fact of their incarceration. The Human Rights Committee has held that the implementation of this rule "cannot be dependent on the material resources available in the State party."<sup>29</sup> Section 122 of the Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code also provides that "the suspect shall be treated humanely both morally and materially"<sup>30</sup>. Cameroon is under the obligation to ensure the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health<sup>31</sup> to everyone, including people in custody. This obligation also entails that the government needs to ensure those deprived of their liberty have access to necessities and services that satisfy their basic needs, including adequate and appropriate food, washing and sanitary facilities, and communication with others<sup>32</sup>. The government also needs to ensure that all inmates are provided with free and adequate medical care in conformity with international standards, such as set out in the Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons under any Form of Detention or Imprisonment<sup>33</sup>.

## 4.3 FREEDOM FROM TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Cameroon is a party to three international treaties that prohibit torture, as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment: the Convention against Torture (CAT), the ICCPR, and the ACHPR<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, Cameroon's Constitution<sup>35</sup>, Penal Code<sup>36</sup>, and Criminal Procedure Code<sup>37</sup> forbid the use of torture and other treatment that violates human dignity and integrity.

Under the CAT, a state party must "take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction." Among other measures, this requires the Cameroonian authorities to regularly oversee interrogation practices and procedures with the aim of preventing torture<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, the CAT requires a state party to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation "wherever there is reasonable ground to believe that an act of torture has been committed in any territory under its jurisdiction"<sup>39</sup>. A state must also ensure that a victim of torture "obtains redress and has an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation"<sup>40</sup>.

Cameroon's own Constitution provides that "under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,"<sup>41</sup> while Cameroon's Penal Code criminalizes the use of torture to induce a person to confess to an offence or to offer statements or related information<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Committee, General Comment 21, Article 10 (Forty-fourth session, 1992), Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.1 at 33 (1994), para. 4, [www1.umn.edu/humanrts/gencomm/hrcom21.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/gencomm/hrcom21.htm)

<sup>30</sup> Cameroon's Criminal Procedure Code, Law n°2005 of 27 July, Section 122.

<sup>31</sup> International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Article 12 and ACHPR, Article 16.

<sup>32</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Report A/64/215 (2009), para.55, <http://daccess-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/437/92/PDF/N0943792.pdf?OpenElement> ; See also the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rules 9-22 and 37-42,

[www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/treatmentprisoners.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/treatmentprisoners.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, December 1988, Principle 24, [www.un.org/documents/ga/res/43/a43r173.htm](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/43/a43r173.htm) . Although these Principles are not binding in the same manner as treaties, they contain authoritative interpretations of states' obligations under international law and include detailed guidance regarding the protection of persons held in any type of detention.

<sup>34</sup> The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter), [www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/](http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/)

<sup>35</sup> Cameroon's Constitution of 1972 with Amendments through 2008 [www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file\\_id=315586](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file_id=315586)

<sup>36</sup> Journal Officiel de la République du Cameroun, Code Pénal Loi n° 67/LF/1 12 Juin 1967, [www.genevaacademy.ch/RULAC/pdf\\_state/CODE-PENAL.pdf](http://www.genevaacademy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/CODE-PENAL.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Law n°2005 of 27 July 2005 on the Criminal Procedure Code, [www.icla.up.ac.za/images/un/use-of-force/africa/Cameroon/Criminal%20Procedure%20Code%20Cameroon%202005.pdf](http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/un/use-of-force/africa/Cameroon/Criminal%20Procedure%20Code%20Cameroon%202005.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Article 11.

<sup>39</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Article 12.

<sup>40</sup> ICCPR, Article 9(5).

<sup>41</sup> Cameroon's Constitution of 1972 with Amendments through 2008 [www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file\\_id=315586](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/text.jsp?file_id=315586)

<sup>42</sup> Journal Officiel de la République du Cameroun, Code Pénal Loi n° 67/LF/1 12 Juin 1967, [www.genevaacademy.ch/RULAC/pdf\\_state/CODE-PENAL.pdf](http://www.genevaacademy.ch/RULAC/pdf_state/CODE-PENAL.pdf)

## 4.4 INCOMMUNICADO AND SECRET DETENTION

All persons deprived of their liberty have the right to communicate with the outside world, especially with their families, lawyers, medical professionals and other third parties<sup>43</sup>. Although the right to communicate with the outside world might sometimes be reasonably restricted<sup>44</sup>, the denial of this right may amount to incommunicado detention, which violates the right to liberty and the right not to be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment.

According to Section 122 of the Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code, while in detention people may at any time be visited by their counsel, members of their family, and any other person following their treatment while in detention<sup>45</sup>.

According to international human rights standards, people deprived of their liberty must be held only in a place of detention that is officially recognized.<sup>46</sup> Cameroon's Criminal Procedure Code also states that for police custody, a suspect shall be detained "in a judicial police cell wherein he remains for a limited period available to and under the responsibility of a judicial police officer"<sup>47</sup>.

## 4.5 DEATH IN CUSTODY

When people are deprived of their liberty, responsibility for their fate rests with the detaining authorities, who must guarantee the physical integrity of each detainee. State responsibility for deaths in custody arises not only when state actors perpetrate abuses on prisoners that result in death, but also when the state does not respect its obligation to protect the rights of detainees, for instance when prisoners die from poor prison conditions or a lack of medical treatment. When a person dies in custody, a prompt, impartial, independent investigation must be conducted regardless of the presumed cause of death. The standards contained in the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions recall the obligation to ensure "thorough, prompt and impartial investigations" into suspected unnatural deaths<sup>48</sup>. Such investigations should collect evidence, conduct an autopsy and collect witness statements to ascertain the cause, manner and time of death and ensure those responsible are held accountable<sup>49</sup>. The results and methodology should be public.

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<sup>43</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)(b); Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners, Rules 37 and 79 and Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, Principle 19.

<sup>44</sup> Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988, Principle 19.

<sup>45</sup> Cameroon's Criminal Procedure Code, Law n°2005 of 27 July 2005, Section 122.

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Committee General Comment 20, §11, [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/a\)GeneralCommentNo20Prohibitionoftortureorothercruel,inhumanordegradingtreatmentorpunishment\(article7\)\(1992\).aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/a)GeneralCommentNo20Prohibitionoftortureorothercruel,inhumanordegradingtreatmentorpunishment(article7)(1992).aspx) ; Special Rapporteur on torture, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2003/68 (2002) §26(e), [http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/241989/E\\_CN.4\\_2003\\_68-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/241989/E_CN.4_2003_68-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y)

<sup>47</sup> Cameroon's Criminal Procedure Code, Law n°2005 of 27 July 2005, Section 118 (1).

<sup>48</sup> The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions, para. 9, at [www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instrree/i7pepi.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instrree/i7pepi.htm)

<sup>49</sup> The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions.



## 4.6 VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW/WAR CRIMES

Amnesty International has concluded that the situation in the far North of Cameroon has constituted a non-international armed conflict since at least 2014<sup>50</sup>. In a non-international armed conflict, international humanitarian law applies as well as international human rights law. Serious violations of international humanitarian law constitute war crimes<sup>51</sup> and entail individual criminal responsibility<sup>52</sup>. Many of the violations documented in this report would also constitute serious violations of international law, considering that civilians were arrested, detained and tortured on the basis that they were believed to be members of Boko Haram. The conduct documented therefore amounts to war crimes, including that of torture.

Under article 8 (2) (c) (i)-4 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, torture constitutes a war crime when it is committed against protected persons under international humanitarian law, including civilians, members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention or any other cause.

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<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights Under Fire*, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> ICRC Customary IHL Study, Rule 156.

<sup>52</sup> See Decision on the Defense Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction, *The Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadić*, Case No. IT-94-1-AR72, ICTY Appeals Chamber, 2 October 1995 (hereinafter the *Tadić* case) and commentary included in ICRC Customary IHL Study Rule 156.

# 5. INCOMMUNICADO AND SECRET DETENTION

***‘No one in the outside world knew where I was.’***

Ramatou, a woman, detained in BIR base in Salak in 2015 and 2016 <sup>53</sup>.

## 5.1 THE VICTIMS

The 101 individual cases documented for this report all involve people who had been held incommunicado in unofficial detention sites in one or several BIR and/or DGRE-run facilities and/or in other detention centres run by the Cameroonian security forces.

Out of the 101 individual cases, 71 relate to individuals who were arrested in the Far North region. Others were arrested in other regions including Centre, Littoral and the South. In the majority of cases, those arrested were Cameroonian men between the ages of 18 and 45, with Kanuri making up the largest single ethnic group. A significant number of those arrested believed they had been targeted in part because of their ethnicity. For instance, a street vendor who spoke to Amnesty International about his experience in detention at the DGRE explained:

*“At about 10.25am, at the market, a gendarme in civilian clothes stopped me to ask the price of the shirts that I was selling. I was with a friend, who is also a trader. We agreed on the price and while my friend was bending down to take the shirts, the gendarme handcuffed him. He then handcuffed me. I asked why, and he said that we are members of Boko Haram because we are Kanuri”* <sup>54</sup>.

Several ex-prisoners who were held incommunicado in the BIR headquarters in Salak, near Maroua, <sup>55</sup> at different times between late 2014 and the end of 2016 told Amnesty International that the majority of detainees in their cells were ethnic-Kanuri who had been arrested in several localities across the Far North region.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview n.48, November 2016

<sup>54</sup> Interview n.26, March 2017

<sup>55</sup> As outlined in Chapter 7, Salak is the biggest BIR base in the Far North region and serves as the Headquarters of the BIR. It is located approximately 15 km from the city of Maroua.

While the majority of the cases documented by Amnesty International for this report involved adult men, the arrest, detention and torture of four adult women and six children were also documented. Amnesty International also documented the cases of four individuals with mental and physical disabilities who were held and tortured at both the BIR base in Salak and a detention facility run by the DGRE in Yaoundé called 'DGRE Lac'<sup>56</sup> (see Chapter 7).

At least seven people also said that while they were held in Salak between December 2015 and July 2016, they witnessed the detention of about 80 Nigerians, including women and children as young as seven<sup>57</sup>. At least 10 former detainees reported sharing their cells in Salak with underage boys or having seen boys as young as 10 outside their cells, including in the interrogation room. For instance, one former detainee explained:

*"When they took me to the interrogation room, my eyes were uncovered. I found a man in plain clothes sitting on a chair, and a child of about 10 years old chained up and lying on the floor. The boy had chains on both hands and feet. I saw him one more time, about a fortnight later, as I was looking through the keyhole of my cell"*<sup>58</sup>.

## 5.2 ARBITRARY ARRESTS

*"I was arrested at home, in Maroua, in front my whole family. Four men in civilian clothes holding weapons came to look for me in my house at about 10pm. All my family was there, more than 45 people. My sister wanted to intervene and told the four men that it is not legal to arrest someone without a warrant or authorization, that they did not have the right to do it, and that I should be taken to a judicial police officer. That angered one of the men who aimed his gun against the stomach of my sister, who was eight months pregnant"*<sup>59</sup>. A 39-year-old man from the Far North region of Cameroon.

The majority of the 101 cases documented involve individuals who said they were arrested either by soldiers, including members of the BIR, or by men in plain clothes who produced no identification proving their identity. In none of the 101 cases documented by Amnesty International for this report were people shown any arrest warrant nor provided with a clear explanation of the reasons for their arrest. Almost all of the individuals were later charged under Cameroon's anti-terrorism law, although those arrested before December 2014 – when the anti-terrorism law was promulgated – were charged under other provisions in the Cameroonian criminal code.

Grounds for arrest vary and can often be arbitrary, based on both previous and recent research, defence lawyers and other sources contacted by Amnesty International. Grounds include coming from or having travelled to villages and cities located along the border with Nigeria, failing to show an ID card, and being displaced as a refugee or as an internally displaced person. As a man from the Far North region explained to Amnesty International, having a relative who is wanted and/or has been arrested by the security forces can also lead to arrest<sup>60</sup>:

*"I was fuelling my motorbike when two policemen came and asked me to show them my ID. I told them I had no ID, but I had the documents showing my refugee status given to me by UNHCR when I registered at the refugee camp in Minawao. I told the policemen that, after five months in Minawao, I had decided to rent a house with my family because we could no longer bear to live in a tent. The policemen said all Nigerian refugees are likely to be Boko Haram members and so they arrested me and took me to the gendarmerie in Maga and then to the BIR camp in Salak where I was held in secret and beaten up"*<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup>This facility is located in the neighbourhood of Yaoundé known as 'Lac' (French for 'lake'), near the National College of Administration and Magistrates.

<sup>57</sup> Interviews n.8, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, July-December 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Interview n.9, Maroua, February 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Interview n.22, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Amnesty International, Right Cause, Wrong Means and Human Rights Under Fire.

<sup>61</sup> Interview n. 77, August 2016 and March 2017

In almost all the cases documented, those arrested told Amnesty International that arresting agents relied on undisclosed and unverifiable denunciations by informants or largely circumstantial information rather than a reasonable suspicion of the commission of a crime. Several interviewees said that they were arrested after reports about them were submitted to the security forces by people in their community, including in order to settle personal grievances. For example, a trader from the Far North region of Cameroon told Amnesty International that he was arrested following allegations of supporting Boko Haram-related activities made against him to the police by another trader who was jealous of his business<sup>62</sup>.

In several cases, arresting agents used excessive force to conduct arrests, and also searched the homes and confiscated belongings of the suspects without obtaining any permission of the residents or showing any warrant signed by a prosecutor. Fatim (not her real name), a mother of six children, told Amnesty International how her baby died shortly after being hurt by soldiers from the BIR when her husband was arrested in Fotokol in March 2016:

*“They came to our place at about 11pm. They were about 30 BIR soldiers, in uniforms, armed, masked, and with helmets. They kicked down the wooden gate of the compound with their military boots. They broke into the house and ordered my husband to follow them, blindfolding him with his t-shirt... About 30 minutes later, two of them came back and found me sitting with my twins [a boy and a girl, 2 months old] in my arms. They searched the house and found 1,000 naira [US\$3] in the pockets of my husband’s pants, which they took... They then ordered me to give them the money my husband was hiding in the house. I told them, we had nothing, absolutely nothing. So, they threatened me and one of them kicked me. I tried to protect my kids whom I was holding in my arms. A kick reached the baby girl. When the two BIR left, for the next 15 days the baby girl was always crying and crying. I didn’t bring her to the hospital because I had no money to pay for the doctor. The baby girl died about two weeks later. We buried her in the village, at the cemetery”<sup>63</sup>.*

## 5.3 INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION

All of the 101 individual cases documented for this report involve people who had been held incommunicado in unofficial detention sites, with no ability to contact their family or lawyer. All of the 101 victims testified independently that they were held for prolonged periods in one or several BIR and/or DGRE-run detention facilities at different times between 2013 and 2017, and/or in other detention centres run by the Cameroonian security forces. These testimonies were consistent and verified through multiple sources, including members of the families of the victims, eyewitnesses and other informants.

Once arrested, victims were taken to one of a number of unofficial detention sites run by the BIR or DGRE, either directly upon arrest or after passing some time at police stations or gendarmerie bases across the country. While some detainees were held at more than one of such sites (BIR and or DGRE-run facilities and/or police and gendarmerie stations), eventually all were transferred to official detention centres, such as the central prison in Maroua or the ‘Prison Principale’ in Yaoundé. More details on the various unofficial detention facilities are provided in Chapter 7. While in detention, both in the official and unofficial detention facilities, detainees were denied any access to the outside world, including their families or lawyers, and all were tortured.

Detainees could be held incommunicado for long periods in these unofficial sites. The average time spent in incommunicado detention in BIR and DGRE-run facilities, as well as in other facilities operated by the Cameroonian security forces, before being taken to an official prison, was over 32 weeks, with some held in such facilities for nearly two and a half years. The average time spent incommunicado in the BIR base in Salak, near Maroua, was 21 weeks, while the average time in one of the two DGRE-run facilities in Yaoundé was over 30 weeks.

In May 2015, Amnesty International researchers documented the case of Ramat (not his real name), a 54-year-old old man who had been arrested by the BIR at his home in Maroua in January 2015, and

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<sup>62</sup> Interview n.3, August 2016

<sup>63</sup> Interview n.110, Maroua, February 20-17

disappeared<sup>64</sup>. Following his eventual release, Amnesty International researchers met Ramat in February 2017 and he described his ordeal:

*“The day I was arrested I was taken to Salak where they [the BIR] held me for nine days. I was tortured three times, it’s hard to talk about what I have been through. Then I was transferred to Yaoundé, to the DGRE, where I spent over seven months before being brought to the ‘Prison Principale’. Since the day of my arrest, until the time I arrived at the Prison, I was held in secret, my family had no idea where I was. I was not allowed to call and inform anyone. I suffered a lot. I thought about my family all the time”<sup>65</sup>.*

Abdoullah (not his real name), a father of seven and trader from Kousseri, told Amnesty International how he was arrested in late 2015 and held in secret for over seven months in various facilities including in Salak:

*“No one ever told me why I had been arrested. During the whole time I was detained at Kousseri, Salak and Yaoundé I was not able to see my family or a lawyer. No one knew where I was, everyone thought I was dead”<sup>66</sup>.*

Estimations about the current number of people being held in one or several BIR and DGRE-run facilities are very difficult to make, as access to these locations is restricted. However, Amnesty International has been able to collect sufficient evidence to estimate that, as of mid-March 2017, the number of people held in Salak and DGRE ‘Lac’ was at least 20 in each facility. At other times between 2014 and 2016, the majority of former detainees have spoken of being held with up to 70 other people in a cell in Salak.

The practice of holding suspects outside of officially recognized detention sites, first highlighted by Amnesty International in July 2016<sup>67</sup>, had been denied by the Cameroonian authorities<sup>68</sup>. However, in February 2017, the Minister of Communication and representatives of the Minister of Defence confirmed in meetings with Amnesty International that people have indeed been detained in the BIR base in Salak, as well as in DGRE-operated facilities. No longer denying this practice of detention, they claimed instead that there is a legal basis to do so. They did not substantiate this claim and, according to national and international law, anyone arrested must be promptly transferred to the police or the gendarmerie, and have the right to communicate with the outside world, especially with families, lawyers, and medical professionals<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Amnesty International, Human Rights Under Fire; Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>65</sup> Interview n.41, Maroua, February 2017. <sup>66</sup> Interview n.4, August 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Right Cause, Wrong Means.

<sup>68</sup> Interviews with Cameroonian authorities, May 2015, February 2016, Yaoundé.

<sup>69</sup> As a party to the ICCPR, Cameroon is obliged to respect international standards of detention, including ensuring that people deprived of their liberty must be held only in a place of detention that is officially recognized. Cameroon’s domestic law also expressly prohibits secret and incommunicado detentions. For instance, according to Section 122 of the Cameroonian Criminal Procedure Code, while in detention people may at any time be visited by their counsel, members of their family, and any other person following their treatment while in detention. The Cameroon’s Criminal Procedure Code also states that for police custody, a suspect shall be detained “in a judicial police cell wherein he remains for a limited period available to and under the responsibility of a judicial police officer”. See also Chapter 4, Legal Framework.

## **DETAINEES TAKEN FROM PRISON TO BE TORTURED AT THE DGRE**

In all the cases documented by Amnesty International, torture was carried out in unofficial detention sites before detainees were transferred to formal prisons to await trial. In some cases, however, detainees could be taken back out of prison to DGRE-run facilities for further interrogation and torture. For example, Madi (not his real name), a detainee at the 'Prison Principale' in Yaoundé, described to Amnesty International how several DGRE agents entered the cells of two male detainees and, with the help of prison guards, conducted a search and seized all the detainees' belongings before handcuffing, blindfolding and taking them away:

*"We saw how our fellow prisoners were handcuffed from the back and blindfolded. A big guy from the DGRE pulled their necks down and their arms up and ordered them to walk in front of him. He was taking them away. This left all of us in a terrible state of mind, we remained traumatized for some time. We didn't know why the DGRE agents were taking them away and we thought it was to kill them. We thought we were no longer safe in prison, while we had thought that the prison was a place where nobody could touch us, and the place where we would be held awaiting for justice ... We all felt very bad, we thought it could be our turn at any time... and we could be brought back to DGRE where the majority of us had been tortured"<sup>70</sup>.*

Like others in the 'Prison Principale', the two detainees had previously been held and tortured at the DGRE before arriving at the prison.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview n.108, December 2016.

# 6. TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT, AND DEATH IN CUSTODY

*'In Salak, I was permanently chained up. I was only given one meal per day, and I was tortured at least three times. The first two times, men in plain clothes beat me severely all over my body with electric cables. During torture, they asked me in French to confess that I was a member of Boko Haram. The third time, they beat me with a wooden plank and a chain as they tried to force me to eat pork. I am Muslim and I don't eat pork so I refused, and I was tortured. They beat me several times with the wooden plank, which had a nail stuck into it. I was beaten everywhere, especially on my legs and ankles. I received so many blows that I passed out.'*

Sale (not his real name), who was held in Salak in early 2015 <sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Interview n. 41, February 2017.

All 101 cases documented by Amnesty International for this report involved detainees who had been subjected to torture between 2013 and 2017 while being held in incommunicado detention, and two thirds of those interviewed reported witnessing the torture of other individuals during their detention.

Altogether, Amnesty International documented at least 24 distinct torture methods used by the soldiers, including the BIR, interrogators, guards and agents of the DGRE present at both BIR and DGRE-run facilities, as well as by members of the gendarmes and the police. When provided details of such practices, a representative of the Minister of Defence denied it was torture, insisting it was merely “enhanced interrogation” (“exploitation approfondie”)<sup>72</sup>.

Amnesty International collected photographs of victims’ scars, which were then analysed by a forensic doctor to check that they were consistent with their accounts of torture, but have not published the photographs in order to protect the identities of victims.

## 6.1 THE MOST COMMON FORMS OF TORTURE

Information received from former detainees, detainees’ families, lawyers, and other sources have described a wide variety of methods of torture used both at BIR and DGRE-run detention facilities and other facilities run by the Cameroonian security forces. The most common methods include: beatings with various objects, holding painful stress positions for hours or even days, various forms of suspension, and drowning. Victims reported that some methods of torture were often used in combination, for example holding a stress position while being tied up, blindfolded, beaten, or subjected to psychological torture, often with increasing levels of pain. Testimonies by former detainees also reveal that detention conditions, especially in BIR-run detention facilities, were so poor that they amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

### 6.1.1 BEATINGS

In almost all cases documented, former detainees were subjected to some form of beatings, both being kicked and punched as well as being beaten with various objects, most commonly wooden sticks or iron bars, the flat part of a machete and electric cables. Djibrill (not his real name), a man who was held in Salak at the end of 2015, described the beatings he endured:

*“At Salak, they beat me constantly for four days. They tied my hands and feet behind my back with a rope they use to hold cows. After two days, the rope broke and they replaced it with plastic handcuffs. Many people beat me, and everyone had some sort of tool, including chains, batons and electric cables, while some kicked me with their army boots and slapped me a lot. After a while I could not hear anything because my ears were ringing so much. I arrived at the DGRE in Yaoundé so weak that they decided to treat me before questioning me, because I couldn’t hear anything.”<sup>73</sup>*

Other instruments of torture that have been described to Amnesty International include belts, whips, chains, gun butts, truncheons, broom and door handles, and other hard objects. Before being beaten, former detainees reported that they were often stripped, their hands and feet restrained and their head or eyes covered.

Moussa (not his real name) from Nigeria who was arrested in Cameroon in late 2013 told Amnesty International :

*“I spent at least 23 months at the DGRE in Yaoundé, held in secret. I came to know every type of torture there and I was constantly chained up by my hands and feet. They beat me all the time with sticks or whatever else they had at hand, broom handles or cables. They beat my body with everything. Often they made us sleep together in the toilets to punish us. Sometimes they tied me to my bed forcing me to stand for 24 hours and my feet swelled up. They beat me so much that I had the feeling that I could no longer feel any pain because I was so used to it”<sup>74</sup>.*

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<sup>72</sup> Interview n.111, Yaoundé, February 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Interview n.11, July 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Interview n.24, August 2016.



Many survivors told Amnesty International that they were beaten in particular on the soles of their feet, usually with the flat part of the machete, but also with other instruments. Following these beatings, prisoners reported being often unable to stand or walk. Oumar (not his real name) told Amnesty International:

*“We were ordered to lie down, face to the ground, in a row. The BIR [soldiers] blindfolded us with pieces of white fabric and tied our hands and feet behind our back with the same fabric. We remained in this position from about 1pm to 4pm with soldiers beating us continuously. They kicked me in the head, face and mouth with their boots, pushing their boots into my head several times, and beat me with sticks and with a machete, especially on the soles of my feet. This torture was extremely painful and when I could finally stand up, I could barely walk”<sup>75</sup>.*

Karim (not his real name), who was held for about a week at the BIR base in Kolofata in February 2016, also described his experience:

*“They ordered me to lie down on the ground against the wall, and [a guard] came to lift my legs while other BIR agents took their batons, machetes and other objects to beat me on the soles of my feet. Then they also beat me all over my body until I was almost unconscious. Afterwards, they threw me in a cell where there were about 13 people. The following day I could barely walk”<sup>76</sup>.*



### TORTURE OF WOMEN IN SALAK AND KOUSSERI

Fatima (not her real name), a woman of who was held incommunicado at the BIR base in Salak between September 2015 and July 2016, described to Amnesty International how she was beaten with various objects, including wooden sticks and the flat part of a machete<sup>77</sup>.

**“At the base in Kousseri, I was held in a cell with two women. [The soldiers] beat me for three days all over my body, especially on the soles of my feet, with all sorts of objects, in order to make me admit things I knew nothing about. By the end of the third day, my soles were going to explode, I was in a lot of pain. It was the same for the two women, who were beaten and who by the end of the third day had large painful wounds on their buttocks. The women were tortured in front of me, while they [the BIR] tortured the woman, they asked the address of a Boko Haram member. Each time the BIR and other officers asked the women questions, they told them what to say in response. On the fourth day, the two women were taken to hospital in Kousseri because their wounds were too serious”<sup>78</sup>.**

Another female detainee told Amnesty International that a BIR agent attempted to sexually abuse her when she was detained in the BIR base in Salak in late December 2015<sup>79</sup>.

Two detainees who were held at the BIR base in Kousseri in June 2015 also told Amnesty International that they spent 25 days in a cell along with two other men and two women and witnessed how the women were tortured.

<sup>75</sup> Interview n.10, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Interview n.78, February 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Interview n.47, August 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Interview n.106, Yaoundé, March 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Interview n.48, November 2016.

## 6.1.2 STRESS POSITIONS

Some former detainees held in BIR and DGRE-operated detention facilities reported that they were ordered to hold painful stress positions for hours or days. Souleyman (not his real name), a 28-year-old man who spent over four months in Salak in 2016, told Amnesty International:

*“The same night as I was brought to Salak, they tied my hands and feet behind my back. They left me in this position for hours and hours while they beat me. I don’t know how many people hit me because I was hooded. I don’t know which objects they beat me with but I think they used electric cables, machetes and batons. After this torture, they threw me in a cell with around 40 to 50 people. The scars of this torture are still visible on my body”<sup>80</sup>.*

Ibrahima (not his real name), who was held at DGRE ‘Lac’ for about eight months in 2015, reported that DGRE agents punished detainees by ordering them to drink 1,5 litres of water before going to sleep and if they didn’t, they would force them to stand for hours holding the bottles in their hands:

*“When I arrived at the DGRE, they forced me to stand for 24 hours, tied up to my bed. DGRE agents would come into our cell, take us out to bring us to the toilets where we would spend the night standing. Sometimes, they would order us to drink 1.5 litres of water before going to sleep, and if we refused they would order us to stand, in a squat position, which was very uncomfortable, for hours and hours, holding the bottles of water in our hands”<sup>81</sup>.*

One of the most common positions described to Amnesty International was the ‘la chevre’ (‘the goat’), which consists of tying up the detainee’s arms and legs together behind his back, and leaving him on the ground. As specified above, this position is often used in combination with beatings, suspensions and humiliations. Former detainees who have undergone this method of torture reported that it caused extreme pain and open wounds. Al Hadji (not his real name), who was held incommunicado and tortured in Salak for over two months in mid-2016, reported to Amnesty International:

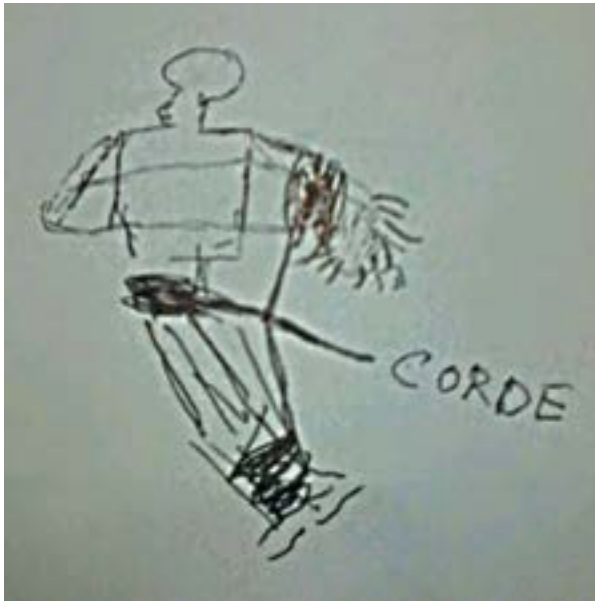
*“When I arrived in Salak, they interrogated and tortured me straight away. A guard came with BIR soldiers to ask me questions about whether I knew Boko Haram’s members. I said I didn’t. He cited over 10 names of Boko Haram’s members and I said I didn’t know any. So they took me, tied my arms and feet behind my back and beat me hard... It was very painful. I still bear the signs left by the ropes which were used to tie my arms and forearms. They beat me for five days, tied up like a goat, my arms and feet restrained behind my back”<sup>82</sup>.*

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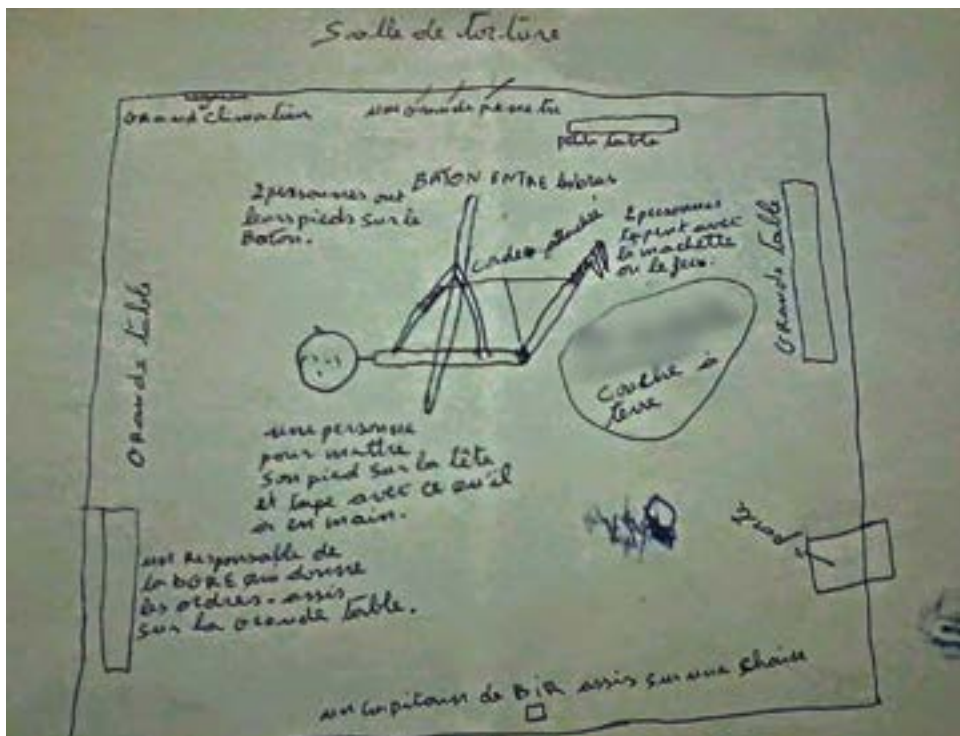
<sup>80</sup> Interview n.15, August 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Interview n.22, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Interview n.77, August 2016.



Ⓢ ↑  
 A sketch by a former detainee depicting how he was tied with ropes.  
 ©Private



Ⓢ ↑ A sketch by a former detainee showing a position they would be forced into while being beaten.  
 ©Private

<sup>82</sup> Interview n.77, August 2016.  
<sup>83</sup> Interview n.17, December 2016.

## 6.1.3 SUSPENSION

Several detainees held at Salak have described being suspended by ropes in various positions, directly hanging from the ceiling or from a bar fitted between two poles. This latter method of torture is commonly known as "la balançoire" ("the swing") and consists of tying the victim's arms and legs behind his back, and then lifting and suspending him from a bar fitted between two poles or tripods. Bachir (not his real name), a 52-year-old man, who was arrested at the beginning of 2016 and held in Salak, told Amnesty International:

*"I was transferred to Salak by car the same day I was arrested. I was blindfolded with a piece of my clothing. I spent five months and six days there. I have suffered all types of torture. I was beaten with a machete and other objects for 11 days. I was tied up with ropes and suspended from a structure supporting the ceiling of a room . [One time] the rope broke and I fell on my head"<sup>83</sup>.*

All detainees who had suffered suspension told Amnesty International that they have been beaten while hanged, causing extreme pain, especially in their muscles and joints, and one reported having water thrown on him.

Bode (not his real name), a father of three who was arrested in Fotokol in the first half of 2016 and held in Salak for about four months, was repeatedly tortured, including by hangings:

*"I was tortured by drowning and also suspended from a wooden structure that was built by the BIR and also used by the soldiers to exercise. This structure was outside, close to the place where the soldiers would eat. They tied me up and hung me from the ceiling with a rope, my feet were tied up from behind. I was hooded and whipped with anything the soldiers had at hand, including planks, electric cables and machetes. I suffered the same treatment as many other detainees"<sup>84</sup>.*



© ↑

A sketch by a former detainee depicting how he was suspended between two poles in Salak.

©Private

<sup>83</sup> Interview n.17, December 2016

<sup>84</sup> Interview n.21, August 2016.

## 6.1.4 DROWNING

Eighteen detainees, notably those held at Salak, reported that they were subjected to drowning, in which their heads were repeatedly forced into a bucket or barrel of water to induce panic and the feeling of drowning. Some reported to have fallen unconscious during this torture. A man who was arrested in July 2015 and held in Salak for about a month, reported to Amnesty International:

*“In Salak, I was tortured for two days. The first day, I was tied up on the ground with ropes. Both my hands and feet were tied behind my back and I was beaten with all sorts of objects. The second day, they drowned me: I was ordered to lay on the ground on my stomach, my hands tied behind the back. There was a plastic bucket full of water and they [BIR officers] forced my head inside the bucket and kept it there until they felt I had no more strength and my body let go. They did this three times, and the third time they realized I had defecated on myself. I woke up under the sun; I had passed out and didn’t know what had happened, nor how much time had passed. When I came round, they brought me to a tap to wash me and promised me the same treatment for the following day, but they didn’t touch me again. Those who did that were all wearing plain clothes”<sup>85</sup>.*



Ⓒ ↑ A sketch depicting two of the most common forms of torture perpetrated in the BIR base in Salak.  
©Private

<sup>85</sup> Interview n.29, August 2016.

## OTHER FORMS OF TORTURE

Former detainees also described a range of other forms of torture, including sleep deprivation, detention in complete darkness, extraction of nails, deprivation of food, burning, and electric shocks, in addition to beatings, stress positions, suspension and drowning.

For example, Madi (not his real name), a man in his 50's, was detained incommunicado for almost six months in the BIR military bases in Kolofata and Salak and in a building of the State Defence Secretariat (Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense, SED)<sup>86</sup>. Arrested by the BIR and men in civilian clothes in February 2016, he was kept for four days in the BIR base in Kolofata in a small cell with 13 other people. He was deprived of sleep for the first 24 hours of his detention, tied up with ropes and beaten on different parts of his body with various objects every day for four days, forced to drink urine and subjected to a mock execution.

**“The adjutant asked [his men] to look for a pickaxe and a shovel to dig a grave. They dug the grave within the camp and threw me into it. It was about 9:30pm. I waited to be killed. They loaded their guns and at this moment I heard a voice saying: ‘Wait! Don’t kill him!’ Following an order from the adjutant, they then asked me to get out of the grave... The same night, they ordered me out of my cell to drink urine that they had poured into bottles”<sup>87</sup>.**

After detention in Kolofata, Madi was transferred to the BIR base in Salak in a military vehicle with eight other prisoners. He was deprived of food for over 24 hours and when he asked for water it was thrown all over him. He spent about five months in Salak, where he was held in two small cells with about 40 and 50 prisoners in each. He was subjected to at least one interrogation and was tortured several times, including by beatings and stress positions such the “goat position”.

**“When we arrived in the interrogation room in Salak, the room that all detainees used to call the DGRE room, there were four people in plain clothes, including a Commissioner. They told me that I had been brought there because I provided information regarding the position of the Cameroonian Army and food to Boko Haram’s members. As soon as I denied the accusations they started to beat me all over my body with electric cables and wooden sticks. They then tied my arms and feet behind my back and beat me in this position. They beat me up like this for two days”<sup>88</sup>.**

Madi reported witnessing other detainees being tortured both in Kolofata and in Salak and having witnessed the death of at least two detainees in Salak following torture. Transferred to Yaoundé on board a military plane, he was held at the SED for about 20 days before being transferred to the ‘Prison Principale’ and charged with funding terrorism.

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<sup>86</sup> The State Defense Secretariat is in charge of the National gendarmerie.

<sup>87</sup> Interview n.20, February 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Interview n.20, February 2017.



## 6.2 OTHER PATTERNS OF TORTURE

### 6.2.1 TIME, FREQUENCY, AND DURATION OF TORTURE

“When they call you for interrogation, you don’t know what’s going to happen. They take you out from the cell handcuffed and blindfolded. Some never came back. Some left in the morning and came back at night after having been tortured all day long<sup>89</sup>.” A 45-year-old man from the Far North region of Cameroon.

Almost all victims said that the most severe torture and other ill-treatment usually took place on arrival in unofficial detention facilities and during interrogation sessions. However, the frequency of torture and other ill-treatment varied and, victims said, depended on several factors, including the length of the detention in a given facility, the health condition in which the detainee arrived at the facility, as well as whether or not military operations against Boko Haram had been successful. As a former detainee held in Salak between late 2015 and mid-2016 recalled:

*“If [the soldiers] came back to Salak after a bad operation against Boko Haram, where for example they lost a man or they didn’t succeed in capturing any Boko Haram members, detainees would panic... Terror would spread among the detainees. The soldiers were disappointed and angry and would shout, speak very loudly, and ask their commanders to finish us all. We would hear that from our cells and be terrified. So we would not sleep all night long”<sup>90</sup>.*

While some of the survivors described being tortured on a daily basis in sessions ranging from 30 minutes to several hours, others said they were tortured randomly or only once. Some also reported that they were never tortured in a given detention facility, having already been tortured elsewhere and too weak to endure more. Abou (not his real name) suffered torture, including severe beatings on the soles of his feet, for five days in the BIR base in Kolofata. He told Amnesty International:

*“On the fifth day, we were transferred to Salak where I spent about five months, held in secret. I arrived in Salak so weak and in such bad shape that for the five months they never brought me out of my cell. They could not interrogate me, nor beat me, because I was about to die... Even today, I cannot spend more than five days without feeling a strong pain in my spine”<sup>91</sup>.*

### 6.2.2 TORTURE DURING TRANSFERS BETWEEN FACILITIES

Over 30 victims also told Amnesty International that they were tortured or ill-treated during transfers between detention facilities. The most common forms of abuse described by former detainees were being thrown “like luggage” into military vehicles or planes while blindfolded and tied up with ropes, having their heads clashed together, being tied up and blindfolded so strongly that it restricted the circulation of blood, being chained up and being hit or beaten with objects while on board.

Goni (not his real name), a 44-year-old man arrested in Fotokol at the beginning of 2016, reported about his transfer from Fotokol to Salak:

*“When we were about to leave the BIR base in Fotokol, the captain in charge told his men to treat me the way ‘commandos’ do. This meant to torture me. So they tied me up, my arms and legs behind my back, and ordered me to lie down in a Land Cruiser where it was very hot. Some soldiers sat on their seats, but some sat on me or put their feet on me for almost the entire trip. I travelled like this for hours, we covered some 300km from Fotokol to Salak through Maltam. That’s how I got burns, skin cuts and abrasions. These injuries were made worse when I was beaten up with machetes, sticks and other objects by the BIR in Salak”<sup>92</sup>.*

Two other men described to Amnesty International how they were tortured and ill-treated alongside at least

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<sup>89</sup> Interview n.5, August and October 2016 and May 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Interview n.5, May 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Interview n.78, February 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Interview n.14, August 2016.

eight other detainees in mid-2014 when they were transported in a convoy of five unmarked vehicles by a group of DGRE agents from the BIR base in Salak to one of the DGRE-run facilities in Yaoundé.

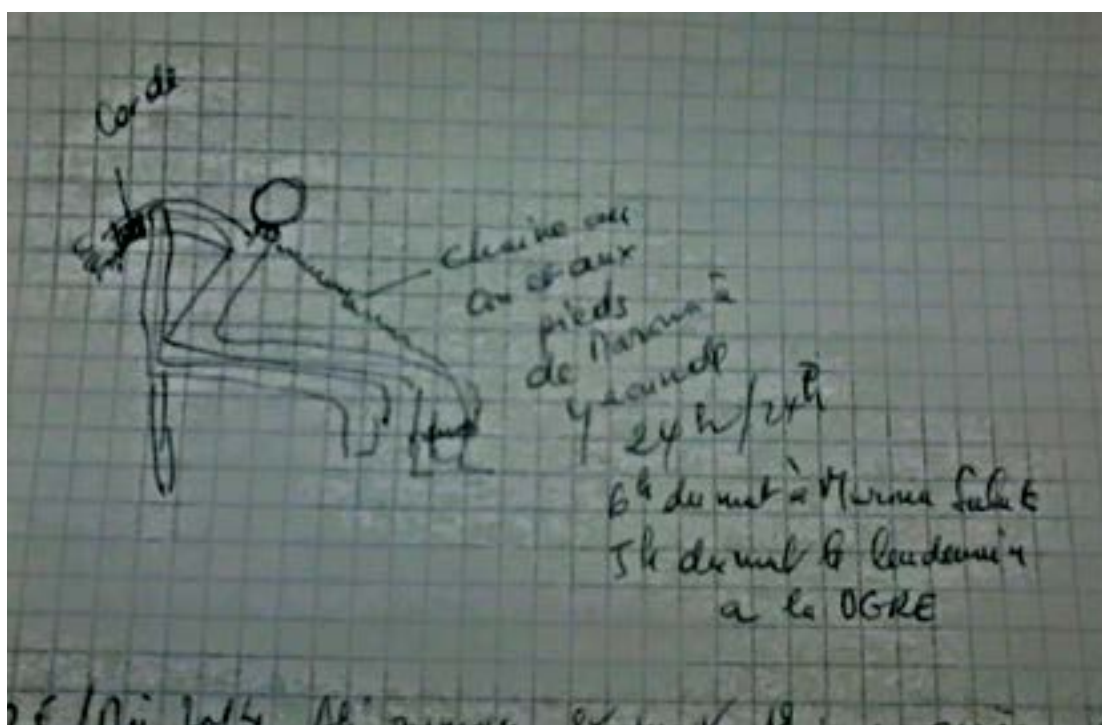
One of the two victims, Sami (not his real name), described the journey:

*“We left Salak in the morning at about 6am, and we arrived in Yaoundé at about 5am the next day. We were thrown into the vehicles like luggage, tied up and blindfolded... We were chained up like animals. The same chain which was around our necks was also binding our feet, while our hands were restricted with a rope tied up strongly from the back. I heard people screaming and crying for the entire trip. I also screamed because of the position in which I was sitting was extremely painful. It was the most horrible experience of my life”<sup>93</sup>.*

Sami also described how he believed one of those travelling with them died during the journey.

*“We were chained up so tightly that our blood flow was hindered. People were screaming and crying out of pain. The convoy had to stop at least once on its way to Yaoundé to unload a man who, I believe, died of suffocation or similar. I was just right next to me. I understood that he was dead because I touched him. He was cold. We were all tied up together and we were sitting next to each other, so our bodies could touch. It was awful”<sup>94</sup>.*

Another victim, Malloum (not his real name), gave a similar account of the events and provided the following sketch showing how he was chained up during the trip<sup>95</sup>.



Sami and Malloum both reported that two individuals who had been detained with them in Salak, and who had been loaded into the vehicles at the same time as them, did not arrive at the DGRE with them, and that, on arrival, DGRE agents asked them to identify two telephones that belonged to those not present.

<sup>93</sup> Interview n.35, August 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Interview n.35, August 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Interview n.36, July 2016.



## 6.2.3 THE PURPOSE OF TORTURE

Almost all victims said that torture and other ill-treatment were used to extract “confessions”. They said they were forced to admit having supported Boko Haram, and forced to provide names of Boko Haram fighters or collaborators or to provide information about people named by interrogators.

Ramat (not his real name), a 21-year-old man who was detained in Salak in late 2015, witnessed several people being tortured, and told Amnesty International:

*“When someone is arrested and taken to Salak, they [BIR] ask him questions about Boko Haram members and activities. If you say you don’t know anything, they think you are hiding something. They think you will admit it by beating you up. Those who say they are not members of Boko Haram can be beaten until they die”<sup>96</sup>.*

Mouhamadou (not his real name) from the Logone Chari district in the Far North of Cameroon who was arrested in early 2015 reported to Amnesty International:

*“I spent 56 days in Salak. I arrived at about 5pm, and at about 10pm soldiers came to take me and brought me into the torture room, where I was tied up. My hands and feet were tied up behind my back with ropes. BIR agents asked me to confess that I was an arms smuggler, but I denied it. While still tied up, my head was forced into a barrel of water and, while I was in this position, they beat the soles of my feet. One after the other, they would hit me. The same for the person who was arrested with me who received the same treatment. We suffered such torture without confessing anything. We were brought back to the cell the same night in so much pain and we slept with our hands and feet tied up. The following day, at about 11am, we suffered another torture session. We were tied up as before and hanged from a window, and while being suspended like this, they beat us up. We were tortured like this for a week and we ended up understanding that we had to tell them that we were arms smugglers in order not to die, so that’s what we did”<sup>97</sup>.*

*However, the majority of former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International also believed that the purpose of torture and other ill-treatment was to punish, terrify and intimidate them, as well as to instil a sense of fear. According to one former detainee: “They beat us up to humiliate us, to spread fear among other detainees. They wanted detainees to fear them. They wanted to set an example”<sup>98</sup>.*



### TORTURE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Former detainees also confirmed that they shared their cells with men with mental and physical disabilities and witnessed how they were also subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has documented four such cases: three at the DGRE ‘Lac’ between September 2015 and July 2016, and one at the BIR base in Salak between December 2015 and July 2016.

For example, in one case at least four eyewitnesses told Amnesty International how one man with mental disabilities was repeatedly tortured by guards at the DGRE ‘Lac’ between January and July 2016. In another case, at least nine eyewitnesses who had been held at Salak between December 2015 and July 2016 told Amnesty International how a man of about 40 years old, described as mentally ill, died following repeated beatings by guards. An eyewitness to this death told Amnesty International:

*“There was man in my cell with mental problems. The agents in Salak beat him all the time. He couldn’t bear the torture anymore and one day he just died in the cell. The other detainees helped to wrap his body into a plastic bag provided by the BIR and to bring him out”<sup>99</sup>.*

<sup>96</sup> Interview n.2A, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Interview n.51, September 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Interview n.5, August 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Interview n.20, February 2017.

## 6.2.4 ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE RAISED IN THE COURTS

*“Six gendarmes in uniform came to Salak to interrogate prisoners. I was interrogated in French by a gendarme whom I couldn’t see. I was interrogated blindfolded. I was asked several questions like: ‘Where do you come from? Why were you going to Mora? Do you know any members of Boko Haram?’ And at the end, I was made to sign a paper that I was not allowed to read. The white fabric covering my eyes was removed only when I signed this paper. I don’t know whether the gendarme who questioned me took notes or not, I couldn’t see anything. When I was heard in Court, I was very briefly allowed to read a report of the preliminary investigation of my case. I don’t know whether this was the report I had to sign blindfolded, but I saw there were some mistakes, including the time of my arrest.”<sup>100</sup>* A man from the Far North region of Cameroon, arrested in late 2014.

Amnesty International spoke to over 10 lawyers involved in defending individuals being tried before the Military Courts in Maroua and Yaoundé since mid-2015. All told Amnesty International that gendarmes at the Secrétariat d’État à la défense (SED) “routinely” record a later date of arrest to hide the period spent in secret detention.

Efforts by defence lawyers to raise allegations of incommunicado detention and torture before the Military Courts in Yaoundé and Maroua rarely, if ever, prompt the courts to investigate the allegations or declare the suspects’ confessions inadmissible. In almost all cases observed in court since mid-2015 by both Amnesty International delegates and legal experts consulted by Amnesty International, statements collected under duress have served as the main evidence used to convict them. As one lawyer told Amnesty International:

*“There’s a clear refusal from the military judges to investigate allegations of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in court. For all the cases I have dealt with, there has been no debate in court about the torture suffered by my clients. When my clients mentioned that they were subjected to torture, the judges systematically and quickly dismissed any allegation without further investigation because, they said, there was no evidence to prove that my clients were detained at Salak or the DGRE. Some of my clients, and clients of other lawyers, allege that interrogators at Salak and DGRE have tortured them in order to extract confessions. However, judges never seek to authenticate the validity of these confessions or take actions to ensure that they were not obtained under duress”<sup>101</sup>.*

## 6.3 CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

### 6.3.1 INHUMANE CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

*“I was held in Salak for 41 days in a cell measuring about 8 metres by 5 metres. We were about 30 people. There was no latrine in the cell; there was just one bucket where everyone had to urinate and defecate. It was horrible. We were treated like animals”<sup>102</sup>.* Rani (not his real name), a man from the Far North region of Cameroon.

Testimonies by almost all former detainees held at different times from 2014 to March 2017 also show that detention conditions, especially in BIR-run facilities, were so poor that they amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. This includes extreme overcrowding, inadequate and insufficient food and water, little or no access to sanitation, denial of medical assistance, and lack of access to fresh air or sunlight. Former detainees held in Salak at different times between late 2014 and the end of 2016 told Amnesty International that they were held in severely overcrowded conditions, with up to 70 inmates in a cell measuring approximately 9 metres by 5 metres in size<sup>103</sup>, with blocked windows and no bedding or sanitary facilities.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview n. 10, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Interview n. 107, Yaoundé, February 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Interview n.9, February 2017.

<sup>103</sup> This is according to former detainees’ testimonies, confirmed by satellite footprint, although this may be less, depending on the roof overhang.

They all reported sleeping on the floor and being forced to urinate and defecate in a bucket. They said they received only one meal per day, usually consisting of peanut sauce and rice. They reported that they were permanently held in their cells, with no access to fresh air or sunlight, and that the only time they were brought outside, other than for interrogations, was about once per month for washing and shaving.

Dozens of detainees were held at police and gendarmerie stations in various locations at different times between late 2014 and late 2016, including Kousseri, Maroua, Mora, Douala, Ngaoundere and Yaoundé (see Chapter 7 for more details). At least 12 of them reported having been held in windowless, underground cells without any access to fresh air or sunlight. Others said they were deprived of food and water or forced to sleep in cells with water on the ground. A man who was arrested in mid-2015 reported to Amnesty International:

*“They tied us up two by two and loaded us onto a vehicle. We stopped in Touboro where we spent the night tied up with big white ropes in a cell of the local gendarmerie where there was water up to our ankles. The following day, as we were starving and on the verge of hypothermia, they brought us to the gendarmerie in Ngaoundere, where we arrived at about 2pm. Our families arrived at the same time, but they were sent away. We stayed 10 days tied up all day and night in a cell of the gendarmerie in Ngaoundere, we were allowed one bottle of water per day between two people and one small fried dough per day. We were fed by the gendarmes because our hands were tied up”<sup>104</sup>.*

### **INADEQUATE ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE**

Over 50 former prisoners held in BIR-run facilities, including Salak, at different times between late 2014 and the end of 2016 said that they had no access to medical care. Those who were detained in Salak reported that while they saw some medical staff there, they did not receive any treatment. Only one former detainee held in Salak reported that he once saw a nurse enter his cell to insert a drip into the vein of a detainee who was in extreme pain. Some detainees, held both in BIR and DGRE-run facilities, witnessed cellmates dying because they were unable to obtain medical assistance (see Chapter 7), while others said there was no medical assistance even to those who had sustained serious injuries, including bullet wounds, either during their arrest or as a result of torture, or to those who suffered from chronic conditions.

In seven out of 101 cases documented, former detainees who had been held in DGRE-run facilities in Yaoundé reported that they were transferred to a Gendarmerie-run hospital located in a military camp known as Yeyap. They were treated following injuries suffered as a result of torture in Salak. While some detainees said medical care was generally available at DGRE facilities, others reported that it was not, with certain individuals alleging that they were denied desperately needed medical attention. One man who was held at DGRE between 2015 and 2016 told Amnesty International how the poor conditions led to many detainees getting painful skin conditions:

*“At the DGRE, we all contracted a nasty disease which made our bodies itch and forced us to scratch a lot, especially on the genitals. We asked the DGRE guards for treatment, but they refused. It was impossible for us to wear any clothes, because our bodies itched so much. We could only put the bed sheets to cover us. Wearing clothes was painful. ‘Mohamed’ [not his real name], a man from Mora, was suffering a lot. He started urinating blood and pus. So they [DGRE agents] came to take him to the hospital. His penis was all red and the skin was peeling off. My penis was also affected by the disease. They eventually took me to a place that they called a hospital where I stayed for six days, my hands and feet tied up to the bed. I was put on a drip three times and they gave me six injections. When I came back to the cell, I found that ‘Bachirou’ and ‘Foulbe’ [not their real names] were very sick and that the DGRE agents were still refusing to treat them. Blood and pus were flowing from their penises, but they refused to take care of them”<sup>105</sup>.*

<sup>104</sup> Interview n.26, March 2017

<sup>105</sup> Interview n.26, March 2017.

## 6.3.2 DEGRADING AND HUMILIATING TREATMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE

All of the former detainees interviewed for this report were held in one or several BIR and DGRE-run detention facilities and/or other facilities run by the Cameroonian security forces between 2014 and March 2017 described being treated in a degrading or humiliating manner throughout their detention or during interactions with soldiers, interrogators, guards or any other agent in charge. Such treatment included: sustained shouting; gross verbal abuse; threats of mistreatment, torture and death; mocking; stripping victims naked and leaving them in front of others for hours or days; ordering detainees to eat a burning meal in less than two minutes, or to drink urine or several litres of water before sleeping; and forcing detainees to lie on cold or wet floors. As one man who was arrested in late 2014 reported to Amnesty International:

*“We had already spent three hours with our faces to the ground, tied up behind our backs and blindfolded. We had already been badly beaten up many times by several soldiers when a soldier came close to us and asked: ‘Did you guys eat anything?’ I replied we didn’t. And so he said: ‘No problem, we came to bring you some coffee.’ And he started beating us again savagely”<sup>106</sup>.*

## 6.4 DEATH IN CUSTODY

*“They [BIR officers] brought me in front of ‘Mahamat’ [not his real name]. They first asked me whether I knew him, I said no. They told me that Mahamat told them that he knew me. I asked them to let me confront Mahamat. When I arrived there, I found Mahamat lying on the ground, his feet chained up. His body was completely shattered by the torture he suffered, I touched his head to recognize him; blood was flowing over his nose and mouth. I told them he was dead, so they asked another detainee to come and wrap the body. I declared this before the Military Court in Yaoundé, but the President of the court pretended not to have heard anything”<sup>107</sup>.* Abdoul (not his real name) from Maroua.

In 32 of the 101 cases documented, former detainees said that they had witnessed at least one, if not several, cases where a fellow detainee had died as a result of torture, ill-treatment, poor detention conditions and/or the lack of medical care. Former detainees provided the names of 23 different men whose deaths they had witnessed between October 2014 and December 2016 in three detention facilities: the BIR base in Kousseri, the BIR base in Salak, and the DGRE “Lac”. Amnesty International has not been able to independently verify these deaths in custody, but eight of the deaths were reported independently by four different eyewitnesses. Amnesty International shared these allegations with the Cameroonian authorities, although no official investigations are known to have been carried out into any of the deaths recorded by Amnesty International.

Based on the testimonies gathered from former detainees and other sources, Amnesty International estimates that dozens of detainees have died in both BIR and DGRE-run detention facilities since late 2013 to May 2017 as a result of torture and other ill-treatment, with the real number likely being higher.

Former detainees provided similar accounts of the process surrounding deaths in custody in Salak. When a detainee dies in a group cell, his cellmates are asked to put his body into a plastic bag, close it with tape and hand it over to BIR soldiers the next morning when they visit the cells. All former detainees who have witnessed a death in custody said that the bodies were collected by soldiers wearing distinctive BIR uniforms, loaded in military vehicles and transferred to an unknown destination. Former detainees who helped wrapping and carrying the bodies outside the cells also reported seeing various digging equipment in the military vehicles, including shovels and picks, and believed the bodies were not buried inside the Salak base but elsewhere. Satellite images of Salak show no evidence of movement of earth within the base that would otherwise suggest that bodies are buried there.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview n.10, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Interview n.23, August 2016.

## TORTURED TO DEATH IN SALAK

Mohamed (not his real name) was arrested by the BIR in January 2016. Taken to a BIR camp, he spent one night in a cell before being transferred to Salak, where he spent six months in incommunicado detention and was interrogated and tortured several times.

*“Once we arrived in Salak, my brother and I were brought to a room where there were the DGRE Commissioner and two men in plain clothes. They blindfolded me again and started beating us with electric cables, saying that a man known as ‘Arun’ [not his real name] told them that we used to guide suicide bombers recruited by Boko Haram. We denied it. They kept beating us up. Then, they brought Arun into the room and removed the blindfold from our eyes so that we could see him. They started beating Arun, who was handcuffed, while we were tied up with ropes. Every time Arun wanted to speak, they would beat him up. The soldier asked us to confess. They told us that if we did not confess, they would bring us to Yaoundé to kill us. We replied that we preferred to be killed rather than to confess something that we didn’t know about. They beat us like this for four days”<sup>108</sup>.*

In Salak, Mohamed was held in a cell measuring approximately 9 metres by 5 metres with up to 50 other people, receiving very little food and water and witnessing the death of at least three detainees as a result of torture and appalling conditions. Describing one of the incidents, he told Amnesty International:

*“I saw him dying in front of me. He was in my cell. He complained about the heat. He told [his torturer] that, in that condition, if they didn’t take him out, he would die. He started having diarrhoea till he died. When he passed away, soldiers asked detainees in the cell to bring the body out. Soldiers then wrapped his body into a white plastic bag, put tape around it and left with it”<sup>109</sup>.*

Former detainees held at the DGRE “Lac” also witnessed death in custody. Six of them who shared a cell in mid-2014 told Amnesty International about the death of a fellow detainee, Boukar (not his real name), a 36-year-old man from the Far North region of Cameroon, following repeated torture by the DGRE agents in June 2014. One of the six witnesses told Amnesty International:

*“Unlike those of us who accepted torture without saying anything, Boukar told the DGRE agents that he had attended school, had a degree and knew it was forbidden to torture people. He told them that we were innocent. The more he said that, the more he was beaten. Boukar died 12 days after our arrival at the DGRE cell. I took care of him while he was in extreme pain”<sup>110</sup>.*

Another witness said:

*“He died at about 4:30am, his arms and feet chained up; the same chain which restrained his feet was tied up to the bed where he was lying down. When Boukar died in the DGRE cell, DGRE agents attempted to remove the chain, but the padlock didn’t work, so the commander asked to remove it outside the cell. So they lifted the bed, brought it out of the cell with the dead body. Boukar was only wearing his underwear because his body was so covered in injuries caused by the torture he suffered that he couldn’t even wear clothes”<sup>111</sup>.*

One of the six eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that in mid-February 2017, Boukar’s father died of a heart attack a few days after he told him that his son was dead.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview n.18, August 2016.

<sup>109</sup> Interview n.18, August 2016.

<sup>110</sup> Interview n.42, January 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Interview n.36, July 2016

# 7. TORTURE SITES

***‘Even the idea of passing in front of the base sends shivers down my spine.’***

Mohamand (not his real name), detained and tortured at the BIR base in Salak, near Maroua.<sup>112</sup>

The practices of torture and incommunicado detention documented in this report were committed in a series of official and unofficial detention centres across Cameroon, involving many BIR bases in the Far North region, DGRE and SED facilities in Yaoundé, as well as other police and gendarmerie bases. Amnesty International has been able to identify at least 20 such sites where incommunicado detention and torture have been carried out between 2014 and 2017, indicating the widespread and routine nature of these practices since at least 2014.

While former detainees were often not immediately aware of where they had been taken, as they had been blindfolded during transfer, most would later come to know the location of their detention and torture, and were able to provide sufficient and consistent details - including in many cases being able to draw clear maps - that made it possible to corroborate with other testimonies, in addition to analysing satellite images, photographs and video evidence.

As outlined in previous chapters, while victims were subjected to torture and ill-treatment in a range of these facilities, the most common locations where victims were tortured were the BIR base in Salak and the ‘DGRE Lac’ facility in Yaoundé – both unofficial detention sites - although other BIR bases in Kousseri, Mora, Kolofata, Fotokol, Waza and Ngaoundere were also identified, as well as the DGRE-run facility located near the military airport in Yaoundé. The vast majority of people were detained in, and transferred between, more than one of these facilities.

While incommunicado detention and torture did take place in some official detention sites, these tended to be for shorter periods either before or after transfer to or from unofficial BIR or DGRE sites. The use of such unofficial sites violates both domestic and international legal standards and obligations<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> Interview n.22, Maroua, February 2017.

<sup>113</sup> According to international human rights standards, people deprived of their liberty must be held only in a place of detention that is officially recognized (Human Rights Committee General Comment 20, §11, [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/aGeneralCommentNo20Prohibitionoftortureorothercruelinhumanordegradingtreatmentorpunishment\(article7\)\(1992\).aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/aGeneralCommentNo20Prohibitionoftortureorothercruelinhumanordegradingtreatmentorpunishment(article7)(1992).aspx) ; Special Rapporteur on torture, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2003/68 (2002) §26(e), [http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/241989/E\\_CN.4\\_2003\\_68-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/241989/E_CN.4_2003_68-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y) . The Cameroon’s Criminal Procedure Code also states that for police custody, a suspect shall be detained “in a judicial police cell wherein he remains for a limited period available to and under the responsibility of a judicial police officer” (Cameroon’s Criminal Procedure Code, Law n°2005 of 27 July 2005, Section 118 (1)).

## 7.1 BIR-RUN FACILITIES

The BIR runs several bases in the Far North region of Cameroon. Research conducted by Amnesty International shows that at least six of them (see below) serve as detention centres, to which there is no access for independent humanitarian or human rights actors. In these bases, detainees are subjected to grossly inhumane conditions and human rights violations, including incommunicado detention, torture and death in custody. Of the six facilities, two are “temporary” bases established since operations were launched to fight Boko Haram, one being a school and the other a private residence. Details and accounts of the six BIR-operated facilities are outlined below.

### 7.1.1 BIR HEADQUARTERS AND MILITARY BASE IN SALAK, NEAR MAROUA

Salak is the biggest BIR base in the Far North region and serves as the headquarters of the BIR and “Operation Alpha”, a major military operation to fight Boko Haram. Located approximately 15km from the city of Maroua, the area within its inner walls measures is estimated to be 408 metres by 414 metres. Amnesty International’s delegates visited the base three times in 2015 and 2016 to meet BIR officers.

Former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International provided similar and consistent descriptions of the areas of the base where they were kept and tortured. They all described two main cells each facing a tree, and a building serving as a garage, where several military vehicles were parked. According to detainee testimonies and satellite imagery, the cells are about 9 metres by 5.5 metres in size.<sup>114</sup> In between the two main cells, former detainees located a building that they identified as an office in which soldiers would rest, and where women or elderly would sometimes be held. In front of this office, they said, there was a big barrel of water used to torture some detainees. Behind the two main cells, former detainees who provided descriptions of Salak all identified a small building formerly serving as toilets, but now out-of-use. Behind the garage, they said, is a building with several corridors and a room with white tiles on the floor, which they all described as the “DGRE room”. Former detainees said that a DGRE Commissioner and DGRE agents sat there to interrogate, humiliate, provide orders to beat detainees, or sometimes do so directly themselves. All former detainees who were held in Salak told Amnesty International that they were interrogated and tortured at least once in this room. Samou (not his real name), who was arrested in Kousseri in March 2016, told Amnesty International about his interrogation in the DGRE room in Salak a few days after his arrest:

*“[A guard] came to take me, hooded, to a room [‘the DGRE room’] where, when they took off the hood, I saw the guard and three people in civilian clothes. They asked me my phone number, and I gave them both my Orange and MTN numbers. They asked me if I knew why I had been arrested, I said no. They asked me to tell them if I knew members of Boko Haram, and I responded that I did not know any. They told me to make it easier for them and confess, or they would kill me. I told them that might happen as I did not know any Boko Haram member. That’s when the guard tied my hands and feet behind my back and they started to beat me with an electric cable and throw water on me at the same time. They beat me half to death and afterwards they took me back to my cell. I remained there for about four months.”*<sup>115</sup>

Most of the detainees reported to only having seen this part of the base, as they were otherwise almost permanently locked in their cells or blindfolded when brought out. However, a handful were allowed to walk around the base and see other areas, as they were asked to collect food and water and bring them to fellow detainees. These detainees said that besides one of the two main cells, in the direction of one of the two watchtowers there was a disciplinary cell and the office of a senior officer who former detainees said provided orders to torture, and was described as being able to “decide the life and death of each detainee”<sup>116</sup>.

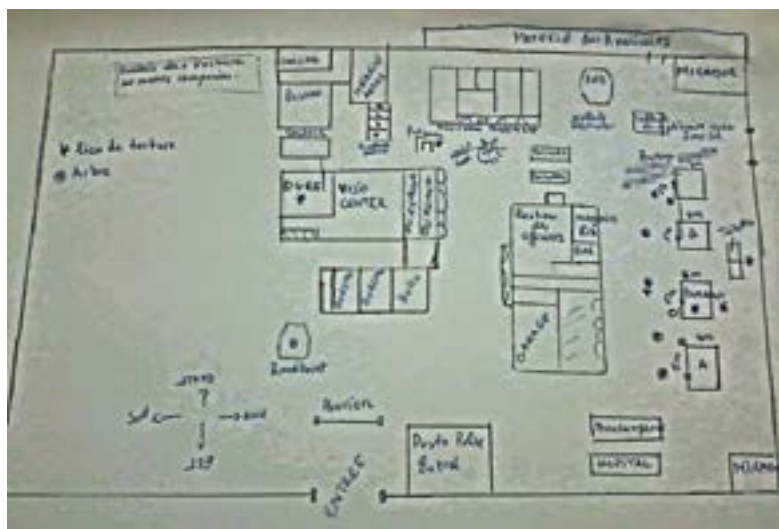
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<sup>114</sup> The real size could be slightly smaller, depending on the overhang of the roof.

<sup>115</sup> Interview n.15, August 2016.

<sup>116</sup> Interview n.5, January 2017.

Amnesty International asked these detainees to independently sketch a map of the base, which is below. The map, which is a composite of sketches by former detainees, shows the entire base and in particular the locations where detainees were tortured (identified with a star).



↑ A composite based on sketches by former detainees showing the internal layout of the base.  
©Private



↑ Satellite imagery showing an overview of Salak BIR base.  
©Amnesty International





↑ A satellite imagery showing the two main cells where detainees were held and the garage facing them, behind which is a building containing the 'DGRE Room' used for torture. ©Amnesty International

## 7.1.2 INTERNATIONAL FORCES PRESENT IN SALAK

*"During my detention in Salak, I saw white men there on several occasions. Most of the time, I saw them from [the holes of] windows of my cell. I saw them jogging in the early morning, from the back window of my cell - the window that faced a wall. I also saw them standing or talking from the front window of the cell - the window that faced the garage"* <sup>117</sup>. A man held in Salak between March and June 2016.

A number of countries provide military assistance to Cameroon <sup>118</sup>, while some including the USA and France have military personnel based in Cameroon to train and coordinate with the regular Army and the BIR<sup>119</sup>. Private Israeli security firms also provide training and assistance.<sup>120</sup> While there were no testimonies to indicate that agents from countries other than Cameroon were directly involved in the practices of incommunicado detention and torture at the Salak military base, evidence gathered by Amnesty International indicates that an identified number of US military personnel were regularly present at the base since at least 2015, and probably during 2014, when the widespread practices of illegal detention and torture documented in this report were carried out.

Amnesty International delegates have directly observed the presence of French soldiers at the BIR base in Salak in May 2015, while over a dozen former detainees held in Salak between 2015 and 2016 said they saw and heard English-speaking white men at the base, including some in military uniform. This is confirmed by photographic and video evidence obtained by Amnesty International clearly showing the regular presence of US personnel in numerous locations across the base, including making use of a makeshift gym and a trailer converted into an office.<sup>121</sup> Tendering documents show that in December 2013 the US military were seeking internet services at the base for its personnel, and showed continued delivery of fuel in April 2017 <sup>122</sup>.

*"I saw white men in Salak many times and I heard them talking in English. I think they were Americans. Everyone said they were Americans and we knew American soldiers stocked material in Salak. I saw them running from the back window of my cell, especially in the morning, as well as standing in front of our cell, just where the garage was. Some were wearing plain clothes, others were in uniform. The uniform was like camouflage clothing, green and beige."*<sup>123</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Interview n. 15, May 2017.

<sup>118</sup> For more information on military assistance to Cameroon see research by AOAV <https://aoav.org.uk/2017/national-c-ied-initiatives-sahel-cameroon/>

<sup>119</sup> Amnesty International, Human Rights Under Fire; Right Cause, Wrong Means. Also note that the United States deployed 300 troops to Cameroon as part of the effort to combat Boko Haram, along with drones and armoured vehicles to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, see: BBC, Boko Haram crisis: US deploys troops in Cameroon, 14 October 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34533820](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34533820)

<sup>120</sup> Jeune Afrique, Cameroun : Paul Biya sous protection israélienne, 19 November 2015, [www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/276021/politique/cameroun-paul-biya-sous-protection-israelienne/](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/276021/politique/cameroun-paul-biya-sous-protection-israelienne/)

<sup>121</sup> Forensic Architecture and Amnesty International, video.

<sup>122</sup> A summary of the tender for internet services is available at <https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&tab=core&id=c-497667d5c0163e46e14ad001dde347f> and one for the delivery of fuel at [https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=b-8342ca7e7fc0d90331a107961f310ae&tab=core&\\_cvview=1](https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=b-8342ca7e7fc0d90331a107961f310ae&tab=core&_cvview=1) (accessed 11 July 2017).

<sup>123</sup> Interview n.17, May 2017.



Ⓢ ↑ "The night vision game". A screenshot of video posted on Facebook on 24 May 2017 by a private contractor working for the US military showing American soldiers playing football with BIR soldiers while wearing night vision goggles in the space behind the entrance of the Salak base. The picture has been lightened for clarity, containing the 'DGRE Room' used for torture.  
 ©Private



Ⓢ ↑ A photo, posted on Facebook on 24 May 2017 by a private contractor working for the US military showing American soldiers training men from the Anti-Terrorist Centre (CAT) in the Salak base. The hangars described by many former detainees are visible in the background.  
 ©Private



Ⓢ ↑ Picture posted on Facebook on 24 May 2017 by a private contractor working for the US military showing a soldier wearing a US military uniform in Salak  
 ©Private



↑ Picture posted on Facebook on 24 May 2017 by a private contractor working for the US military showing the 'meat locker', used as a gym and used by American soldiers based in Salak.  
©Private

Amnesty International also wrote to the US and French Embassies in Cameroon on 23 June 2017, requesting further information about whether their personnel had been aware of illegal detention and torture practices at the BIR base in Salak, and whether they had reported any such allegations to the Cameroonian authorities. The US Embassy responded on 11 July 2017 but they did not answer these questions. Their letter can be found in the appendix. No response had been received from the French Embassy at the time of publication.

Given the regular presence of military personnel, especially from the US but also from France, at Salak, Amnesty International believes these governments need to investigate the possibility of their military personnel having knowledge about the practices of incommunicado detention and torture taking place on the site, and whether or not the military assistance provided to Cameroon has contributed to the commission of these crimes and violations <sup>124</sup>.

### 7.1.3 BIR MILITARY BASE IN KOUSSERI

Located at the southern edge of the town of Kousseri, in the neighbourhood known as Youbou or Semry, the walled area of the military base is about 5,000 sq metres in size. According to testimonies collected by Amnesty International from four people who were held in cells located within the base at different times between January and July 2015, there are several buildings within the compound. These buildings include a large structure in the middle serving as the soldiers' dormitory with over 50 bunkbeds, as well as several warehouses and at least two cells where suspects are detained. The cells face a building serving as an office for soldiers. All former detainees held in one of these two cells confirmed that they were tortured there, and at least one witnessed the death of another detainee following torture.



↑ A satellite image showing an overview map of the BIR base in Kousseri, located around 350 metres north of the CRTV Kousseri / Radio Kousseri telecommunications tower. ©Amnesty International

<sup>124</sup> Amnesty International has presented its findings to the US and French Embassies in Cameroon in May 2017, and also in writing in June 2017..





↑ A satellite image showing the BIR base in Kousseri. ©Amnesty International

## 7.1.4 PRIVATE RESIDENCE USED BY THE BIR IN KOLOFATA

Located in the neighbourhood of Kolofata known as the ‘quartier administratif’, and surrounded by a man-made trench, this facility appears to be a private residence that used to belong to the sub-prefect of Kolofata and now serves as an Army barracks and detention facility. This has been demonstrated by the witness accounts and sketches independently provided by two former detainees who were held and tortured at this location in February 2016. Further, Amnesty International has authenticated a 1:46 minute video posted online in January 2017<sup>125</sup> showing at least seven BIR soldiers<sup>126</sup>, some of whom are wearing distinctive BIR uniforms, beating two Fulani-speaking men in the courtyard of the site<sup>127</sup>. The victims have been accused of being Boko Haram members and other soldiers are seen filming the scene. Photographic evidence obtained from local sources and satellite imagery showing the layout and location of this facility, along with a screenshot of the above-mentioned video, can be found below.



↑ Screenshot of a video showing a man being tortured by BIR soldiers at a residence in Kolofata, 1:07min

<sup>125</sup> Using online and social media research, including reverse image search with frames of the video, the earliest version of the video was found in a Twitter post at 20:11 on January 13, 2017 (West Africa Time Zone). It was not possible to determine the exact date of the incident from the video alone. The video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RL0T505Zy-E>.

<sup>126</sup> The men beating the other men in the video analysed by Amnesty International are members of the BIR. The clothing is consistent with uniforms of the BIR. Most notably, several men were black T-shirts that clearly display the letters “B.I.R” on the back.

<sup>127</sup> The compound visible in the video shows two walls, one with a door, and two areas with rooms. Adjacent to the second wall, a small structure is visible in the corner. A compound matching this description can be identified in satellite images at coordinates 11.154955, 13.999718, within a fortified area in Kolofata..



Ⓢ ↑ Drawing by a former detainee showing the internal layout of the Kolofata BIR base.  
©Private



Ⓢ ↑ Satellite image of a compound that matches features visible in the video.  
Satellite image from February 2016. Coordinates: 11.154955, 13.999718  
©Amnesty International



Ⓢ ↑ Overview of Kolofata town and military base. Location of incident highlighted in red. Satellite image from September 2016. Coordinates: 11.159051, 14.001068

## 7.1.5 A SCHOOL USED BY THE BIR IN FOTOKOL

Like the previous facility, the site in Fotokol is not an official Army base, but rather a school that became a temporary base for the BIR beginning around May 2014<sup>128</sup>. According to satellite imagery reviewed by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, the area inside the school's walls is roughly 42,500 sq metres and the school was fortified in mid-2015.

Amnesty International has obtained and, in collaboration with Forensic Architecture, authenticated a 3:18 minute video showing several BIR soldiers, some of whom are wearing distinctive BIR uniforms, torturing suspected Boko Haram members held in this site before October 2016. Features visible in the video match up with features visible in satellite images and sketches of the school done by former detainees. Amnesty International has interviewed several men from Fotokol and three men who were held in this location at different times between December 2015 and March 2016, who all independently recognized the building as the Public School number 2 of Fotokol ('Ecole publique numéro 2 de Fotokol').

The video shows several BIR soldiers dragging a man for approximately 75 metres and beating blindfolded detainees with sharp wooden sticks. Several soldiers and detainees are also visible throughout the video.

The incident shown in the video took place before October 2016, since a new building, first visible in satellite imagery from October 2016, is not visible in the video. Metadata from the video file indicates that the file was created on 16 January 2015. Looking at the very long shadows visible in the video, with the sun in the West, it is possible to determine that the incident took place in the late afternoon. The men abusing the detainee are wearing military uniforms with flak jackets (and some with helmets and T-shirts) that clearly display "B.I.R."

While the school had not been in use for teaching since the hostilities between Cameroon and Boko Haram started, it reopened in late 2016. In November 2016, the Cameroonian newspaper L'Oeil du Sahel published an article about the re-inauguration of the school by the military<sup>129</sup>. However, information obtained by Amnesty International shows that the school was still being partially used by the BIR in June 2017, with soldiers cohabitating and sharing the space with the children<sup>130</sup>. As of 1 June 2017, nine detainees were still held there, according to local sources.

Given the situation in the far North of Cameroon has constituted a non-international armed conflict between Boko Haram and the Cameroonian authorities since 2014, the government of Cameroon must ensure that it complies with international humanitarian law. By using the school as a military base while children were also using it, the Cameroonian authorities have placed children at risk by making the school a military objective (as a dual use objective)<sup>131</sup> and have thus failed to take sufficient precautions against the effects of attack,<sup>132</sup> even though international humanitarian law would in any case prohibit Boko Haram from attacking the school considering that any such attack would likely be disproportionate. Cameroon would therefore be in violation of its obligation to protect civilians during armed conflict. This would also constitute a violation of Cameroon's obligations under international human rights law to protect its population from human rights abuses.

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<sup>128</sup> Interviews with former detainees and military sources.

<sup>129</sup> Oeil du Sahel, 13 November 2016, <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/oeildusahelcameroun/photos/pcb.1282012031850690/1282011938517366/?type=3>,

<sup>130</sup> Telephone interview n.109, April 2017.

<sup>131</sup> See ICRC Customary IHL Study, Rule 8.

<sup>132</sup> As required under customary international humanitarian law – see ICRC Customary IHL Study, Chapter 6.





Satellite image which shows the school's facility and its use. In blue: facilities used by children. In red: facilities used by soldiers. In purple: facilities shared by both.



A satellite image showing the compound of the school in Fotokol where the BIR established its base. Coordinates are: 12°22'29.00"N, 14°13'42.00"E.



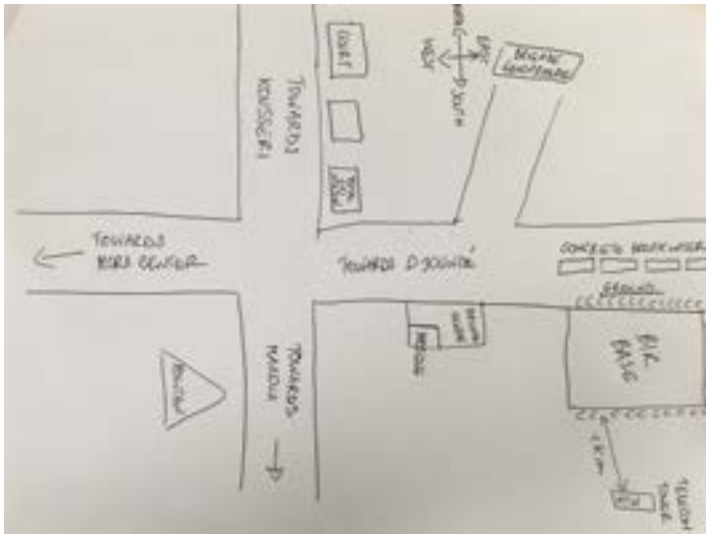
Screenshots of the video, with BIR clearly visible on flak jackets (0:15min) and trucks (0:22min).

Satellite imagery and other photographic evidence showing the location of this facility, along with some screenshots of the above-mentioned video and its analysis by Amnesty International, can be found below.

## 7.1.6 MILITARY BASE IN MORA

Located on the east side of the city of Mora, on the road leading to Djounde, the BIR base in Mora is surrounded by barricades and contains several buildings, including a hangar. Amnesty International has collected testimonies of eight individuals who were arrested in the Far North and who were held incommunicado and tortured in this site, and who also witnessed the torture of others.

Those former detainees have also sketched a map of the base which was used by Amnesty International to obtain satellite imagery and identify the exact location of the site. The sketch (redrawn by Amnesty International for the purpose of clarity) and satellite imagery are provided below.



Ⓢ ↑

Sketch made by a former detainee showing the location of the BIR base in Mora and its surroundings (redrawn for the purpose of clarity).

©Private



Ⓢ ↑

A sketch of the internal layout of the BIR base in Mora done by a former detainee and redrafted by Amnesty International for the purposes of clarity and protection of sources.

©Private





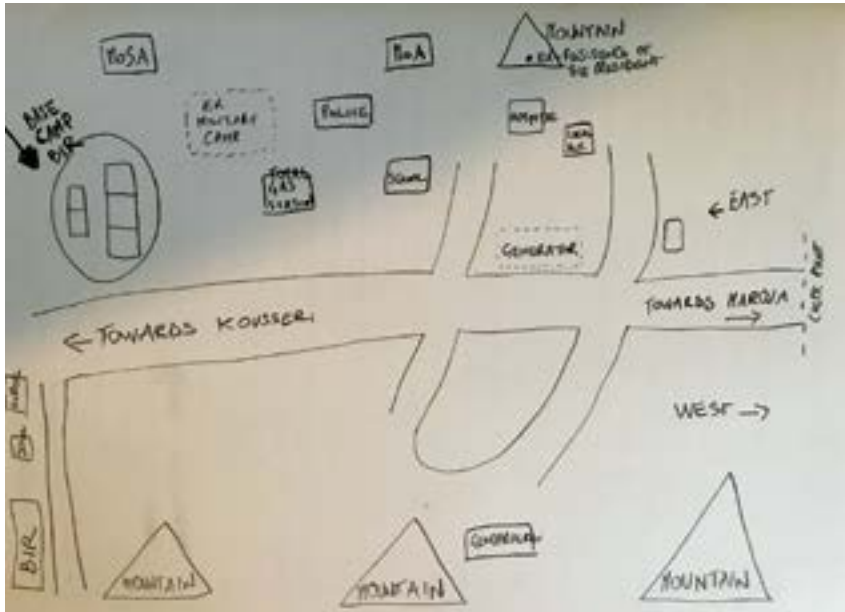
Satellite imagery showing an overview of Mora and the location of the BIR base. ©Amnesty International



Satellite imagery showing the BIR base in Mora. ©Amnesty International

## 7.1.7 MILITARY BASE IN WAZA

Located at the outskirts of the city of Waza, on the west side on the road leading to Kousseri, this military base is surrounded by a fence and has at least five main buildings with BIR written in large letters on the roof of three of them. From satellite imagery obtained by Amnesty International, it appears that, since the beginning of 2017, the base is being expanded significantly. Amnesty International has spoken with four individuals who were held incommunicado and tortured in this site and who also witnessed the torture of others.



⦿ ↑  
 A map showing the surroundings of the BIR base in Waza sketched by a former detainee, redrawn for clarity.  
 ©Private



⦿ ↑  
 Satellite imagery showing the Waza military base before expansion, February 2016. ©Amnesty International

## 7.2 DGRE-RUN FACILITIES

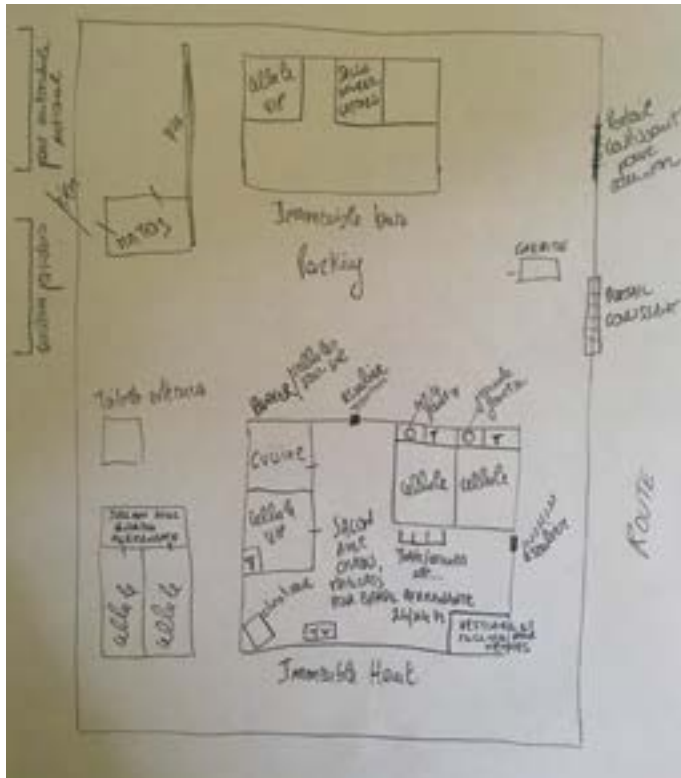
According to information received by Amnesty International, including from former detainees, the DGRE runs at least two unofficial detention centres in Yaoundé where detainees have been subjected to prolonged detention, interrogations, and torture. A map of Yaoundé showing the location of these two facilities (the two dots on the next page). A detailed description of one of the two facilities, known as DGRE 'Lac', is provided below. Information on the second facility known as DGRE 'Airport' is too limited to provide a detailed description of layout, but it is located near the military airport in the neighbourhood of Yaoundé known as Mvog-Mbi. Amnesty International collected testimonies from 37 people who had been held at DGRE 'Lac', and about 15 people who had been held at DGRE Airport, between 2013 and 2017.





## 7.2.1 DGRE 'LAC'

Located in the neighbourhood of Yaoundé known as 'Lac', near the National College of Administration and Magistrates (known with the French acronym of ENAM), this facility appears to host several buildings. Testimonies from former detainees consistently indicate that they were held in at least one of three different cells located in what they called 'Grand Bâtiment' or 'Bâtiment Haut' (High Building – see first image below). They confirmed that there were toilets in each of the three cells and that in the same building there was a kitchen, a living room with a TV, and another room. Former detainees said they were both tortured in these cells, and witnessed the torture of others. They also reported that in addition to 'High Building', there were at least two other buildings, including one called the 'Bâtiment bas' (Low building) used to store materials, and another building with two more cells.



⦿ ↑

A sketch showing the internal layout of the DGRE 'Lac' done by former detainees and redrawn by Amnesty International for the purposes of clarity and security of sources.

©Private



⦿ ↑

Satellite imagery showing the location of the DGRE 'Lac'.

©Amnesty International



Satellite imagery showing the location of the DGRE 'Lac'.

## 7.3 OTHER FACILITIES

Incommunicado detention and torture were reported by over a quarter of detainees in 18 other detention sites,<sup>133</sup> including police stations, and gendarmerie bases in a variety of locations, and also at SED, the Investigative Police ('Police Judiciare') in the district known as Elig Essono, and the base of the Presidential Guard, all in Yaoundé<sup>134</sup>. Torture was reported in six of these sites, including the SED and stations of the Special Police Units known as 'Equipes spéciales d'intervention rapide' (ESIR) in the towns of Kousseri and Maroua. Aboubakary (not his real name), a farmer arrested in Mora in September 2014 before being transferred to Yaoundé in October 2014, told Amnesty International:

*"I spent 25 days in the building of the Investigative Police in Yaoundé, in the neighbourhood known as Elig Essono. I was held in secret, blindfolded and tortured. They tied my hands behind my back with handcuffs and a rope. My feet were also tied up. They beat me with whatever object they could find: sticks and machetes, mainly, but they also kicked me with their boots. They would only take off my blindfold to question me, asking whether I was a member of Boko Haram. If I answered no, they would blindfold me and beat me again and again. This happened continuously for three days. On the third day, they brought me food. I told them I couldn't even stand up and I needed medical attention and medicines. They said they'll take care of it, but then they beat me even harder. One of the agents came with scissors and cut my skin, the cut was about 15cm long, while another pulled out the nail of my left foot out with pliers. I was in so much pain that at one point I asked them to get a knife and kill me, so I could stop suffering. I told them: 'Kill me, kill me! I don't want to feel this anymore.' That's when they left me alone"<sup>135</sup>.*

<sup>133</sup> Among others: the station of the Police Unit known as "Groupement mobile d'intervention" (GMI) in Maroua; police stations in Mora, Fouban and Douala; the Gendarmerie bases of Maga, Maroua, Mora, Ngaoundere and Douala.

<sup>134</sup> All of these are official detention sites, apart from the base of the Presidential Guard.

<sup>135</sup> Interview no. 50, August 2016.

# 8. INDIVIDUAL AND COMMAND RESPONSIBILITY

Amnesty International believes that the evidence contained in this report provides a sufficient basis for Cameroonian authorities to initiate independent and impartial investigations into potential individual and command responsibility for crimes of torture, incommunicado detention, and other human rights violations committed by various military officers and security service agents, as well as serious violations of international humanitarian law that amount to war crimes. This is especially the case for violations and possible crimes committed at two unofficial detention sites – the BIR base at Salak and DGRE Lac – where Amnesty International documented 80 cases of torture and incommunicado detention between March 2013 and March 2017.

Under international law, those who gave orders or directly participated in the commission of crimes such as torture may bear individual responsibility. Superior BIR and DGRE officers may also bear responsibility for human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by BIR soldiers and DGRE agents under their command in accordance with the doctrine of command responsibility. This may be the case even if they did not directly participate in or give orders to commit the violations, if they have effective control over the direct perpetrators, knew or should have known about the crimes and did not take all necessary and reasonable measures to prevent the commission of these crimes, or to punish the persons responsible.

## 8.1 DIRECT PERPETRATION OF TORTURE BY MID-RANKING OFFICERS

According to evidence gathered by Amnesty International, in the BIR base at Salak it was mostly low or mid-ranking officers who were identified by victims and witnesses as having committed and participated in acts of torture. Perpetrators were often around the rank of ‘Adjutant’ (a non-commissioned officer, similar to a Staff Sergeant). Victims interviewed by Amnesty International identified 65 names of such officers, including more than a dozen who were named independently by at least four different individuals who had both witnessed and been subjected to torture while detained at Salak at various times in 2015 and 2016.

Over one-third of the victims were able to identify their torturers by hearing the names or nicknames used by their colleagues or other detainees who happened to know them prior to arrest. Amnesty International was able to independently verify the names and ranks and location of deployment of many of these officers through internal military sources and publicly available profiles, including in some cases photographs clearly showing their uniforms, weapons and presence in Salak during the periods that torture was documented.

Amnesty International’s research also shows that at DGRE ‘Lac’ torture was frequently carried out by mid- or low-ranking agents, although victims identified more senior officers who were present during torture sessions and in some cases were heard providing orders. Victims and witnesses who were detained at DGRE ‘Lac’ between late December 2013 and March 2017 were able to independently identify by name six agents who

committed acts of torture between late 2013 and March 2017. In addition, most of these victims identified at least one senior DGRE agent who was either present during torture sessions and at facilities where victims of torture were held.

## **8.2 POTENTIAL LIABILITY OF HIGH-RANKING BIR AND DGRE OFFICERS**

The scale and frequency of the violations outlined in this report suggest that it would be improbable for high-ranking officers at Salak or DGRE Lac to have been unaware of what was happening. Not only were over 80 of the 101 cases of torture and incommunicado detention committed in these two unofficial detention facilities, but in Salak victims also described being held incommunicado in cells with up to 70 other people.

At the BIR base in Salak specifically, while there is insufficient evidence to suggest that high-ranking officers were directly committing torture, or ordering its commission, the information collected by Amnesty International does suggest that some high-ranking officers in this military base would most likely have been aware that the routine practice of torture was being carried out by other officers and/or soldiers under their command.

For instance, the specific cells and rooms where acts of torture were committed in Salak were extremely close to the offices routinely used by high-ranking officers at the base, suggesting that it would be extremely difficult for them to have been unaware of the actions being committed by personnel under their command. Over 50 torture victims at Salak were able to describe the main room where they had been interrogated and tortured – a room that witness testimony and analysis of satellite imagery demonstrates being in the same building as the offices of some high-ranking officers at the base. Those same offices were also approximately 110 metres from the cells where victims were detained, and where torture was also reported.

Similarly, a number of senior DGRE officers were identified by at least 10 victims and eyewitnesses as being present during interrogations that involved acts of torture, at Salak and DGRE ‘Lac’, and in some cases at both locations. For example, one high-ranking DGRE agent was identified by 10 former detainees who had been tortured in Salak as being the person supervising and conducting interrogations and giving orders to agents and soldiers to continue and/or stop the acts of torture during interrogations.

Amnesty International is also unaware of any investigations launched – or other disciplinary measures taken - by the Cameroonian authorities in relation to allegations of torture and incommunicado detention, including those documented in a report published by Amnesty International in July 2016. Nor is it aware of any measures taken by authorities and responsible military and security service officials to prevent such acts of torture from occurring. Senior BIR officers had previously told Amnesty International that no one was held in Salak , a claim contradicted by the evidence collected by Amnesty International and later admissions by representatives of the Cameroonian government. As documented in this report, widespread patterns of arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention and acts of torture continued throughout 2016 and into 2017 and no measures appear to have been taken to prevent or punish these practices.

## **8.3 THE OBLIGATION TO INVESTIGATE**

Amnesty International believes that all human rights violations and serious violations of international law that amount to war crimes including incommunicado detention, torture, death in custody and enforced disappearances documented in this report should be investigated, and that those responsible, either by virtue of their direct or command responsibility, should be brought to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty. The officers who were in charge of the detention facilities mentioned in this report, as well as their commanders at the BIR, DGRE and Defence Staff, should be investigated for their suspected command responsibility for human rights violations and crimes under international law including incommunicado detention, torture, death in custody and enforced disappearances. As specified in Chapter 4, Cameroon is also a party to international treaties prohibiting incommunicado detention, torture and death in custody, which include obligations for the perpetrators of such human rights violations to be investigated and prosecuted in accordance with fair trial standards.



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research conducted by Amnesty International indicates that the practices of incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment of people held on suspicion of supporting Boko Haram are widespread and routine in BIR and DGRE-run facilities across Cameroon, as well as in other detention centres run by the Cameroonian security forces such as police and gendarmerie stations, including the SED. This is despite commitments made by the Cameroonian government to respect human rights in the fight against Boko Haram.

The lack of effective investigations of these violations, despite previous reports, also indicates that Cameroon to date has fulfilled neither its obligation to investigate, prosecute and punish those suspected of responsibility, nor its obligation to prevent such occurrences.

States supporting the Cameroonian authorities in the fight against Boko Haram, such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Germany also have a role to play to prevent human rights violations<sup>136</sup>. Not only should they call on the Cameroonian authorities to take actions to investigate and remedy the violations outlined in this report, they should review their own support to ensure they neither ignore nor contribute to the commission of human rights violations.

## TO THE CAMEROONIAN AUTHORITIES

### PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO TORTURE, INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION, AND DEATHS IN CUSTODY

- Immediately close all unofficial and secret places of detention, including ungazetted military detention centres, and either transfer detainees to lawful places of detention or release them in such a manner that allows reliable verification of their release and ensures their safety;
- Publicly order the security forces to end the practice of detaining and interrogating people outside of official detention sites, including at BIR bases and DGRE facilities;
- Ensure that all persons deprived of their liberty are able to inform their families about their location and status of their detention, and are able to access medical assistance and a lawyer of their choice at all stages of interrogation;
- Grant independent international monitors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), unhindered access to all persons deprived of their liberty and allow them to carry out unannounced inspection visits to all detention facilities, including military bases and buildings operated by the secret services, to investigate and monitor conditions;
- Ensure that all interrogators wear identifying uniforms and badges with their names and identification, and that all individuals involved in interrogations are visible to the prisoners;
- Ensure that all allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including the use of coercion and threats, made by suspects, including before military courts, are promptly and independently investigated, and acted upon;



- Improve conditions in detention facilities and preserve prisoners' physical and psychological integrity by providing all detainees with professional medical care, adequate food, water, lighting, cooling, and ventilation, in accordance with international and regional stand.
- Create and maintain an up-to-date, centralized register of all people arrested and detained, readily available and accessible to the relatives and lawyers of those detained as well as to any other people who may be concerned. The register must include the personal details of the detainees, the names and places of detention, as well as the names of the individuals responsible for the detention, authority for the detention and the date of arrest and detention, and all transfers;
- Ensure that confessions or other evidence obtained through torture may never be invoked in legal proceedings.

### **ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTION**

- Issue a clear public directive to military and security forces that arrests and detentions be conducted in compliance with international human rights and domestic law, and ensure all security forces are trained on and understand these norms;
- Ensure that there are sufficient, recognizable and precise grounds for arrest and that evidence is appropriately gathered. A suspect must only be arrested if there is a reasonable suspicion that he or she may have committed a crime. If there are insufficient grounds for arrest, the person must be immediately released;
- Ensure that detainees are promptly brought before an independent civilian court that upholds international fair-trial standards, are informed of the charges against them, and have knowledge of and access to legal procedures allowing them to challenge the legality of their detention.

### **ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE REMEDIES TO VICTIMS**

- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture, incommunicado and secret detention and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the detention facilities outlined in this report – especially Salak and DGRE Lac - and ensure that guards, interrogators and other detention officials who are responsible for the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners face disciplinary measures and criminal prosecution in fair trials before civilian courts without recourse to the death penalty;
- Pending such investigations, suspend from active duty all commanding officers and soldiers reasonably suspected to be individually criminally responsible for human rights violations and crimes under international law, including those named in this report;
- Ensure thorough, prompt, effective, and impartial investigations of all suspected cases of death in custody. The methodology and findings of the investigations should be public, and authorities should ensure that persons identified by the investigation as committing any unlawful killings are held accountable in fair trials before civilian courts without recourse to the death penalty;
- Publish official lists of all detainees who have died in Cameroonian detention facilities and prisons highlighted in this and previous Amnesty International reports, including those operated by intelligence agencies and the military, and provide death certificates and autopsy results to the families;
- Launch effective, independent and impartial investigations into previous cases of enforced disappearances raised by Amnesty International, including the disappearances of over 130 people following their arrests in the villages of Magdeme and Double and the unlawful killings and destruction of property committed during the arrest operation, and bring those responsible to account in fair trials before civilian courts without recourse to the death penalty;
- Ensure that all victims of torture and other ill-treatment are granted reparation including measures of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition;

- Create and maintain an up-to-date, centralized register of all people arrested and detained, readily available and accessible to the relatives and lawyers of those detained as well as to any other people who may be concerned. The register must include the personal details of the detainees, the names and places of detention, as well as the names of the individuals responsible for the detention, authority for the detention and the date of arrest and detention, and all transfers;
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- Ensure that all victims of torture and other ill-treatment are granted reparation including measures of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

## **INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND CO-OPERATION WITH UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS**

- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and make the declaration under Article 12 (3) allowing the Court to exercise jurisdiction over all crimes covered under the Statute committed since it came into force in 2002;
- Cooperate with the UN Treaty Monitoring Bodies, including by submitting outstanding reports and implementing their recommendations.

## **TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PREVENTION OF TORTURE IN AFRICA AND THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON PRISONS, CONDITIONS OF DETENTION AND POLICING IN AFRICA**

- Urgently request a country visit to Cameroon during which the delegation of the Commission should be granted unconditional and full access to prisons and places of detention including those within military and gendarmerie bases;
- Urge the Government of Cameroon to comply with the Commission's 2002 Robben Island Guidelines and the 2014 Guidelines on the Conditions of Arrest, Police Custody and Pre-trial Detention, and specifically request the government to report on the implementation of these guidelines in its next periodic report under Article 62 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

## **TO STATES PROVIDING MILITARY AND OTHER ASSISTANCE TO CAMEROON**

States supporting the Cameroonian authorities in the fight against Boko Haram, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Israel, and others should:

- Call on the Cameroonian authorities to immediately guarantee that detainees will be protected from torture and other ill-treatment, to ensure they have unrestricted access to their family and lawyers, to close all unofficial detention centres, to reveal the whereabouts of all detainees who have been subjected to enforced disappearance and to keep a registry of the names of all those detained by Cameroonian security forces;
- Call on Cameroonian authorities to provide immediate and unhindered access for recognized international detention monitors to all persons deprived of their liberty, without prior notification;
- Provide financial and technical support to the justice sector in Cameroon, especially with a view toward ensuring that human rights are protected during arrests and detention, and for reforming the justice system to provide fair trials;
- Urge Cameroonian authorities to investigate the human rights violations outlined in this report and to take the measures outlined to prevent arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture, enforced disappearances, deaths in custody and inhumane prison conditions, as Cameroon committed to doing during its UPR in 2013;

All states supplying weapons, ammunition or any other military technology to Cameroon must take effective measures to ensure that any military co-operation with Cameroon, including training or technical advice, does not contribute to the commission of human rights violations and crimes under international law, including by:

- Carrying out a rigorous risk assessment against strict human rights criteria before authorizing any military transfer; should the transfer take place, states must establish effective monitoring processes and put in place robust post-delivery controls to prevent diversion to unauthorized end-users. Any such transfers must be rapidly halted if arms are used to commit human rights violations and crimes under international law;

- Vetting all Cameroonian military personnel recommended for training to screen out those responsible for human rights violations and crimes under international law;
- Reviewing the impact of training in human rights and international humanitarian law provided to date and the systems of accountability within which trainees operate;
- Engaging in the UN's Universal Periodic Review of Cameroon when it comes up for its third examination in April-May 2018, including by holding the government accountable for the recommendations it accepted during its previous review in September 2013 and making new recommendations to address the most pressing human rights concerns in the country;
- Supporting and building the capacity of Cameroonian human rights organizations that are documenting human rights violations occurring in the fight against Boko Haram and encouraging the UN and other international actors to ensure that such support and training is made available to them.

#### **TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

- Adopt a resolution calling on the Government of Cameroon to urgently launch thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations into human rights violations and crimes under international law by the Cameroonian authorities and security forces, and to seek regional and international assistance and advice in the conduct of these investigations and any subsequent prosecutions;
- Request a report from the Cameroonian government on steps taken towards the implementation of its obligation to pursue truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, including through the investigation and prosecution of crimes under international law and human rights violations committed by the Cameroonian authorities and security forces.

#### **TO THE UN OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

- Offer technical assistance and support to any independent investigations initiated by the Cameroonian government, in particular assistance with the collection and preservation of evidence;
- Continue to inform the Council on human rights violations committed by the Cameroonian authorities and security forces, and about progress made in holding perpetrators of crimes under international law and human rights violations accountable.

#### **TO THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE**

- Visit Cameroon to assess the human rights situation and condemn any acts of torture.

#### **TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

- Publicly monitor and report on cases of arbitrary arrests, unlawful and incommunicado detention, torture, death in custody and other human rights violations perpetrated by the Cameroonian security forces and authorities in the fight against Boko Haram;
- Regularly submit alternative reports on human rights violations in Cameroon to the African

Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the various UN human rights mechanisms and bodies.

# APPENDIX



Réf: TG AFR 17/2017.007

**Son Excellence Paul Biya**  
**Président de la République**  
**Présidence de la République**  
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**Yaoundé, République du Cameroun**

Dakar, le 20 avril 2017

**Objet : Réunion d'information sur les résultats des recherches effectuées par Amnesty International**

Excellence, Monsieur le Président

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser cette lettre, qui fait suite à mon précédent courrier en date du 20 mars 2017, dans lequel je vous demandais de bien vouloir recevoir une délégation d'Amnesty International à partir du 20 au 24 mai 2017, dans la mesure où votre calendrier le permettrait. Pour faire suite à cette demande, je vous fais parvenir un complément d'information qui, je l'espère, permettra d'étayer de manière utile l'éventuel entretien que vous voudrez bien nous accorder.

Vous trouverez en annexe un résumé des conclusions de recherches récemment menées au Cameroun par Amnesty International. Celles-ci sont le fruit de nombreuses rencontres avec des victimes, d'anciens détenus, des témoins et des représentants d'organisations de la société civile et des pouvoirs publics, ainsi que l'analyse de documents photographiques et vidéo. Ce résumé montre que dans leur lutte légitime contre Boko Haram, les forces de sécurité ont eu à commettre de graves violations des droits humains et atteintes au droit international (détention au secret, torture, décès en détention, etc.).

Ce document est destiné à servir de point de départ à un éventuel entretien personnel. Il est également une occasion à saisir pour apporter des réponses et prendre des mesures, que nous pourrions évoquer dans notre prochaine publication. Amnesty International partage toujours les résultats de ses recherches au préalable, de manière à avoir des commentaires écrits avant la publication de ses rapports, mais nous aimerions cette fois-ci accorder davantage de temps au débat et au dialogue.

Excellence Monsieur le Président, nous vous serions reconnaissants de nous faire parvenir votre réaction, si possible avant le 10 mai 2017, afin que nous puissions l'inscrire dans l'ordre du jour de notre éventuel entretien, ainsi que des mesures envisagées par votre gouvernement, et faire figurer celles-ci dans un prochain rapport.

Nous prenons acte de la volonté que vous avez exprimée de veiller à ce que les droits humains soient respectés dans la lutte contre Boko Haram et nous serons heureux de pouvoir discuter avec vous de manière à traduire cette volonté dans les faits, à la lumière des constatations que nous avons faites.

Veuillez agréer, Excellence, Monsieur le Président de la République, l'expression de notre très haute considération.

Registered Company Number/NINEA: 25370850R9

Alioune Tine  
Directeur régional  
Bureau régional Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre

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Registered Company Number/NINEA: 25370850R9



## **Annexe 1 : Synthèse des conclusions des chercheurs d'Amnesty International**

### **Des dizaines de personnes ont été détenues au secret et torturées par les forces de sécurité camerounaises entre mars 2013 et mars 2017**

Amnesty International a recensé un grand nombre de cas de personnes qui auraient été placées en détention au secret et soumises à la torture et à d'autres mauvais traitements dans les locaux du Bataillon d'intervention rapide (BIR) ou de la Direction générale des renseignements extérieurs (DGRE), ainsi que dans d'autres centres gérés par les forces de sécurité camerounaises. Toutes avaient été arrêtées et placées en détention parce qu'elles étaient soupçonnées de soutenir Boko Haram. Les cas présentés dans cette synthèse concernent des événements survenus entre les mois de mars 2013 et mars 2017. La plupart portent sur des personnes arrêtées en 2014 et 2015, mais les pratiques dénoncées ont manifestement continué en 2016 et 2017.

### **Les victimes ont été détenues au secret et torturées dans plusieurs centres de détention officiels situés dans des bases du BIR, notamment celle de Salak, ainsi que dans un centre de la DGRE à Yaoundé**

Amnesty International a pu, grâce aux témoignages émanant d'un grand nombre de sources dignes de foi, établir où étaient situés les centres dépendant du BIR et de la DGRE où des personnes auraient été placées en détention au secret, torturées et, plus généralement, maltraitées. Les deux lieux de détention le plus souvent cités étaient la base du BIR à Salak et un centre de la DGRE situé dans la région de Yaoundé et connu sous le nom de "Lac". D'autres bases du BIR ont également été mises en cause, ainsi que des installations dépendant de la DGRE situées près de l'aéroport militaire de Yaoundé. Nous avons pu établir que, à la base du BIR à Salak, certaines personnes avaient été torturées dans des locaux qui se trouvaient tout près des bureaux des hauts gradés. Il paraît donc très peu probable que les officiers supérieurs présents sur les lieux aient pu ignorer ce qui se produisait.

En fait, contrairement à ce qui avait été dit lors de conversations précédentes avec des responsables des pouvoirs publics, Amnesty International a appris en février 2017 par des représentants du ministre de la Défense, ainsi que le ministre de la Communication lui-même, que des personnes avaient été détenues à la base du BIR à Salak et dans des centres dépendant de la DGRE. Les autorités ont affirmé que ces détentions reposaient sur une base légale. Pourtant, le droit international et le Code de procédure pénale du Cameroun (Section 118 (1)) disposent que tout individu arrêté doit être remis dans les plus brefs délais à la police ou à la gendarmerie, et a le droit de communiquer avec le monde extérieur.

### **Les coups, les positions délibérément inconfortables, les pendants et les simulacres de noyade faisaient partie des méthodes de torture les plus courantes**

Amnesty International a recueilli des informations sur des méthodes de torture employées non seulement dans les centres du BIR et de la DGRE, mais également dans d'autres lieux dépendant des forces de sécurité camerounaises, tels que des commissariats ou des gendarmeries, et même le secrétariat d'État à la Défense (SED). Les méthodes de torture les plus fréquemment décrites étaient les suivantes : coups à l'aide de différents objets, obligation de garder une position pénible pendant des heures, voire des jours, diverses formes de pendaison, et simulacres de noyade. D'après les informations dont dispose Amnesty International, il apparaît également que les conditions de détention, en particulier dans les centres du BIR, étaient déplorables, au point de constituer de fait un traitement cruel, inhumain et dégradant. Les prisonniers étaient en effet détenus dans des conditions de surpopulation extrême, sans nourriture, ni eau en quantité et en qualité suffisantes, sans accès ou avec un accès très limité à des installations sanitaires, sans recevoir de soins médicaux et dans des locaux mal ventilés et ne recevant pas la lumière du jour.

Amnesty international a pu visionner trois vidéos montrant des membres des forces de sécurité camerounaises commettre des violations des droits humains, et notamment des actes de torture et des exécutions extrajudiciaires. Un médecin légiste a également examiné des photos fournies par d'anciens prisonniers et confirmé que les lésions visibles tendaient à confirmer les récits de torture de ces derniers.

Amnesty International a pu vérifier de manière indépendante l'identité de bon nombre d'individus ayant procédé aux interrogatoires et responsables des actes de torture et des décès dénoncés, aussi bien sur la base du BIR à Salak qu'au centre de la DGRE à Yaoundé.

### **Questions non résolues déjà signalées dans des rapports précédents**

Amnesty International a dénoncé depuis 2015, dans ses publications, lors de rencontres ou dans des courriers adressés aux autorités, un certain nombre de cas d'arrestations arbitraires, de disparitions forcées, d'homicides illégaux et d'autres atteintes graves aux droits humains, demandant un complément d'information et des mesures de la part des autorités. Certains cas ont évolué, mais d'autres restent d'actualité et nous réitérons nos demandes d'informations et de solutions les concernant.

Nous prenons acte de la libération, en janvier 2017 de **18 hommes arrêtés arbitrairement sur le marché de Maroua, en juillet 2014**. Ces hommes avaient été acquittés en décembre 2016 par le tribunal militaire de cette même ville. De même, nous nous félicitons de l'acquittement d'au moins six hommes arrêtés arbitrairement en novembre 2014 à **Bornori**, un village du département de Mayo-Tsanaga, dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord, lors d'une opération de ratissage menée par le BIR<sup>1</sup>. Nous avons également salué publiquement la libération, en juin 2015, de 84 enfants détenus pendant plus de six mois à la suite d'une opération menée en décembre 2014 dans leur établissement scolaire, à **Guirvidig**, un village du département de Mayo-Danay, également dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord<sup>2</sup>.

Aucun progrès, en revanche, n'a été enregistré dans un certain nombre de cas de premier plan, tel que celui de **Magdémé et Doublé** que nous avons également évoqué dans notre précédent courrier. Nous regrettons que, plus de deux ans après les événements, la lumière n'ait toujours pas été faite sur ce qui s'est précisément passé à la gendarmerie de Maroua, ainsi que pendant l'opération de bouclage et de bouclage et de ratissage menée dans les villages de Magdémé et de Doublé. Les autorités camerounaises n'ont toujours pas révélé l'identité des personnes mortes en détention, pas plus que leur lieu d'inhumation ni les circonstances de leur décès. Il n'y a pas non plus eu d'enquête indépendante destinée à établir ce qui s'était passé dans les deux villages lors de l'intervention des forces de sécurité et ce qu'étaient devenues les quelque 130 personnes dont on est toujours sans nouvelles. Le 11 juillet 2016, le secrétaire d'État auprès du ministre de la Défense chargé de la Gendarmerie nationale a indiqué qu'une commission serait créée pour enquêter sur les crimes commis par les forces de sécurité engagées dans des opérations contre Boko Haram. Aucune information ne nous est parvenue depuis à ce sujet malgré nos demandes.

Dans le rapport que nous avons publié en juillet 2016, nous avons également dénoncé plusieurs cas de recours excessif à la force de la part des forces de sécurité dans le cadre d'opérations de bouclage, de perquisition et d'arrestation. Nous avons notamment attiré l'attention sur l'intervention qui a eu lieu en novembre 2014 à **Bornori**, au cours de laquelle sept personnes ont été tuées illégalement, ainsi que sur l'opération menée à **Achigachiya**, à 35 km au sud-ouest de Limani, à la frontière nigériane, qui a fait au moins une trentaine de morts, dont de nombreuses personnes âgées, en janvier 2015. Cette dernière opération avait été menée par les forces de sécurité camerounaises afin de récupérer les dépouilles des militaires tués le 28 décembre 2014 par Boko Haram, abandonnées devant la base militaire détruite par les insurgés<sup>3</sup>. Dans le même rapport, Amnesty International recensait 17 cas de disparitions forcées présumées de personnes accusées de soutenir Boko Haram, qui auraient été commises par les forces de sécurité – le plus souvent par le BIR – dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord entre avril 2015 et février 2016. Amnesty International a fourni aux autorités camerounaises des informations concernant ces cas – en particulier les noms, les circonstances et les dates de leur arrestation – et a demandé à savoir où se

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Bonne cause, mauvais moyens : atteintes aux droits humains et à la justice dans le cadre de la lutte contre Boko Haram au Cameroun*, (Index : AFR 17/4260/2016), <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr17/4260/2016/fr/> 14 juillet 2016 (consulté le 18 avril 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Le Cameroun libère 84 enfants détenus depuis six mois au nord*, <http://www.amnesty.sn/spip.php?article2121>, 14 août 2015 (consulté le 18 avril 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, *Bonne cause, mauvais moyens : atteintes aux droits humains et à la justice dans le cadre de la lutte contre Boko Haram au Cameroun*, (Index : AFR 17/4260/2016), <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr17/4260/2016/fr/> 14 juillet 2016 (consulté le 18 avril 2017).

trouvaient ces personnes, mais sans jamais recevoir de réponse<sup>4</sup>. Amnesty International a mené ses propres enquêtes et a réussi à déterminer ce qu'étaient devenues deux d'entre elles. Les 15 autres sont toujours portées disparues.

## **Annexe 2 : Questions et recommandations**

### **Questions**

Nous souhaiterions vivement recueillir votre réaction aux éléments exposés précédemment. Nous disposons d'éléments détaillés, et notamment de noms et de dates, que nous sommes prêts à vous communiquer avant la publication d'un éventuel rapport, mais nous aimerions discuter avec vous de la façon de protéger nos sources et les victimes de possibles actes d'intimidation ou de représailles.

Nous prenons acte des déclarations des autorités camerounaises, qui se sont plaintes, par le passé, du fait qu'Amnesty International ne leur avait pas laissé suffisamment de temps pour répondre aux questions soulevées par les conclusions de ses chercheurs. Toutefois, comme nous l'avons dit, nous avons dénoncé des cas d'homicides illégaux, d'exécutions extrajudiciaires, de torture, de détentions au secret et de disparitions forcées présumées sans que cela ne suscite de réponse de la part des autorités. À notre connaissance, aucun membre des forces de sécurité n'a eu à rendre de comptes pour les violations des droits humains énumérées plus haut. Dans ces conditions, nous sommes profondément inquiets pour la sécurité des victimes, de nos sources et de leurs familles. Nous serions par conséquent heureux de nous entretenir avec vous de ces questions plus en détail.

Parallèlement à ces observations générales, nous aimerions obtenir des réponses aux questions suivantes :

- 1) Quels sont les efforts conduits par les autorités camerounaises pour que les allégations de violations des droits humains et d'atteintes au droit international mettant en cause les forces de sécurité camerounaises présentées ici et dans les rapports antérieurs fassent l'objet dans les meilleurs délais d'enquêtes approfondies et impartiales de la part d'une instance civile ? Serait-il possible de fournir à Amnesty International des informations et des documents concernant des enquêtes de ce type qui auraient effectivement été menées, ainsi que des cas où des individus présumés responsables de ce genre d'agissements auraient été tenus de rendre des comptes, en précisant, le cas échéant, quelles en auraient été les conséquences ?
- 2) Quelles mesures les autorités camerounaises ont-elles prises ou envisagent-elles de prendre afin de mettre fin aux arrestations arbitraires, à la détention au secret et à la torture dans des centres de détention non-officiels ? Amnesty International a formulé des recommandations dans des rapports précédents. Nous en rappelons certaines un peu plus loin.
- 3) Quelles mesures les autorités camerounaises ont-elles prises pour que les lieux de détention non-officiels soient fermés et pour que nul ne puisse être détenu ailleurs que dans un centre de détention officiel ?
- 4) Serait-il possible d'avoir des informations concernant le procès en cours du Colonel Zé Onguéné Charles, ainsi que les conclusions de l'enquête sur la mort en détention de 25 personnes pendant la nuit du 27 au 28 décembre 2014, dans les locaux de la gendarmerie de Maroua, et notamment les noms des personnes décédées, la cause de leur mort et le lieu de leur inhumation ?

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<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, *Bonne cause, mauvais moyens : atteintes aux droits humains et à la justice dans le cadre de la lutte contre Boko Haram au Cameroun*, (Index : AFR 17/4260/2016), <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr17/4260/2016/fr/> 14 juillet 2016 (consulté le 18 avril 2017).

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- 5) Les autorités camerounaises envisagent-elles d'élargir le champ de cette enquête aux allégations d'exécutions extrajudiciaires, de destruction de biens privés et de pillages mettant en cause des membres des forces de sécurité camerounaises, le 27 décembre 2014 dans les villages de Magdémé et de Doublé, ainsi qu'à la disparition forcée présumée de plus de 130 habitants de sexe masculin ?

## **Conclusion et recommandations**

Les recherches menées par Amnesty International montrent que la détention au secret, la torture et les autres mauvais traitements sont des pratiques courantes dans certains centres du BIR et de la DGRE, à travers le Cameroun, ainsi que dans d'autres centres de détention administrés par les forces de sécurité camerounaises, tels que les commissariats de police et les gendarmeries, y compris le SED. Les victimes de ces pratiques sont des personnes soupçonnées de soutenir Boko Haram. Nous prenons acte des engagements pris par le gouvernement camerounais de respecter les droits humains dans le cadre de la lutte contre Boko Haram, et nous demandons que les recommandations suivantes soient acceptées et mises en œuvre. Les engagements pris et les mesures adoptées seront bien entendu signalés dans toute publication ultérieure.

## **Prévention de la détention au secret, de la torture et des décès en détention, et mesures visant à lutter contre ces pratiques**

- Donner publiquement l'ordre aux forces de sécurité de mettre un terme à la pratique qui consiste à arrêter et à interroger des individus hors des lieux de détention officiels, et notamment sur les bases du BIR et dans les locaux de la DGRE.
- Mettre un terme aux détentions au secret, y compris lorsqu'elles se déroulent dans un lieu de détention officiellement reconnu, et veiller à ce que tous les détenus puissent avoir librement accès à un avocat de leur choix, aux membres de leur famille et à des soins médicaux.
- Accorder aux observateurs internationaux indépendants, tels que le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR), l'accès sans entraves à toutes les personnes privées de liberté, en leur permettant d'effectuer des inspections imprévues de tous les lieux de détention, y compris les bases militaires et les locaux relevant des services secrets, afin d'enquêter et de constater les conditions de vie qui y règnent.
- Faire en sorte que toutes les personnes privées de liberté puissent informer leur famille du lieu et de la nature de leur détention, et puissent consulter l'avocat de leur choix à tous les stades de l'interrogatoire.
- Répondre rapidement et efficacement aux plaintes dénonçant des actes de torture et autres mauvais traitements, en veillant à ce que les détenus puissent régulièrement bénéficier de soins médicaux.
- Veiller à ce que tous les responsables des interrogatoires portent des uniformes identifiables et des insignes sur lesquels figurent leur nom et un élément d'identification et à ce que toutes les personnes participant aux interrogatoires soient visibles par les détenus.
- Veiller à ce que toutes les allégations de torture et d'autres mauvais traitements, y compris de recours à la contrainte et aux menaces, formulées par des suspects, notamment devant les tribunaux militaires, donnent lieu dans les meilleurs délais à une enquête impartiale, et à ce que des mesures soient prises en conséquence.

## **Respect de l'obligation de rendre des comptes**

- Mener sans délai des enquêtes exhaustives, indépendantes et impartiales sur toutes les allégations de torture, de détention au secret et d'autres traitements cruels, inhumains ou dégradants signalés dans tous les lieux de détention, et veiller à ce que les surveillants, les responsables des interrogatoires et les autres agents de l'administration pénitentiaire qui auraient commis de tels actes contre des détenus fassent l'objet de mesures disciplinaires et de poursuites pénales dans le cadre de procès équitables devant des tribunaux civils et sans possibilité de recours à la peine de mort.

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- Garantir la conduite sans délai d'enquêtes approfondies, rigoureuses et impartiales sur tous les cas présumés de décès en détention. La méthodologie et les conclusions des enquêtes doivent être rendues publiques et les autorités doivent veiller à ce que les personnes dont l'enquête a permis d'établir qu'elles avaient apparemment commis un homicide illégal soient traduites en justice dans le cadre de procès équitables devant des tribunaux civils et sans possibilité de recours à la peine de mort.
- Publier les listes officielles de tous les détenus qui sont morts dans les centres de détention et les prisons du Cameroun, y compris les établissements gérés par les services de renseignement et l'armée, et remettre les certificats de décès et les résultats des autopsies aux familles.
- Ouvrir des enquêtes rigoureuses, indépendantes et impartiales sur les affaires antérieures de disparitions forcées signalées par Amnesty International, et notamment sur la disparition de plus de 130 personnes arrêtées dans les villages de Magdémé et de Doublé, ainsi que sur les homicides illégaux et les destructions de biens perpétrés lors de l'opération d'arrestation, et traduire les responsables présumés en justice, dans le cadre de procès équitables devant des tribunaux civils et sans possibilité de recours à la peine de mort.
- Veiller à ce que toutes les victimes d'actes de torture et d'autres mauvais traitements bénéficient de réparations, notamment de mesures de restitution, d'indemnisation, de réadaptation, de satisfaction et de garanties de non-répétition.



Ref: TG AFR 17/2017.012

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23 June 2017

**Re:** Right to reply letter on Amnesty International findings following research missions.

Dear Ambassador,

I am writing to follow up on our meeting on 23 May 2017 in Yaoundé when we discussed the findings of Amnesty International's recent research in Cameroon.

As discussed, Amnesty International believes that Cameroon has both the right and the obligation to protect civilians from Boko Haram, but should do so while respecting the human rights of its population and its national and international legal obligations. However, our research has identified serious human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by the Cameroonian security forces, including incommunicado detention and torture

Amnesty International has documented over a hundred cases between 2013 and 2017 where individuals have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and detained incommunicado in illegal detention facilities run by the Cameroonian security forces and authorities. The two main sites concerned include the headquarters of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) in Salak, and a facility in Yaoundé known as 'Lac' run by the General Directorate of External Research (DGRE).

Our research confirms a regular presence of US military personnel at the BIR base in Salak, reportedly to train and coordinate with Cameroonian forces. Given their regular presence on the base, the frequency of the violations documented as well as the apparent visibility of the specific structures and rooms where detainees were held and frequently tortured, we are concerned that members of the US military may be aware of, or have reasonable suspicions relating to, the unlawful detention and the torture allegedly being committed.

If this is the case, we believe that the US government has an obligation to advise the military chain of command in Cameroon of these violations with a view to ending them, and to provide relevant information to the prosecuting authorities so that those suspected of responsibility can be investigated and prosecuted.

We would therefore appreciate receiving information as to what steps the US government has taken to investigate whether members of the US military may be aware of or have reasonable suspicions regarding these practices. We would also appreciate information regarding any measures that may have been taken to report these practices to relevant Cameroonian authorities including the security services' chain of command with a view to ending these violations, and any steps have been taken to provide this information to the prosecuting authorities with a view to investigating and prosecuting those responsible.

We note also the military assistance, including training and the provision of equipment, by the US government to Cameroon in order to help protect civilians from attacks by Boko Haram. Amnesty would

appreciate receiving information as to what measures the US is taking to ensure that the military forces to whom this support is being provided are not committing human rights violations.

We also believe it is essential for Cameroon's international partners, especially those providing military assistance, to leverage their influence to encourage the government to take effective measures to end human rights violations in the fight against Boko Haram and to ensure accountability for violations committed to date.

Detailed concerns about the widespread practices of torture and incommunicado detention have also been shared in writing with the Cameroonian authorities in April 2017, and will be published in a future report.

In order for us to reflect all relevant views on our findings, we would also like to request some information from the US government on the following questions:

- 1) For how long and how many US military personnel have been based at the BIR headquarters at Salak, and undertaking what activities?
- 2) What measures have the US Government taken, or will take, to investigate whether US military personnel had knowledge of practices of incommunicado detention and torture at the BIR headquarters in Salak, during their presence at or visits to the base?
- 3) Can you provide Amnesty International details of any instances when the US Government has referred allegations of human rights violations by Cameroonian security forces to the Cameroonian authorities, or to the prosecuting authorities, and what investigations or other measures were taken by the authorities?
- 4) What measures are the US Government taking to ensure that the Cameroon military forces to whom the military is providing assistance are not committing human rights violations?
- 5) What measures have been taken, or will be taken, to make sure that vetting procedures of Cameroonian military personnel recommended for training by the US are effective, ensuring those suspected of being responsible for human rights violations and crimes under international law are excluded? Can you provide more information regarding your vetting procedures, including the criteria used?

We would appreciate any written response by 5 July 2017, and we would also be available to discuss the issues further by telephone.

Many thanks in advance and please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,



Alioune Tine  
Regional Director  
Regional Office for West and Central Africa





*EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA*

*Yaounde, Cameroon*

OFFICE OF THE AMBASSADOR

July 11, 2017

Mr. Alioune Tine  
Regional Director  
West and Central Africa Regional Office  
Amnesty International  
BP 47582  
Dakar, Senegal

Dear Mr. Tine:

Thank you for your letter of June 23 concerning allegations of human rights abuses committed by Cameroonian security forces, including the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) based in Salak, and other authorities. The U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé and the Department of State take such allegations seriously and, in accordance with the Leahy Law, do not furnish assistance to any security force unit if the Secretary of State has credible information that such a unit has committed a gross violation of human rights (GVHR). In addition, the Department continuously seeks to identify the unit involved when it has credible information of a GVHR but the identity of the unit is unknown. Currently, certain units of the BIR based out of Salak, Mora, and Adamawa are ineligible for assistance in accordance with the Leahy Law because of credible information implicating those units in the commission of GVHRs, and we continue to review all allegations of GVHRs committed by the BIR and other Cameroonian security forces.

With our active engagement, the Government of the Republic of Cameroon shares with our Embassy in Yaoundé information regarding alleged GVHRs. This allows us to help ensure that no assistance is furnished to security force units when there is credible information that the unit committed a GVHR. Cameroon is an important partner in addressing security challenges on the continent and the State Department take all aspects of its partnership seriously.

The U.S. government takes a five-fold approach with regard to its engagement with respect to human rights with Cameroon military forces that receive U.S. military assistance. First, in accordance with the Leahy Law, the Department of State vets all foreign military personnel or units that receive training or security assistance under the Foreign Assistance Act, so that no assistance is furnished to security force units implicated in the commission of GVHRs. Second, the U.S. military conducts routine training for recipients of U.S. security assistance through mobile training teams, provided by the Defense Institute for International Legal Studies (DIILS). DIILS teams come to Cameroon to teach courses on respect for human rights to the Cameroonian military units that receive U.S. security assistance.

Third, the Department of State mandates by policy that ten percent of each country's International Military Education & Training (IMET) allocation must support Expanded IMET (E-IMET) courses, such as participation in military law and justice courses, human rights courses, or courses on the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). DIILS conducts E-IMET courses at their school in Providence, Rhode Island, and Cameroonian graduates of these courses go on to serve in Cameroon's military justice system. Fourth, all Cameroonian personnel who attend U.S. professional military institutions undergo the same human rights and LOAC training that the U.S. military provides to its own personnel who attend those institutions. Lastly, U.S. military to military exchanges with Cameroon focus on defense institution-building, including a course designed to share best practices, adapted to Cameroon's situation. The course focuses on teaching Cameroonian forces to conduct military training and operations in accordance with international norms and standards.

The Department of State and other relevant agencies follow a thorough, transparent, and deliberate remediation process under the Leahy Law for any units who have committed GVHRs. Both local offices at the U.S. Embassy and various bureaus at the Department of State retain records of vetted personnel and units, as well as the routine recertification of such units through recurrent vetting. The United States Government, both in Washington and at the Embassy in Yaoundé, is regularly and deeply engaged on these issues. We have expressed explicit concerns about all of these issues at the highest levels, including with President Biya, and continue to do so.

We appreciate the reporting that Amnesty International and other international and local civil society organizations produce, and we welcome any further reporting you may have on human rights in Cameroon. In addition to our responsibility to comply with Leahy Law, we know that terrorism in West Africa cannot be defeated if our partner forces commit atrocities or lose the trust of the population.

We hope this information is helpful in addressing your concerns. Please feel free to contact me further on this or any matter.

Sincerely,




Michael S. Hoza,  
Ambassador



**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.  
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS  
TO ONE PERSON, IT  
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

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# CAMEROON'S SECRET TORTURE CHAMBERS:

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND WAR CRIMES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BOKO HARAM

The Government of Cameroon has the right and duty to protect civilians from the atrocities committed by Boko Haram, yet must also respect the human rights of its population in doing so. Too often it has fought the right cause with the wrong means.

This report documents 101 cases of incommunicado and torture committed by Cameroonian security forces between 2013 and 2017, most of which were carried out in a series of facilities run by Cameroon's elite Rapid Intervention Brigade (BIR) and the General Directorate of External Research (DGRE).

Victims who had been arrested, often without evidence, were held incommunicado for an average of 32 weeks, where they were subjected to torture including severe beatings, stress positions, suspensions and simulated drowning. Most of those tortured were men from the Far North region, though victims also included women, minors and people with physical and mental disabilities.

These widespread and routine practices of incommunicado detention amount to serious crimes under international law including war crimes. Urgent action is needed both from Cameroonian authorities and Cameroon's international partners to put an end to these practices and ensure that effective and independent investigations are carried out into those who suspected of individual or command responsibility.