



April 13, 2017

Ms. Faith Pansy Tlakula
Office of the AU Special Rapporteur
Freedom of Expression and Access to Information
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dear Madam,

The undersigned organisations that are members of the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), write to express deep concern about the deteriorating freedom of expression and human rights situation in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

On January 17, 2017, the national telecommunication and internet service provider, CAMTEL, shut down internet services in the North-west and South-west regions of Cameroon. On the same day, the government banned activities of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), a group of eminent citizens from the Anglophone regions set up to dialogue with the government on the ongoing protests in the country. The police arrested two leaders of the CACSC, Dr. Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla, president of CACSC and Dr. Fontem A. Neba, Secretary General of CACSC.

There have been series of protests in Cameroon's two regions since November 2016, stemming from the decision of the government to impose French language in schools and courts of the predominantly Anglophone regions.

This move has been described by leaders and people of the two regions as evidence of the Cameroonian government's policy to "marginalise the English-speaking minority."

Since January 17, 2017, more than 50 influential local and international human rights organisations, networks, agencies, and millions of individuals have condemned the [internet shutdown and the arbitrary arrests](#) of the two leaders as a flagrant abuse of the fundamental rights of the people of the affected regions.

The Cameroonian government has however, repeatedly failed to heed the numerous calls from the international community to [unblock the internet](#), release those arrested and resort to dialogue

in order to resolve the situation and bring calm to North-west and South-west regions of Cameroon.

April 16, 2017 will be exactly three months since the people of North-west and South-west Cameroon have been denied internet access and those who were arbitrarily arrested remain in prison. Dr. Agbor-Balla and Dr. Fontem have been charged by the Yaoundé military court for alleged acts of terrorism, inciting civil war, inciting secession, and spreading false information. The two could face a death penalty if found guilty under Cameroon's [Anti-Terrorism law](#).

Recalling the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution, ACHPR/Res. 362 (LIX) 2016 which recognises the "importance of the internet in advancing human and people's rights in Africa, particularly the right to freedom of information and expression;"

Reemphasising the concern highlighted by the ACHPR/Res. 362 (LIX) 2016 about the "emerging practice of State Parties of interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the internet, social media and messaging services;"

Further recalling the ACHPR/Res. 362 (LIX) 2016 which "calls on State Parties to respect and take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect citizens' right of information and expression through access to internet services;"

We the undersigned organisations therefore appeal to you, Madam Commissioner, to publicly condemn the Internet shutdown and the arbitrary detention of the leaders of the CACSC in Cameroon.

We also call on you, as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, to use the powers of your good office to among others, put pressure on President Paul Biya of Cameroon to respond to calls from the international community by:

- Unconditionally restoring Internet access in the North-west and South-west regions
- Releasing those arrested and resorting to dialogue in resolving the crisis
- Demonstrating commitment to uphold and defend human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Cameroon as well as regional and international frameworks to which Cameroon is signatory

We are confident that your office will take note of the infractions enumerated above and consider the above recommendations towards improving the freedom of expression and human rights environment both online and offline in Cameroon.

Yours Sincerely,

Signed,

Members of AFEX

Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)
Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS)
Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP)
Human Rights Network for Journalists in Uganda (HRNJ-U)
Journaliste en Danger (JED)
International Press Centre (IPC)
Institute for Media and Society (IMS)
Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA)
Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
Media Rights Agenda (MRA)
National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)
West African Journalists Association (WAJA)

ABOUT AFEX

AFEX is a continental network of some of the most prominent freedom of expression and media rights organisations in Africa that are also members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network of free expression organisations. The network is currently made up of twelve organisations based in West, East, Central and Southern Africa. AFEX works to increase the effectiveness of its members and to enhance the impact of their work in addressing freedom of expression challenges on the continent.

Visit here to read more: www.africafex.org