

CAMEROON APOCALYPTIC DEMOCRACY: CONCERNS ABOUT THE JUNE 2007 ELECTIONS

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Prior to 1990 multi-party politics in Cameroon was a dream until Law No. 90/053 of 19th December 1990 on Freedom of Association legalized the formation of political parties in Cameroon. On May 26, 1990, Ni John Fru Ndi fiercely launched the Social Democratic Front (SDF) against threats from the Centralist Government officials of Mr. Paul Biya that led to the death of six armless militants allegedly killed by the forces of Law and order. Thereafter, other political parties were formed and lunched. In March 1992, the first ever multi-party legislative elections were held though highly boycotted by the main opposition parties on grounds that the rules did not guarantee for free and fair elections and that their militants needed time to register for the elections.

The creation of an independent electoral commission to supervise elections in Cameroon has remained the pro-occupation of the main opposition parties in Cameroon. The National Elections Observatory (NEO) set up by the regime has the status of observer only. The above notwithstanding, Law No .2006/011 of 29 December 2006 has created Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), which is suppose to be an independent body responsible for the organisation, management and supervision of elections in Cameroon. Just as the New Criminal Procedure Code, it has to become operational only after 18 months from the 29th of December 2006.

The Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) under the helm of President Paul Biya has remained in power for closed to 25 years and has used its position to restrict political access and activities of the main opposition parties

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making the movement toward political liberalization a nightmare. If Parliamentary and Council elections were to be organised today then the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINAT), which is answerable to the chairperson of the CPDM, will organise the elections while NEO will continue its role of observer. Unfortunately, the main opposition parties will continue to protest the status quo but the offshoot is that they have to wait until after 18 months for ELECAM to become operational.

After the parliamentary elections, the CPDM as usual will maintain the highest number of seats in parliament, thereby giving them the opportunity to amend the constitution to permit the current Head of State to contest elections after his two terms. Elections organised by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization are often marked by persistent irregularities, fraud, rigging, intimidation, harassment. It is prudent and honourable for the postponement of the upcoming elections just as they did for the harmonized Criminal Procedure Code in order to put ELECAM to test prior to Presidential elections.

The people are ignorant about their rights to freely choose their political representatives. Quite often registration of voters is carried out in camera by the administrative authorities. Even those who regularly register do have voting cards a technique used by the administration to technically prevent some people from exercising their civic rights. Electoral results are constantly manipulated by the regime in power. Some people are arbitrarily arrested and journalists subjected to inhuman treatment for exercising opinions contrary to those of the ruling party.

Cameroon is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted by United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December, 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976. Article 1 of the ICCPR states that:

“All people have the right to self-determination. By virtue of the right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.

Electoral participation is the most popular means of democracy. It enables people without distinction to play an active role in government by electing representatives to act as their agents. Electoral participation in Cameroon is still far from guaranteeing political equality and perfection at all levels. Violence at polling stations and post election violence; official manipulations at the time of votes counting; rigging and the use of money to buying votes have disempowered the poor, women and minorities in making or determining their political choices. The poor and the woman hardly raise their voices or participate in active decision making in Cameroon. Post electoral violence has been an aspect of Cameroon's political culture and is use as a mean to limit, constrain, or exclude political participation.

Poverty is a social problem in Cameroon that directly affect the people's political will. Lack of basic necessities such as jobs, farm to market roads, potable water, food, etc makes it easy for the commercialisation of votes by the business class, elite political thieves, and embezzlers of state funds to continue to maintain themselves in power against the wish of the people. Commercialisation of votes is a human right violation because it influences the people's direct and objective assessment of the political candidates. Therefore any elections organized in Cameroon other than by ELECAM means the government has is a hidden agenda, which might push Cameroonians too far.