

THE DYNAMICS OF PRISON ADMINISTRATION AND PRISON REFORM IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This paper underscores the titbits of prison administration in Cameroon and highlights the efforts of the Cameroon government towards ameliorating the deplorable prison conditions. It also reflects the government's open door policy to organisations, groups and individuals to visit the prisons at anytime considering that it is a herculean task for the government to rehabilitate the prisoners with its meager resources without involving the civil society. However, despite the efforts of the government and the civil society towards a better prison life much still needs to be done to satisfy the needs of the increasing inmate population. Therefore, the original good intentions of the Cameroon Penitentiary System 1992 is only on paper and the prison conditions in practice falls short of international standards. In a nutshell, this paper raises a number of issues of substantive relevance, which tells the reader something about prison conditions, and conveys the grandeur of rhetoric.

Keywords: Cameroon, prisons, cells, penitentiary, justice, crimes, overcrowding, infrastructure,

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1. Introduction

The administration of prisons in Cameroon is currently under the Ministry of Justice, assisted by a Secretary of State in charge of Prisons after a decree of 8 December 2004.¹ However, before 2005 prison administration was under the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation.² The prison administration is defined as a public administrative service responsible for implementing the prison policy of the government, executing court decisions through a central administration and managing the National School of Penitentiary Administration (NSPA) and prisons.

2. History of Cameroon Prison System

The history of prison administration in Cameroon is centred around two periods, *vis*; the colonial and post-colonial period. The colonial period was characterised by two stages which were under the German Colonial Rule and under the Franco-British Rule. Most of the prisons were built during the German Colonial Rule and their main mission was the imprisonment of indigenous delinquents and recalcitrant persons to undertake construction work for the administration.³

Under the Franco-British Rule, Cameroon laid down the first prison regulations. In French-speaking Cameroon, orders of 8 July 1933 and 15 September 1951 were characterised by discriminatory regulations between whites and indigenous people under administrative authorities. On the other hand, in Anglophone Cameroon prison administration was according to chapter 159 of the revised

¹ Thaddeus N Besong, "Penitentiary Administration in Cameroon: From colonial times to present day," Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation, Republic of Cameroon (2008), p. 39.

² African Charter for Human and People's Rights, "Prisons in Cameroon: Report of the Special Rapporteur on prisons and conditions of detention in Africa". The ACHPR report to the government of the Republic of Cameroon on the visit of the special rapporteur on prisons and conditions of detention in Africa. (2-15 September 2002), ACHPR/37/OS/11/437, website, accessed June 2008.

³ Ministry of Territorial Administration and decentralisation, "Summary of Prison Administration in Cameroon", (2003), p. 2. Yaounde-Cameroon: Nagro Business.

laws of Nigeria 1958.⁴ Prisons were better structured and run by trained prison staff. The regulations remained in force till 1972.

The Post-Colonial Period which began from 1972 to date was characterised by two reforms. Firstly, the 1973 reform was aimed at harmonising the Cameroon prison system following the unification of East Cameroon and West Cameroon. This led to the setting up of the National Training centre for prison officers and the putting in place of prison regulations and special regulations for prison personnel. Secondly, the 1992 reform which was signed by the President of the Republic included the seven new instruments reorganising prison administration in Cameroon.⁵

3. Prison Regulations and Administration

The Cameroon prison regulation is drawn from the national and international instruments and has three main objectives. The first objective is Security which involves protecting the society through the effective imprisonment of convicted persons and those awaiting trial. The second objective is economic based on occupying the prisoner through work to participate in the national development effort. The third objective is social and involves preparing the prisoner for better rehabilitation through an individualised system and treatment and developing his capacities to take care of himself, thus favouring his return to normal social life⁶. If one looked at the objectives of prison regulations in Cameroon one could be tempted to say that all is well in Cameroon prisons, considering that it provides an environment for better treatment of prisoners. Like Thaddeus Besong puts it, the aims of the prison administration in Cameroon reflect Montero's aim (protection of offenders and suspected offenders against unofficial retaliation), and deterrence which is better than the severity of punishment⁷.

⁴ Thaddeus N Besong (note 1 above), p. 10.

⁵ Ministry Of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (above) p. 3

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Thaddeus N Besong (note 1 above), p. 38.

However, the situation on the ground falls short of meeting the objectives. In terms of material, infrastructural, financial, regulatory and human problems the Prison Department faces the following difficulties:⁸

- Scanty budget as compared to the number of missions;
- Meagre allocations for the reinforcement of the functioning of prisons;
- Insufficient budget for the purchase of uniforms and packs;
- Insufficient investment budget for adjustments, new buildings, mass acquisition of rolling stock and security equipment;
- poor health plan;
- endemic overcrowding of prisons;
- old and obsolete infrastructure and equipment inherited, for the most part, from the colonial era;
- shortage of food;
- Claustrophobic detention cells;
- near absence of rehabilitation and probation facilities;
- Serious shortage in personnel and too much work for the existing personnel;
- Outdated laws governing prison administration.

Despite the hardship the Cameroon penitentiary is facing, it is still evolving as would be seen below. An attempt to measure what constitutes good prison governance is an uphill task as very little literature exists to highlight good practices in terms of administration, management, and proper functioning in the African context and specifically Cameroon. There is International consensus on the desirable objectives and treatment of offenders in correctional facilities, which is reflected in various international instruments. In Africa, increasing incarceration,⁹ coupled with inadequate resources and societal beliefs that

⁸ Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (above), p. 2.

⁹ Jeremy Sarkin, "Resources and Governance" in Jeremy Sarkin (ed) Human Rights in African prisons (2008), p. 21. Cape Town: HSRC

incarceration should be punitive,¹⁰ create horrible conditions of detention in some countries. The practical realities may at times be dreadful, but a progressive movement over the past decade promises to bring about reforms in detention conditions. Donors are assisting in this process and providing resources as well as technical assistance¹¹. Various regional instruments such as the Kampala Declaration on Prison Conditions in Africa, the Fourth Conference of the Central, Eastern, and Southern African Heads of Correctional Services; The Arusha Declaration of Good Prison Management; the Ouagadougou Plan of Action to name only a few, highlight this movement. Most African countries have adopted these instruments, which provide hope for sweeping reforms in African prisons. However, there is need to discuss the various international policy frameworks, and then assess what ratification actually means in practice for it to be meaningful and establishing hope for sweeping reforms.

4. Challenges to Improving Prison Conditions in Cameroon

One aspect of prison conditions that must be addressed for prison management to reach acceptable standards is the provision of adequate healthcare. This calls for better sanitation and methods of waste disposal, better food, increased rations and most importantly, adequate measures to combat the spread of diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Some prison systems have developed educational opportunities to sensitise inmates about HIV/AIDS but more is needed, for example, making condoms readily available. In addition, those already infected require more assistance.

The Cameroon penitentiary has not completely turned a blind eye to the HIV/AIDS status of prisoners. The Douala central prison, the largest in Cameroon with at least 100 females, for instance, is making efforts towards combating HIV/AIDS. Despite the fact that the state is unwilling to provide anything beyond the most meagre and basic diet, clothing, medicine, and entertainment (a luxury

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid.

for those with sponsors out of prison) the Douala prison administration is connected to SunAIDS.¹² The prison administration acknowledges the fact that they cannot handle the health of the prisoners all alone. As such they solicited the aid of SunAIDS which has created a small office near the prison and sent a counsellor to attend to the prisoners three times a week.

The Counsellor Ms Suzanne Mbondi works in close collaboration with the prison doctor Dr. Amougou Ello Germain who happens to be the only doctor for the six prisons in Douala (It is not abnormal for one doctor to control all the prisons in the region given that it was only in the year 2000 that 8 medical officers were recruited to enhance the quality of the prison service¹³). He spends much of his time in the Douala central prison where SunAIDS is active. A huge number of prisoners respond to the HIV tests. About 50 prisoners are tested every week and many of whom are trained as peer educators. However, SunAIDS is only present in Douala central prison though it hopes to expand the programme to serve as a viable model for other prisons in Cameroon. Against this background of HIV/AIDS in prisons what is the position of the female prisoners, especially pregnant mothers who are HIV positive? Are they given the priority to be tested first or must they fight with the 50 inmates tested every week in order to get tested? What is the status of pregnant women in other prisons who do not have a special programme like this?

Section 27 (2) of the Penal Code (PC) states that no woman with a child or who has been recently delivered should begin serving her sentence until six weeks after delivery. Section 27 (3) states that a woman with a child already in custody pending trial shall continue until the said period to be in custody as if awaiting trial. Section 27 (2) and (3) on the other hand, states that a woman who gives birth while in custody awaiting trial continues to have the advantage of this less

¹² Armand Totoum, "Having Aids in Cameroon's largest prison", AIDS awareness Campaign-Stories from Africa (2008), p. 2 accessed June 2008.

¹³ Thaddeus N Besong (note 1 above), p. 39.

rigorous custody for six weeks after, despite conviction. Therefore, the question of pregnant women in prison is farfetched as per the Cameroonian PC, in spite of the fact that from time to time they could be found in prison for various reasons.

The primary goal of the prison is to securely contain convicts under its charge. However, Jeremy Sarkin¹⁴ posits that over the last 10 years, various positive prison reform initiatives have been undertaken across the African continent. According to him the Kampala Declaration of Prison Conditions in Africa has played a crucial role in this. This declaration was drawn up in 1996 following a three-day meeting of delegates from 47 countries, including Ministers of state, prison superintendents, judges and Non Governmental Organisations. A number of African governments have altered their legislation as a result of the declaration which has subsequently improved the situation in various prisons across the continent with Tunisia and Libya being good examples. It was noticed that Tunisia and Libya, for the first time, allowed human rights organisations such as Amnesty International to visit their prisons.

However, despite the fact that these two countries have opened their prison doors to Amnesty International, Cameroon has still not done so given that Amnesty International¹⁵ reports that the government of Cameroon continues to deny access to their representatives for over a decade. Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur on prisons and conditions of Detention in Africa appreciated and acknowledged the spirit of commitment and openness of the Government of Cameroon to improve the conditions of prisoners/detainees. It therefore shows that she gained access easily as it is mentioned that she would have loved to meet the president of the Republic had it not been for his prior engagements outside the country.¹⁶

¹⁴ Jeremy Sarkin (note 9 above), p. 5.

¹⁵ Amnesty International, "The state of the world's human rights" (2008), p. 383 UK: Amnesty International Publications on Cameroon.

¹⁶ ACHPR, 2002 (note 2 above), p. 6.

5. Towards Ameliorating the Deplorable Prison Conditions

The Cameroon 1992 correctional policy regulating penitentiary administration in Cameroon has incorporated almost all the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of prisoners. In addition, to ensure better management there are several seminars and workshops held for the top administrators of prisons. For example, a second annual meeting was held recently from the 10-12 of December 2009 in Yaounde, Cameroon under the auspices of the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and keeper of the Seals,--Amadou Ali. This meeting brought together top penitentiary administrators like regional delegates of penitentiary administration from the 10 regions of Cameroon, accompanied by the director of the National School of Penitentiary Administration and all the superintendents of central prisons. The agenda of this second annual meeting of penitentiary administrators was to seek a solution on “How to improve the conditions of living in prisons and the image of the penitentiary administration in particular”. These administrators were also expected to evaluate the general functioning of the penitentiary administration with the intention of finding out ideal solutions to boost future performance in the short and long term.

According to Bikoe¹⁷ the Vice Prime Minister Amadou Ali said Cameroon prisons were evolving positively. He went ahead to say that the Head of State had decided to construct a central prison in Douala with a capacity of 5,000 places by 2009. According to Amadou Ali, the 2009 budget of the Ministry of Justice reflected the first quarter of this construction. In addition, the minister said they were four prisons with a capacity of 300 under construction. This according to the minister was a giant step taken by the penitentiary to improve on the conditions of prisons without forgetting the fact that there were 20 prisons which were undergoing rehabilitation. The Minister highlighted the fact that the prisons will stop being perceived and managed as a place of oppression, torture and diverse

¹⁷ Marthe B Bikoe, “Prisons:des Ameliorations en vue”. The Cameroon Tribune Newspaper, of Friday 12 December 2008, No. 9245/5444-35 p. 6, Cameroon.

abuses, as the essential factor of reintegration is moral reformation, amendments and social reclassification of convicts.

In addition, still in a bid to enhance good governance in prison, the Minister of Justice, Amadou Ali stated in communiqué No. 3042/CD, calling for tenders No. 09/AONO/CPM/MJ/2008 to construct an infirmary in the Bafoussam Central Prison.¹⁸ This therefore is an indication that the Bafoussam Central Prison never had an infirmary before but would soon have one. How then were the health conditions of the prisoners in this prison handled and specifically those of women who are vulnerable to health hazards? The amount set aside for the construction of the infirmary according to the communiqué is FCFA 61,791,553. It is hoped that the construction would be completed within five months. From the foregoing, one can conclude that the government is making enormous efforts to ameliorate the conditions of prisoners all over Cameroon.

Apart from ongoing constructions within the penitentiary, considered a positive sign towards rehabilitation, there are other good activities in prison which also enhance reformation. For example, the Bamenda Juvenile Reformatory School has 40 juveniles either serving jail terms or awaiting trial. According to Ndula¹⁹ these juveniles on 12 March 2009 told the public in the presence of the Delegate of Social Affairs for Mezam Division, Mbakwa Toyong Thomas of the rare educational opportunities they have which other children in the free world are unable to get. The event was the donation of gifts by the Mezam Divisional Delegation of Social Affairs. The Delegate on his part said “minors of the Bamenda prison are not the worst children in society but circumstances pushed them into offences that sent them to prison”. The delegate being a government representative stated the commitment of the social services to cause the speedy release of those prepared to rise to expectation in good behaviour. He also

¹⁸ Ali Amadou, “Communique No. 3042/CD portant d'attribution d'un appel d'offres”. The Cameroon Tribune Newspaper of Monday 30 March 2009. No. 9318/5517-35 p. 10, Cameroon.

¹⁹ Richard M Ndula, “Bamenda prison: Educational privileges for juveniles”, The Cameroon Tribune Newspaper of Tuesday 7 April, 2009. No. 9324/5523-35, p. 8, Cameroon.

carried a message from the Minister of Social Affairs, Catherine Bakang Mbock threatening to withdraw protection and assistance from recidivist minors. At the end of the ceremony, some donations were made to the minors to enhance their wellbeing which included, dresses, exercise books, pens, pencils, bathing items, and foodstuff.

It is note worthy that in all of these the female minors were not beneficiaries in the reformatory school. During my visits in the Bamenda Central Prison I posed the question why female minors were not beneficiaries and I was told they cannot mix males and females in a classroom for obvious reasons and in line with international standards which require total separation of males and females. My next question was why this discrimination. Can a separate programme not be organised for the female juveniles or better still could female wardresses not be made to supervise the juveniles in class? The prison complained about understaffing and that it was not cost effective since there were only a few female minors.

However, it is an acceptable truth that within the penitentiary regime where facilities for useful training do exist, only a minority are usually able to benefit²⁰ and most often the priority is given to men or boys. This is a consequence of the scarcity of the necessary resources. Nonetheless, it would be an overstatement to say that women do not learn anything in prison. Women and girls do learn more in the area of vocational skills as I have witnessed in most of the prisons. Usually most of the female prisoners were assigned daily household tasks such as scrubbing, dormitory cleaning, turning out staff bedrooms, baby sitting the children of staff, and finally serving meals or tea and coffee to staff. In other circumstances, the female convicts were encouraged by the prison staff to be involved in petty trading, cooking and needlework which tended to enhance

²⁰ Carol Smart, *Women, crime and criminology: A feminist critique* (1977), p. 141. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

stereotypical feminine roles, giving them a little opportunity for self-fulfilment in less conventional areas. Why female convicts are not offered greater opportunities in prison? Is it because women and girls are not perceived as potential breadwinners? Nevertheless, it is immaterial to lay emphasis on the latter since the tendency to feminise the labour of women is not unique to prisons.

Besides the assistance the Bamenda central prison received from the Mezam Divisional Delegation of Social Affairs, in January 2009 it earlier received donations from the Synagogue church of all Nations and other Christian organisations and churches. The Synagogue Church through its coordinator Mr. Kan Elory Moses Payne announced that the church has donated a consignment of eight 20 inch television sets and parabolic antennas to all the prisons in the North West Region. He was present at the Bamenda prison to donate the audio-visual equipment to the inmates who expressed their joy for such a gesture. According to Mr. Kan, Bamenda Central Prison alone received 3 television sets while the other five prisons in the region have a TV set and a satellite dish; namely Wum, Ndop, Kumbo, Nkambe and Mbengwi Principal Prisons. The Synagogue Church equally assigned a technician to all the prisons to install the TV sets and its Satellite dish. The purpose of this donation was to demonstrate the fact that Christ came for sinners and not the righteous. Prisoners according to Kan remain our brothers and sisters. A prison is intended to reform not to punish and so in providing them with such equipment was to show that they are still part of society. The purpose of this donation was also to motivate others to come to the needy with other forms of assistance while the Synagogue Church promised to donate other essentials to the inmates in the nearest future.

I actually saw one of this TV sets in the female cell when I visited the Bamenda Central Prison in April 2009. However, the female cell of the Mbengwi Principal prison had no TV set. The one TV set was given to the male cell. The superintendent in charge of the Mbengwi prison said the female cell was recently

built and so the populated male cell was given the priority. I also remarked that the office of the superintendents of the Bamenda Central prison and Mbengwi Principal Prison had no televisions compared to the other prisons. I do not know if this is because the coordinator of the Synagogue Church insisted to the regional delegate that these TV sets were meant for the prisoners and not the prison staff.²¹ To me, this insistence is normal given that corruption in the administration remains a threat at all levels: police, prison, and judiciary.²²

6. Collaboration Between the Government and Civil Society to Improve Prison Conditions in Cameroon

The fact that organisations, groups and individuals are allowed to visit the prisons at anytime shows that the government has acknowledged that they cannot rehabilitate the prisoners, single-handedly, but had to involve civil society. On that note, a group of journalists of Saint François de Sales in Yaounde paid a visit to Mfou Principal Prison near Yaounde a week before Christmas and celebrated with the inmates. The major highlight of the day was a church service with the inmates and the authorities of the prison. Speaking during the sermon, Rev. Father Jean-Baptiste Beraud of the Don Bosco Congregation Yaounde reminded the inmates that they are all children called by God. He said the feast of Christmas should be celebrated by all including convicts. Besides preaching, other activities for the day included journalists joining prisoners in manual work such as farm work which is part of penal labour. The journalists also participated in sports such as handball and football and the winners were awarded a trophy.

However, though the Minister seem to echo changes in the penitentiary lately, the situation is far from ideal. Many of the reports presented during the meeting reflected difficulties that the different prisons were facing such as those of the Douala central prisons. Like most prisons worldwide and particularly in Africa,

²¹ Bih Lenga, "Synagogue church donates 8 TV sets for North West Prisons". The Life Time Newspaper of January 9-24th 2009 p. 6. No. 0018. www.lifetimecameroon.com

²² ACHPR, 2002 (note 2 above), p.10.

prison overcrowding is a critical problem in all the prisons in Cameroon exacerbated by the increasing number of pre-trial detainees who sometime outnumber the convicts. Consequently, the ills of overcrowding have a grievous effect in Cameroon coupled with a severe financial shortage facing the penitentiary.

The New Bell prison in Douala demonstrates a staggering overcrowding which has gone to reduce prisoners to sleeping on the ground, in the toilets, washrooms and outdoors. The prisoners are packed like sardine in their cells and with a hand clap every two hours to change their sleeping position. Some are bound to sleep in the open air in the court yard even during the rainy season. Worse still, some have to stand up all night and only take their turn to sleep in the morning, when others are up.²³ However, this situation is not unique to Douala-Cameroon as recent reports on overcrowding in South Africa indicated inmates sleeping on the floor or in toilets and showers.²⁴

To reiterate the rate of overcrowding in prison, Amnesty International²⁵ further reveals that because the New Bell prison was built in 1930 for a prisoner population of 700 and now houses 4,000 prisoners, the repercussion is inadequate toilet facilities and the lack of hygiene results in many prisoners falling sick. Other ills of overcrowding in the New Bell prison are fighting amongst inmates. According to Fomo,²⁶ Nana Valery died on 25 December 2008 after being stabbed on his chest with a knife by other inmates. The story goes that Nana lost FCFA 50,000 and requested some three inmates who were his friends to refund the money. When they refused to do so a fight broke out and the 28

²³ Jacky Atabong, "Health Conditions in the New-Bell Prison", Rapport des 03 Atelier Regionaux de concertation pour d'Amelioration des soins de santé des detenus dans les prisons centrales, Cooperation Cameroun-Union Europeenne (18 August 2008), p. 64.

²⁴ Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons, "Office of the Inspecting Judge:Annual Report 2005/2006". Cape Town: Judicial Inspectorate prisons.

²⁵ Amnesty International (note 15 above).

²⁶ Eric V Fomo, "Un mort dans une bagarre a la prison", The Cameroon Tribune newspaper of Monday 29 December 2008. No. 9255/5454-35 p. 5. Cameroon.

years old man was stabbed and rushed to the prison infirmary. While he was receiving treatment his friends followed him to the infirmary, threatened the prison nurse and got hold of Nana whom they stabbed several times where he bled to death. After his death the three friends who committed murder were placed in a disciplinary cell and investigation is ongoing.

On the other hand, the Maroua Central prison was constructed in 1935 having a capacity of 250 as opposed to a capacity of 150 earlier reported by the ACHPR²⁷. Despite the fact that this prison has not been renovated it now houses 900 inmates with a staggering overcrowded rate and prisoners complaining of lack of air when locked in cells. However, when this prison was constructed it did not take into consideration women but times are changing and women are also incarcerated.²⁸ According to the superintendent, there are lots of difficulties at the Maroua central prison. However, the women are better lodged than the men given that they have good toilets whereas the male offenders who are greater in number do not enjoy same. To demonstrate the open-door policy adopted by the government to better manage prisons, the superintendent in Maroua declared that “the Maroua central prison has opened its doors to families and other well wishers or voluntary donors”. On that note Mbossa²⁹ reports that Maroua receives aid from NGOs, religious dignitaries and other associations constituting medicines, clothing and food. Without these donations it would be very difficult to manage the prison.

Data management in prison is manual as observed during my visits to prisons. Over the years, numerous files have accumulated and storage space is scarce. The importance of this data cannot be underestimated as some prisoners are jailed in groups and sometimes they give inaccurate information. If the prisoner passes away it becomes very difficult to trace the next of kin. The department

²⁷ ACHPR, 2002 (note 2 above).

²⁸ Eric V Fomo (note 26 above).

²⁹ Patrice Mbossa, “Une journée a la prison de Maroua”. The Cameroon Tribune of Monday 31 March 2008. No. 9068/5267-34 p.12. Maroua

currently has less than 10 working computers and this makes data management a herculean task. That could be the reason behind the lack of concrete data on how many male and female offenders are convicted in Cameroon even though the regional delegate for the South West said the lack of statistics was due to change of Ministry from Territorial Administration to Ministry of Justice.

The unavailability of statistics in the Cameroon penitentiary was obvious when the Special Rapporteur on prisons and conditions of Detention came. According to ACHPR³⁰ it was not possible to establish a figure for the total population of convicted prisoners and those of remand ahead of the mission. The Special Rapporteur noted that some of the figures for the two categories held in prison were later supplied to the delegation without any difficulty by the prison authorities. Due to the unavailability of comprehensive figures, however, the delegation had to work on the basis of estimates supplied by the prison administration without being able to confirm them. Notwithstanding, recently Mactata³¹ has at least given the total population of prisoners in the 10 central prisons in Cameroon which stands at 13,054 with 289 females. But the gender differentiation of the 72 prisons in Cameroon is still not known.

The Special Rapporteur was informed that given the myriad of challenges faced by the government, prison reform was not generally seen as a priority compounded by the fact that general public opinion does not see why prisoners should be accorded privileges and that reform in the area is irrelevant.³² This is a confirmation of what Sarkin³³ said, “Not many governments seem to be interested in investing in prisoners...” NGOs and various local/international organisations provide various important services to prisoners. During the visit of the Special Rapporteur in 2002 the presence of NGOs was greatly felt as they

³⁰ ACHPR, 2002 (note 2 above).

³¹ Francis M Mactata, “The treatment of vulnerable prisoners” A report presented by the regional delegate of penitentiary administration for the North West – Bamenda, during the meeting of regional delegates held in Yaounde, Cameroon (10-12 December 2008), p. 22.

³² ACHPR, 2002 (note 2 above), p. 10.

³³ Jeremy Sarkin (note 9 above), p 5.

attended the meeting organised at Hotel Mont Febe and introduced their respective activities in the fields of prisons and protection of human rights. The NGOs enlightened the Special Rapporteur on the existing problems in prisons and on the problems faced by the Cameroon society in general. The NGOs also spoke of some progress made by the authorities in alliance with civil society.

In a bid to gain additional support for the Kumba principal prison in addition to the little subvention from the government the superintendent of Kumba principal prison embarked on drilling 50 inmates on pig farming using 5 pigs. The one day workshop was done in my presence on 19 March 2009 and was sponsored by prison authorities. Opening the workshop the superintendent, Thierry Foba told Eden Newspaper³⁴ that being an inmate is not the end of the world. He added that the prison is a reformatory and transitional centre for future development. According to the superintendent the knowledge gained by the inmates will help them to start life and forget about what took them to prison.

The inmates were drilled on the various species and breeds of pigs in Cameroon, the advantages of pig farming and how to set up a piggery, the mode of feeding, fattening and possible ways of marketing. At the end of the workshop, the Meme Divisional Delegate for livestock, advised the Kumba Prison Authorities to form an Animal Husbandry Association in order to always benefit from government assistance. It should be noted that despite the fact that this project is geared towards reformation and rehabilitation no female inmate was part of the training programme. When I asked the prison authorities why female inmates were not included in the project, they said efforts were being made to get someone to train the female inmates sewing, giving the impression that pig farming was a man's sphere thus strengthening the gender stereotypes. They said the divisional delegation of Women's Empowerment and the Family had already provided two

³⁴ Talla A Kitts, "Kumba prisoners drilled on pig farming". The Eden Newspaper, No. 358 of Wednesday 25- 30 March 2009. p. 8.

machines which were brought in my presence. However, there is still nobody to train the interested female inmates who seat idle most of the time.

7. Conclusions

In spite of the efforts of the Cameroon government to perfect prison conditions a lot still needs to be done as far as the implementation of international and national instruments are concerned. But as a wise jurist said: “the international standards are like stars for penal justice: they are not there to be reached, they are there to guide us”.³⁵

³⁵ Honore Tougouri, “Vulnerable prisoners” in prison conditions in Africa: Report of a Pan-African seminar, Kampala Uganda 19-21 September 1996 (ACHPR: 1997), p. 65. Paris: Penal reform International.