

Trafficking in Persons Report

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CAMEROON (Tier 2 Watch List)

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Most victims are children trafficked within the country, with girls primarily trafficked for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. Both boys and girls are also trafficked within Cameroon for forced labor in sweatshops, bars, restaurants, and on tea and cocoa plantations. Children are trafficked to Cameroon from Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, Benin, and Niger for forced labor in agriculture, fishing, street vending, and spare-parts shops. Cameroon is a transit country for children trafficked between Gabon and Nigeria, and from Nigeria to Saudi Arabia. It is a source country for women transported by sex trafficking rings to Europe, primarily France, Germany, and Switzerland.

The Government of Cameroon does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so, despite limited resources. Nevertheless, Cameroon is placed on Tier 2 Watch List for its failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat human trafficking over the previous year, particularly in terms of efforts to prosecute and convict trafficking offenders. While Cameroon reported some arrests of traffickers, none of them was prosecuted or punished. The government refers victims to NGOs, but does not identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations or monitor the number of victims it intercepts.

Recommendations for Cameroon: Broaden the scope of its draft law against the trafficking of adults to include men, and pass and enact the draft law; increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and develop a system for collecting relevant law enforcement data; educate police, judges, and lawyers about the law against child trafficking; develop a formal system for collecting data on the number of victims rescued and assisted; and adopt the draft national action plan to combat trafficking.¹

Prosecution

The Government of Cameroon made modest but inadequate efforts to combat trafficking through law enforcement means during the last year. Cameroon does not prohibit all forms of trafficking, though it criminalizes child trafficking and slavery through its 2005 Law Combating Child Trafficking and Slavery, which prescribes a penalty of 20 years' imprisonment—a punishment sufficiently stringent and commensurate with penalties prescribed for rape. Government and NGO representatives report, however, that many judges and lawyers in the provinces are not aware of the 2005 law against child trafficking. Article 2 (3) of Cameroon's Labor Code prohibits compulsory labor, but prescribes only a penalty of the equivalent of \$100 to \$3000 in fines, which is not sufficiently stringent. The government's 2006 draft law prohibiting trafficking of adult women still awaits passage by the National Assembly. In January 2008, gendarmerie in the North West Province arrested three traffickers transporting seven children between the ages of 12 and 17 to the Center Province for the purpose of labor exploitation. Police brought the suspects to the Bamenda Prosecutor's Office, where the case is pending. In December 2007, Bamenda gendarmerie arrested a child trafficker in a case in which one of his victims was ill and died due to lack of medical attention. The suspect was released on bail, pending charges and a trial. In 2007, the Yaounde court held hearings on six child trafficking cases that are still pending. Although Cameroon has a police Brigade de Moeurs responsible for investigating child trafficking cases, it reported handling only one case of child labor exploitation in 2007. The government lacks any mechanism for systematic collection of data concerning arrests, investigations, or prosecutions of trafficking offenses. The government does not provide specialized trafficking training for law enforcement officials.

Protection

The Government of Cameroon demonstrated minimal efforts to protect trafficking victims over the last year. The government does not operate trafficking victim shelters, but does refer victims to NGOs. In December 2007, one NGO in Yaounde reported that most of the 840 vulnerable and trafficked children it assisted since its creation in February 1987 were referred by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). The government reported that it operated nine centers for vulnerable children, some of whom were trafficking victims. Government officials do not follow procedures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such

as street children. The government interviews victims for evidence to assist with investigations or prosecutions. The government does not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they face hardship or retribution. Victims may be inappropriately incarcerated or fined for unlawful acts as a direct result of being trafficked.

Prevention

The Government of Cameroon made solid efforts to raise awareness about trafficking during the reporting period. To commemorate World Day Against Child Labor on June 12, 2007, the Minister of Social Affairs made a public address on the importance of protecting children from labor exploitation, with a particular focus on children in agricultural labor. To mark the Day of the African Child, on June 16, 2007, Cameroon organized a children's National Assembly session under the theme of "Let's Say No to Child Trafficking." The child Parliamentarians passed a number of resolutions calling to protect children from trafficking. Government-operated radio and television aired anti-trafficking messages. While an inter-ministerial anti-trafficking group exists, it did not meet on a regular basis. Cameroon took measures to ensure that its nationals who are deployed abroad as part of peacekeeping missions do not engage in or facilitate trafficking by briefing troops before deployment on international norms governing peacekeeping missions. In collaboration with the ICRC, the government also organizes seminars for military and police leadership to keep them updated on these norms. Cameroon has not finalized or adopted its draft national plan of action against trafficking.