

CAMEROON

Part 1

Cameroon is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. Despite the country's multiparty political system, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement has remained in power since it was created in 1985. The July 2007 legislative and municipal elections were conducted with irregularities. International and domestic observers noted significant deficiencies in the electoral process, including substantial barriers to registration and insufficient safeguards against fraudulent voting. The government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous human rights abuses. Security forces committed unlawful killings, some stemming from excessive beatings, and engaged in torture, beatings, and other abuses, particularly of detainees and prisoners. Prison conditions were harsh and life-threatening. Authorities arbitrarily arrested citizens, and there were reports of prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention. The government restricted citizens' freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and movement. Additional concerns in the realm of political and human rights included but were not limited to: official corruption and impunity, discrimination against women and ethnic minorities, trafficking in persons, and forced child labor.

Part 2

The U.S. government's paramount policy priority is promoting democratic principles and practices and strengthening democratic institutions and respect for human rights. In 2007 the U.S. concentrated on the conduct of the mid-year national legislative and municipal elections. In 2008 these activities will continue, with a particular focus on the establishment of an independent electoral agency in anticipation of presidential elections in 2011. The U.S. government also identified the expansion and solidification of democratic practices, especially respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms of expression (press and individual), as particular challenges for the country. Although the country possesses functioning democratic institutions, those institutions are weak--especially the electoral system--and their effectiveness is eroded by rampant corruption.

The United States will promote its goal of strengthening democratic institutions and improving respect for human rights by actively engaging officials from all levels of government, local and international nongovernmental organizations, and other

members of civil society and the media. The U.S. will continue to press high-level government officials, including the president, about the need to respect human rights, punish human rights offenders, and establish and nominate independent members of the independent electoral body known as "Elections Cameroon."

Part 3

The United States continues to urge the development of an independent election monitoring commission. During the July 2007 legislative and municipal elections, the embassy placed election observers around the country. Through private and public diplomacy the embassy communicated concerns about deficiencies in the process. During this same period, the embassy worked with multilateral donors and the government to reform the electoral process, especially assisting with a voter registration campaign. U.S. officials attended high-level working groups, whose participants included members of the UN Development Program and European Union, to coordinate policy on finance, governance, and assistance expenditures in support of the elections. During his 2007 New Year's Eve speech, President Paul Biya signaled his intention to change the constitution to remove presidential term limits. The U.S. government, in private meetings with high-level government officials and in public statements, continues to underscore the importance of respecting presidential term limits to solidify the democratic process. Additionally, in February 2008, in an effort to encourage dialogue about proposed constitutional change, the embassy organized a high-level roundtable discussion with participants from civil society and the government to discuss democracy, the constitution, and presidential term limits.

The United States continues to support local NGOs in implementing projects to promote good governance and the rights of women and children. During the year the U.S. government funded four NGO projects aimed at promoting democracy and human rights through the dissemination of the criminal procedure code and the empowerment of under-represented groups in the country. In an effort to support anticorruption efforts, the U.S. government continues to support local NGOs' anticorruption campaigns. One of these campaigns seeks to empower citizens to bring cases of corruption to the courts, as well as encourage whistleblowers and greater information sharing with civil society and the media.

U.S. officials continue to advocate through public interviews the need for a free press to advance democracy. U.S. officials also continue to push for the issuance of licenses to independent

radio and television stations. In private meetings with government officials and in public remarks, the embassy expressed concerns about reports of restrictions on press freedom and the closure of media outlets. In a show of solidarity with diverse sources of information, U.S. officials continue to visit private media organizations.

Part 4

The U.S. government works with the government, local NGOs, and multilateral donors to promote fundamental human rights and democratic governance. For example, in 2007 the U.S. ambassador delivered remarks to parliamentarians and high-level government officials urging them to draft legislation banning female genital mutilation. To support religious tolerance, the U.S. ambassador continued the annual practice of hosting an Iftaar dinner and promoted the U.S. government's report on international religious freedom. In 2007 the U.S. ambassador hosted a second Iftaar dinner in Douala, the country's commercial capital, for the first time.

In 2007 the United States sent four young NGO leaders to a course entitled, "Youth Empowerment and Leadership," which centered on civic participation, youth leadership, governance, and conflict resolution. In 2007 the embassy hosted a digital video conference on "Electoral Commissions and Election Transparency," which addressed a broad spectrum of issues related to the functioning of electoral commissions, including problems encountered, best practices, and the role of electoral commissions in ensuring transparency. The embassy also conducted a five-day program on "Civil Society, Democratization, and Elections," which featured a panel discussion with civil society leaders and lectures for students and faculty in three universities. This enabled the United States to highlight the importance of citizen participation in strengthening democracy and electoral processes. In 2007 the embassy conducted workshops in various parts of the country to train the media about how to cover political events, particularly the importance of balanced reporting and follow-up on campaign promises. The U.S. embassy sponsored a series of call-in programs in which U.S. officials explained the impact of the civil rights movement on the social and political evolution of the United States and highlighted the universal significance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for social justice.

The United States worked with the military and police to curb human rights abuses. To foster more professionalism in the security forces and engender more sensitivity for human rights,

the U.S. government used funds from the International Military Education and Training program to send members of the armed forces to military schools in the United States, where they studied civil-military relations, peacekeeping operations, military subordination to civilian authorities, and a broad range of other legal and human rights topics. The United States also funds partnerships for local police and government officials at the International Law Enforcement Academy, which provided instruction to local law enforcement authorities in Botswana and the United States.