



## **Cameroon: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 31 March 2011**

### **Information on traditional religious practices in where people (men) are forced to become chief; Any problems if they refuse; Any state protection for such problems.**

A response by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* under the heading 'Appointing a traditional chief' states:

"The appropriate administrative authority undertakes "the necessary consultations to appoint a new chief." The authority must consult the "appropriate customary public figures." Those consultations take place during meetings called by either the prefect or the subprefect. In the consultations, the various candidates are reviewed, and the new chief is chosen. The administrative authority in charge draws up the minutes and sends them, along with a complete file on the candidate, to the central authorities. That file contains a police clearance, a copy of the candidate's birth certificate, a medical certificate and, as required, a copy of the certificate confirming the vacancy at the head of the chieftaincy (death certificate, medical report on disability or disqualification, letter of resignation or decision to dismiss the predecessor). The appropriate administrative authority has only to ratify the selection. Although the public figures are consulted, their views are not necessarily taken into account. The administrative authority may supersede the local decision and appoint a candidate who is believed to serve the authority's interests (Africa Development 2000, 97-98).

According to the study published in Africa Development, [translation] "the political commitments of the candidates are influential in ascending to or occupying the throne" (ibid., 98)." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2 June 2005) *CMR100141.FE Cameroon: Chieftaincy, specifically in the village of Bonabakata in Douala; the process of naming a successor to the traditional chief; the consequences of refusing to become chief; and the availability of state protection, if any* (June 2005)

It also states:

"In his 31 May 2005 correspondence, mentioned earlier, the professor and researcher in the Public Law Department of the Université de Cotonou stated that, legally, passing the title of traditional chief from father to son [translation] "is not automatic, in principle." He explained that there are always preliminary consultations, but that in reality-except in rare cases where [translation] "the son is truly incompetent"-the son always succeeds his father at the head of the chieftaincy (professor 31 May 2005)." (ibid)

In a section titled 'Consequences of refusing the title of traditional chief and state protection available' it states:

“According to the professor and researcher in the Public Law Department at the Université de Cotonou, refusing to accept the status of traditional chief may be interpreted as a [translation] "refusal to cooperate with the party in power," and even worse, the person concerned may be suspected of [translation] "sympathizing with the opposition" (31 May 2005). The professor and researcher provided the following information:

You could be subject to all sorts of pressure and threats, and if you persist, there is no telling what could happen to you in a country where the courts are not free to uphold the law. Even in your own circles, the authorities have ways to turn your loved ones against you, . . . to interfere with your family, and so on.

There have been cases where a candidate has been set up in a situation where his only way to avoid imprisonment was to negotiate a release by agreeing to become the traditional chief. However, the scope of the problem varies between regions. It is more serious in the West, Northwest, Southwest, North and Far North provinces, where chieftaincy plays a major role in controlling the people and their votes come election time, than it is in the rest of the country. There is still no rule of law, anyway, and you cannot prove anything. And before which judge? (31 May 2005).

Regarding the legal system, Roger Gabriel Nlep, associate of the French faculty of law and vice-rector of the Université de Douala (Cameroon), said in 2002, in an article on access to public law in Cameroon, that settling disputes on the appointment of the traditional chief is not a matter for the judicial authorities (14 Jan. 2002). Article 1 of Act No. 79/17 of 30 June 1979 states that [translation] "notwithstanding Article 9 of Order No. 72/06 of 26 August 1972 . . . disputes regarding the appointment of the traditional chiefs are brought before the authority with the appointing power, which rules without appeal" (Nlep 14 Jan. 2002; Africa Development 2000, 90). Also, Act No. 80/31 of 27 November 1980 [translation] "divests jurisdiction of matters related to disputes regarding the appointment of the traditional chiefs" (Nlep 14 Jan. 2002; Africa Development 2000, 91)." (ibid)

Another report by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

“A professor from the Department of Law at the University of Buea in Cameroon, who is an expert in human rights and traditional practices in Cameroon, provided the following information in 13 December 2004 correspondence:

The Bangous are a community with a strong chieftaincy tradition. They have an inner circle of traditional elders who select the chief in [the] event of a vacancy. This group claim[s] to consult the ancestors before making their choice. ... [C]hieftaincy is seen as a position which carries immense prestige. People therefore scheme to get elected when there is a vacancy. The state is directly involved in the making of a chief ... through its local district officers in all of Cameroon. ... No one can ... be compelled to be made a chief. When a candidate declines an offer to be made a chief[,] an alternative candidate will be selected. There is no rule that states that until a selected candidate dies a chief cannot be appointed. ... [I]t is possible to even dethrone an incumbent chief with the approval of the state.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (20<sup>th</sup> December 2004) *CMR43215.FE Cameroon: Chieftaincy of the Bangou in the village of Bangou; how succession occurs,*

*including the rituals; the consequences of a person's refusal to become chief; whether that person would be threatened and whether the state would protect him or her; the process that follows the refusal, in order to choose a new chief (2002-2004)*

See also *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* document which states:

"An associate professor of anthropology at Carleton College in Minnesota who has done "extensive field research concerning the Bamileke since 1983" indicated that the Bamileke have a "custom of 'capturing' a new chief" (13 Mar. 2006).

The Web site *Cameroon: Culture and Tourism* indicates that, among the Ngemba in Bamileke territory, the high-ranking members (notables) of secret societies handle the succession process: it is their responsibility to [translation] "capture" one of the heirs of a deceased chief, who will become the new chief (n.d.a.). The new chief is brought to the [translation] "La' Kam (a place where the chief is hidden for nine weeks, invested and initiated into the mysteries of the kingdom)" (ibid.). According to an article in the *Cameroon Tribune*, in the village of Komako, this [translation] "initiation period" lasts seven to nine weeks, during which time [translation] "one of the wives made available [to the new chief] conceives his offspring" (14 Oct. 2004)." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (25<sup>th</sup> April 2006) *CMR101150.FE Cameroon: Situation of women regarding the customs of chiefdoms; whether the wife of a village chief recently inducted against his will would be forced to join her husband at the village, share her husband with the multiple spouses imposed by the chiefdom and initiated into the secret society; consequences of refusing these practices; significance of the title of Defo and whether one can be a Defo but not be a chief, only a high-ranking member (notable); information on the village of Baham (2005 - March 2006)*

### **References:**

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2 June 2005) *CMR100141.FE Cameroon: Chieftaincy, specifically in the village of Bonabakata in Douala; the process of naming a successor to the traditional chief; the consequences of refusing to become chief; and the availability of state protection, if any (June 2005)*

[http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR\\_RDI/RIR\\_RDI.aspx?id=449365&l=e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=449365&l=e)

(Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (20<sup>th</sup> December 2004) *CMR43215.FE Cameroon: Chieftaincy of the Bangou in the village of Bangou; how succession occurs, including the rituals; the consequences of a person's refusal to become chief; whether that person would be threatened and whether the state would protect him or her; the process that follows the refusal, in order to choose a new chief (2002-2004)*

[http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR\\_RDI/RIR\\_RDI.aspx?id=417603&l=e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=417603&l=e)

(Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (25<sup>th</sup> April 2006) *CMR101150.FE Cameroon: Situation of women regarding the customs of chiefdoms; whether the wife of a village chief recently inducted against his will would be forced to join her husband at the village, share her husband with the multiple spouses*

*imposed by the chieftom and initiated into the secret society; consequences of refusing these practices; significance of the title of Defo and whether one can be a Defo but not be a chief, only a high-ranking member (notable); information on the village of Baham (2005 - March 2006)*

[http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR\\_RDI/RIR\\_RDI.aspx?id=451368&l=e](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451368&l=e)

(Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March 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

Electronic Immigration Network (EIN)

European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board Of Canada

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UNHCR Refworld

United Nations Human Rights Committee

United Kingdom Home Office

United States Department of State