



Cameroon - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 3 October 2013

Information on the Pentecostal church in Cameroon? Information on the number of Pentecostal churches closed in recent times.

A report by the *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* states:

“The Independent Expert welcomed the freedom of religion and harmonious coexistence of various religious groups which is evident across the country. However, she met leaders of Pentecostal Churches who raised concerns, including the recent closure of a number of Churches in the country. “Registration and authorisation processes should be non-discriminatory and clear criteria and time-frames should be established and respected in practice,” Ms. Izsák emphasized.” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (11 September 2013) *United Nations Expert On Minority Issues Welcomes Cameroon’s Efforts And Urges Important Next Steps To Protect Minorities*)

A report by *Voice of America News* states:

“YAOUNDE — Thousands of Christians in Cameroon no longer have places to worship as the government continues to crack down on illegal churches for what it says are activities that have nothing to do with preaching the word of God. But pastors of these churches said they are being targeted because they criticize the government of President Paul Biya, who has been in power for more than 30 years.

Frustrated Christians pray in front of their sealed house of worship in the Cameroonian capital, Yaounde, saying the government of Cameroon persecutes children of God.” (Voice of America News (13 August 2013) *Christian Pastors in Cameroon Decry Crackdown*)

The report continues:

“The government said it is justified in taking action. It has now shut down 15 pentecostal church denominations in Yaounde and the North West Regional Capital, Bamenda, with plans to close more.” (ibid)

A report by *CNN Wire* notes:

“YAOUNDE, Cameroon (CNN) -- Cameroon's President Paul Biya has ordered the closure of nearly 100 Christian churches in key cities, citing criminal practices organized by Pentecostal pastors that threaten the security of the West African nation.

But Pentecostal pastors said the move is evidence of Biya's insecurity about the churches' criticism of the government.

Biya is using the military to permanently shut down all Pentecostal church denominations in the nation's capital, Yaounde, and the North West Regional capital, Bamenda, which have the largest Christian populations in Cameroon.

More than 50 churches have now been closed, with the government targeting nearly 100 in eight other regions" (CNN Wire (14 August 2013) *Cameroon's president orders Pentecostal churches closed*)

A report by *World Watch Monitor (USA)* notes:

"The government of Cameroon has ordered the closure of dozens of churches in an attempt to put an end to what it considers to be anarchy among some Christian organisations.

The measure, which authorities began to impose on August 23, targets Pentecostal churches, which are not officially recognised.

[...]

About 10 churches have had their doors locked in Yaoundé, the capital. In Bamenda, the main town in the northwest, which houses a high proportion of the country's Christians, some 20 churches have been affected." (World Watch Monitor (USA) (3 September 2013) *Dozens of 'noisy' churches silenced in Cameroon*)

The report continues:

"Cameroon is a secular country in Central Africa. Almost 80 per cent of its 20 million people are Christians. Freedom of worship and religion is guaranteed by the constitution, reinforced by Act No. 90/053 of Dec. 19, 1990, regulating religious organisations.

This law stipulates that the exercise of religious worship should be subject to the approval of the minister of interior affairs, and authorisation by the president.

Since the 1990 law, Pentecostal organisations have experienced remarkable growth in the country. Dozens of churches, which often have links in neighbouring Nigeria, settled in the country.

Such rapid growth has come at the expense of historical churches such as the Catholic Church, which has seen a great number of its followers join Pentecostal movements.

These Pentecostal churches are renowned for their dynamism and ability to mobilise crowds.

It is difficult to know the precise number of churches in the country. Officially, only 47 permits were granted to Churches or Christian organisations between 1990 and 2009, whereas about 500 denominations are operating across the country.

"This would mean that the overwhelming majority of those churches that are currently swarming our cities and towns exist illegally, benefiting from the tolerance of our administrative system," Bakary said.

[...]

The decision to close non-recognised churches is not new in Cameroon. A number of Pentecostal churches in Cameroon have been closed in recent years by local authorities following complaints by residents." (ibid)

A report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading "Religious Demography" states:

"The country has an area of 183,568 square miles and a population of 18.1 million. Approximately 40 percent of the population is Christian, and 20 percent Muslim. The remaining 40 percent practices indigenous religious beliefs. The Christian population is divided between Roman Catholics (27 percent of the total population) and Protestants (13 percent). The largest Protestant groups are Presbyterians and evangelicals, while Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals represent fewer than 2 percent of Protestants. There is also a small community of Baha'is." (United States Department of State (26 October 2009) *Cameroon International Religious Freedom Report 2009*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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