



Cameroon: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 16 June 2011

Are there child protection laws and agencies which adequately protect children's rights in Cameroon?

Page 9 of a report from the *OMCT* under the heading Preliminary Observations notes:

"The Republic of Cameroon signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter the Convention) on 27 September 1990 and ratified it on 11 January 1993. It has also been party to the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights since 27 June 1984, and to the Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or punishments since 19 December 1986.

Furthermore, Cameroon ratified certain legal instruments of a regional nature such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on 20 June 1989, and the African Charter on The Rights and Well-being of the Child on 5 December 1997. [...]

As to a legal perspective, Cameroon has decreed numerous laws, orders, decrees and circulars that purport to be in accordance with the Convention, but are sometimes insufficient and may prove to be an obstacle to efficient protection of the Rights of the Child as provided for by the Convention." (OMCT (12 October 2001) *Rights of the Child in the Republic of Cameroon*)

Page 12 under the heading 'General Observations' notes:

"Article 2 of the Convention stipulates as a fundamental principle that States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."

Although Cameroon refers to non-discrimination in its Constitution Preamble, proclaiming that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of race, sex, religion", the OMCT notes that in practice, this principle is not respected." (ibid)

A report from the *Country of Return Information Project* under the heading 'Children' section 1.3 notes:

"In Cameroon the term children is generally used to indicate dependents and between 0 and 18 years old. In the practice most institutions continue assisting those persons who are vulnerable and dependent, after 18. The general mission of Ministry of Social Affairs includes social protection of

children, marginalised populations, the elderly and the disabled. Cameroon ratified - amongst others - the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the ILO's Conventions related to Children. Action plans have been elaborated on the fight against child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. Recently, Cameroon has instituted a National Solidarity Service. Work is underway to put in place a National Solidarity Fund." (Country of Return Information (CRI) Project (November 2008) *Country Sheet - Cameroon*)

Included in the above report are lists of organisations who work with children (please see attached).

The *Child Rights Information Network* noted under the heading 'National Report':

"6. Cameroon is a party to the six principal international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations: (f) Convention on the Rights of the Child (signature 27 September 1990, ratification 11 January 1993).

8. At the national level, the preamble to the Constitution declares the Cameroonian people's commitment to the following universal values and principles, which are guaranteed to all citizens by the State without distinction based on sex or race:

- Protection of women, young people, the elderly and persons with disabilities
- Children's right to an education
- Compulsory primary education

9. In addition to the preamble, a number of legislative and regulatory measures strengthen and ensure the realization of the rights and freedoms set out in the Constitution and the international and regional instruments mentioned above, for example:

(n) Act No. 2005/015 of 29 December 2005 on trafficking and trading in children;

44. The preamble to the Constitution enshrines the right to education and makes primary education an obligation towards children. Three ministries are responsible for the education sector: the Ministry of Basic Education, the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. Generally speaking the quality and quantity of services provided by these ministries has improved." [...] (Child Rights Information Network (5 February 2009) CAMEROON: Children's Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review)

Paragraph 67 notes:

"Despite the proclamation of the principle of free primary education, intended to ensure equality of opportunity for all children, in practice it is not implemented everywhere. Many children are therefore still not receiving free primary education." (ibid)

Under the heading 'UN Compilation' the report noted:

"1. In 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) encouraged Cameroon to ratify and implement the OP-CRC-SC and OP-CRC-AC.7 In 2003, the Committee against Torture (CAT) recommended that Cameroon ratify the OP-CAT.8

2. In 2001, while noting the process taken up by Cameroon to harmonize existing legislation with the Convention, CRC remained concerned about the domestic legislation, including customary law, which was very fragmented and partly unsuitable, outdated and not in conformity with the Convention, and expressed concern about the continued existence of customs and traditions which impede children from fully enjoying their rights.9

5. OHCHR noted that, as reported by the Government, on 10 November 2006, a Committee for the Elaboration and Implementation of the Plan of Action for Human Rights was created, to integrate human rights education into the primary school system.[...]

15. In 2001, CRC expressed concern at the persistence of discrimination in Cameroon, in particular at the disparities in the enjoyment of rights experienced by children from rural areas, least developed provinces, Batwa children and children from other marginalized population groups.[...]

16. In line with the concluding observations of the HR Committee in 1999, CRC was in 2001 concerned that children are victims of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, sometimes constituting torture, committed notably at police stations, in detention places and in prisons. It was also concerned at some instances of forced disappearance and extra-judicial execution of children.[...]

19. In 2001, CRC was concerned at the use of FGM and at the lack of legal prohibition or national strategy of its prevention. It recommended that Cameroon adopt legislation prohibiting the practice of FGM and implement programmes to sensitize the population about the harmful effects of this practice.[...]

21. In 2001, CRC was concerned at the large number of children sold by their parents and subsequently exploited in the labour market, and about the increasing number of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution and pornography, especially among those engaged in child labour and street children.[...]

25. In 2001, CRC was concerned at the difference between the minimum legal ages for marriage of boys (18 years) and that of girls (15 years), which allows for the practice of early marriage and that a child below the age of 18 years might be recruited into the armed forces with parental consent." [...]
(ibid)

Under the heading Children the *US Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices* published in April 2011 notes:

“The law does not prohibit FGM, which was practiced in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest regions; statistics on its prevalence were unavailable.” (US Department of State (8 April 2011) *Cameroon: Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2010*)

The report also noted:

“In September the Ministry of Social affairs, UNICEF, and the Ecole Instrument de Paix, a local NGO, organized a workshop in Douala to address the growing problem of the sexual abuse of children.

Approximately 2,000 children lived on the streets of the major urban centers. The Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children, a governmental project in partnership with NGOs, gathered information on street children and offered healthcare, education, and psychosocial care; the project also bolstered the intake capacities of specialized centers.

The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.” (ibid)

References

Child Rights Information Network (5 February 2009) *CAMEROON: Children's Rights References in the Universal Periodic Review*
<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=21599&flag=report>
(Accessed 16 June 2011)

Country of Return Information (CRI) Project (November 2008) *Country Sheet - Cameroon*
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49afa13a2.html>
(Accessed 15 June 2011)

OMCT (12 October 2001) *Rights of the Child in the Republic of Cameroon*
http://old.omct.org/pdf/cc/Cameroun_Web_GB.pdf
(Accessed 16 June 2011)

US Department of State (8 April 2011) *Cameroon: Country Report on Human Rights Practices – 2010*
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154335.htm>
(Accessed 16 June 2011)

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.

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International
BBC Monitoring
BBC News

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Ethnologue
Danish Immigration Services
European Country of Origin Information Network
Google
Human Rights Watch
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
IRIN
Lexis Nexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Relief Web
UNHCR Refworld
UK Home Office
US Department of State