

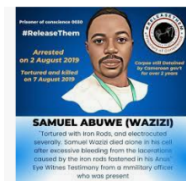


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## #ReleaseThem Campaign 2022 Activity Report

Date: November 1st 2022

Authors: #ReleaseThem Campaign Team



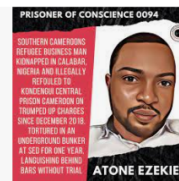
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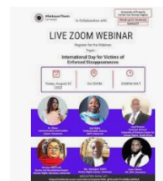
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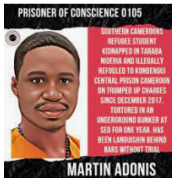
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### Executive Summary

The #ReleaseThem is an advocacy campaign initiated by a consortium of concerned individuals and organizations from all over Cameroon. It was launched in January 2022 with the mission of galvanizing local and international support for the release of all prisoners of conscience and to put the necessary pressure on the Government of Cameroon to respect the human rights of all prisoners in Cameroon regardless of the reason for incarceration. In addition, the Campaign has been consolidating a database of all enforced disappearances at the hands of Cameroon's armed and security forces. As part of its modus operandi, the campaign works to expose squalid conditions in Cameroon's detention centers and the widespread use of torture and other degrading and inhumane treatment of prisoners of Conscience including but not limited to:

- Arbitrary arrests
- Incommunicado detentions
- Enforced disappearances
- Summary executions
- Extrajudicial killings

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The main objective of the campaign is to put a stop to abuses and to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. It is hoped that these activities will help provoke the collective consciences of the international community to issue condemnations against the Government of Cameroon, sanction gross human rights abusers and force the release of prisoners. This report highlights the activities of the campaign since its launch in January 2022. It covers fundraising, advocacy, partnership development, and operational activities.

Since its inception in January 2022, the #ReleaseThem campaign has made enormous strides in advocacy towards shedding light on the atrocious human rights situation as well as the plight of prisoners of conscience in Cameroon. This has all happened despite enormous challenges related to human and material resources and the general disinterest of the western media networks and global institutions in reporting cases of gross human rights violations in large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Our achievements in such circumstances renew our hope in pushing for more achievements as we have major tasks within our annual programme.

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- Research collaboration with our partners
- Development and launch of a comprehensive Human Rights report on Cameroon

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## Introduction

The #ReleaseThem campaign is a human rights advocacy initiative organized by a partnership of concerned individuals and organizations from the both English-speaking and French-speaking regions of the Cameroons. Among these concerned individuals are human rights defenders, political leaders, teachers, lawyers and trade unionists, collectively referred to as activists. In December of 2021, with the possibility of significant exposure brought about by Cameroon's hosting of the African Cup of Nations in January 2022, the collective of activists had hoped to use the hosting of this continental sports spectacle to shed light on the mass atrocities committed by the regime of Cameroon's 89 year old president, Paul Biya. Spurred to action by the quasi-total media silence on human rights issues, these activists launched the ReleaseThem campaign in January, 2022 with the mission of galvanizing international and national support to put the necessary pressure on the Cameroon Government to release all prisoners of conscience.

From its inception, the campaign aimed to ensure perpetrators of gross human rights abuse are held accountable. The conflict in Southern Cameroons has exposed widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, most especially by government security forces. These violations include but are not limited to arrest without warrants, trial of civilians in military tribunals, widespread incidences of rape, torture, maiming, arbitrary and incommunicado detentions, summary executions, extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances. #ReleaseThem is seeking justice for these atrocious crimes against humanity and will pursue all avenues to ensure that perpetrators and those who have command responsibility for them are held accountable. By exposing these crimes and holding perpetrators to account, the campaign hopes to, at best put an end and at worst, seriously reduce incidences of these heinous crimes.

Since its inception the campaign has made enormous strides, despite severe challenges related to human and material resources. The first major challenge which actually served as the inspiration for the campaign in the first place is the seemingly global conspiracy of silence about ongoing gross human mass violations and mass atrocity crimes being committed by the government of Cameroon against its minority English-speaking population. This situation was further exacerbated by multiple competing global and regional crises including the Covid 19 epidemic, Ethiopia-Tigray conflict and the Russia-Ukraine War. Global events continue to consume all available news cycles and command the attention of the international community to the detriment of events in the Southern Cameroons, preventing meaningful action towards the resolution of the root causes.

In collaboration with its partners, #ReleaseThem has:

- organized a series of outreach and sensitisation webinars on various human rights themes
- undertaken grassroots media campaigns to highlight the plight of prisoners,
- commemorated key dates in the global human rights calendar,

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- donated relief funds to prisoners with pressing issues

Our accomplishments under challenging circumstances demonstrates the importance of the work of human rights defenders and the determination of the #ReleaseThem team.

The campaign team, as such, continues to seek partners to collaborate on planned activities as well as any activities eventually proposed by current and prospective partners towards the realisation of joint objectives.

## Accomplishments

Key accomplishments of the #ReleaseThem Campaign till date include the following:

### Campaign launch

This ReleaseThem campaign was formally launched as an online only event via zoom, on 22 January, 2022 as in conjunction with the Southern Cameroons International Town Hall. The launch featured an international cast of renowned guests including human rights lawyers, renowned authors, journalists, activists, academics, etc. The launch also featured representatives from a few international human rights organizations. Attendees were treated to testimonials of degrading and inhumane treatment of detainees from the former British Southern Cameroons. The launch also featured a rousing rendition by performing artist Mbongueh Angwi of her song Kondengui. The song tells the story of victims held in the dungeons of Kondengui, the notorious maximum security prison in Cameroon's capital, Yaounde.



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## ● Organization of Twitter Space Events

And

Hosting an Upcoming  
**TWITTER SPACE**  
26 JUNE 2022  
4:00PM WEST AFRICA TIME  
INTERNATIONAL DAY IN SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE  
**THEME**  
Widespread use of torture as a weapon of war, a mockery to the Mandela Rules - Case study of Cameroon's Prisoners of Conscience

The #ReleaseThem Campaign has organized two twitter space events since the start of 2022.

-The first Twitter Space event was held on the 9th of June 2022 on the theme: **Human rights Abuses on Prisoners of Conscience in Cameroon**

-The second Twitter Space event held on 26th June 2022 in commemoration of the International Day in support of victims of torture. It was centered on the theme: **Widespread use of torture in Cameroon as a weapon of war, a mockery to the Mandela Rules - case study of Cameroon's Prisoners of Conscience**

## ● Organization of Webinars

• University of Pretoria Center For Human Rights  
• Stand Up For Cameroon  
• Katika 237

Invites You To A **LIVE WEBINAR**

TOPIC  
**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES**

DATE: 30TH AUGUST, 2022  
TIME: 5:00 PM WAT  
18:00 CET  
17:00 LONDON TIME

BREAKING THE SILENCE SURROUNDING ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE, ARBITRARY ARREST AND THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS

HOST: #Releasethem

PANELISTS:

Kak Walle, Political leader, Activist, SUFC, Cameroon  
Lloyd Kweyza, Assistant Director (Operations)UPCHR, South Africa  
Bar. Amungwa TANYI, Human Rights lawyer, SS, PMP, Cameroon  
Lana Fabrice

FACILITATOR:  
Dr. Akwo Eileen  
Communication and Conflict Expert

**REGISTER FOR THE WEBINAR**

CLICK ON THIS ZOOM REG.LINK: [https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/WN\\_gP2yu0ArTVmEjyib9kA](https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/WN_gP2yu0ArTVmEjyib9kA)

AFTER REGISTERING, YOU WILL RECEIVE A CONFIRMATION EMAIL CONTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT JOINING THE WEBINAR

The #ReleaseThem Campaign has, in partnership with other organizations nationally and internationally, successfully organized two webinars and one fundraising event since it's launch:

-Webinar in collaboration with Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) Nigeria to commemorate the international day in support of victims of Torture In June 2022

-Webinar in collaboration with: Stand up for Cameroon, the Centre for Human Rights at University of Pretoria and other human rights defenders to commemorate the international day for Victims of Enforced Disappearances in August 2022

-Fundraising webinar in June 2022 to raise funds for operational uses and advocacy activities

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## ● Participation in the NGO working group:

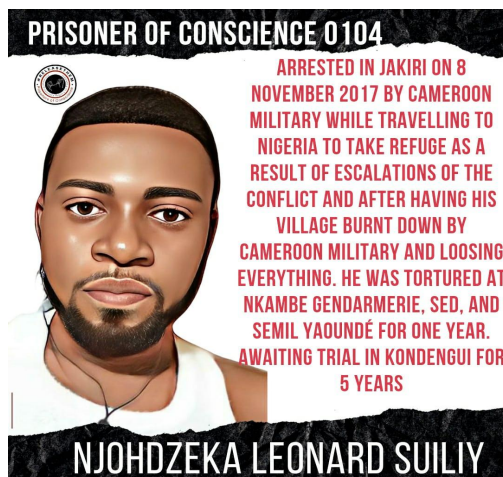
The #ReleaseThem Campaign participated in the virtually held NGO forum event in April 2022 to highlight the plight of prisoners of conscience in Cameroon. The campaign demonstrated how the Government of Cameroon randomly arrests individuals, subjects them to torture, incommunicado detentions, detentions without trial, arbitrary sentencing, enforced disappearances, summary executions and extra-judicial killings. In this year's participation, the campaign laid emphasis on the detention of pregnant women and toddlers.

## ● Support for Prisoners

Since the start of the year, the Campaign has intervened in a number of cases to provide financial support to prisoners of conscience. These include but is not limited to the following:

1. Medical emergency cases to provide funds needed for surgery of detainees.
2. Family emergency case to pay medical bills for a detainee to secure the release of their deceased daughter from hospital for burial.
3. Provision of food assistance to Prisoners of Conscience in particular and prisoners in the Prison Centrale in general.
4. Financial assistance to empower family members of detainees were the breadwinners of the family

## ● Prisoner Profile Project



This work was initiated with a lot of verve, expert graphics designing and a well populated database of victims. It is driven by a strategy of profiling victims on their birthday and their day of arrest: an exercise which yielded additional dividends as it served as a kind of census as well. The feedback from the public has been resoundingly positive, as the masses now know the faces and stories behind what were mere prison statistics. Most of the testimonies have impacted many members of the public, spurring them to take affirmative action. All the same, the detainees' needs remain high, especially given the deplorable health and hygiene of the prisons. As of today, 120 prisoners of conscience have been profiled out of an

estimated total of 3000. It should also be noted that the number keeps growing as the Cameroon state's oppressive machinery chugs relentlessly on. The difficulty of achieving this task can be gauged from the rather small number of prisoners profiled, relative to the estimated total. Difficulties are mostly related to the opacity surrounding the management of prisoner statistics by the Cameroon

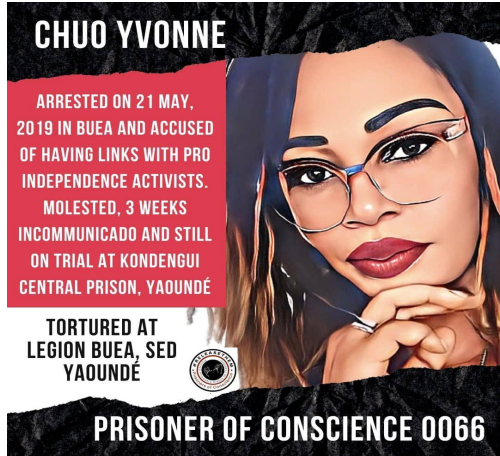
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state's prison administration but also result from the hesitation by prisoners to speak up out of fear of reprisals by the Cameroon regime.

- **Work on profiles of disappeared persons**



Disappeared persons are a specific group of victims because of the uncertainty of their support communities about their fate. According to the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/133 of 18 December 1992, "persons are arrested, detained or abducted against their will or otherwise deprived of their liberty by officials of different branches or levels of Government, or by organized groups or private individuals acting on behalf of, or with the support, direct or indirect, consent or acquiescence of the Government, followed by a refusal to disclose the fate

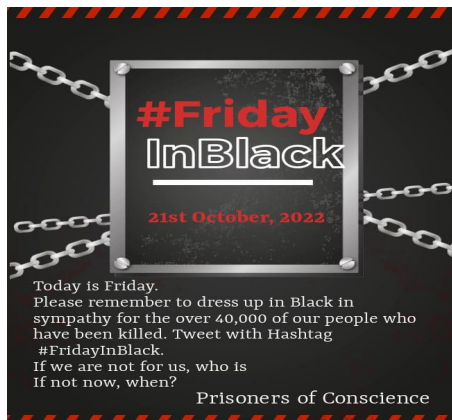
or whereabouts of the persons concerned or a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law."

Their profiling by the campaign was galvanized by the 30<sup>th</sup> August World Day of the Disappeared and 1444 disappeared people were profiled.

- **Work on prisoners stories**

The ReleaseThem campaign has worked with a number of Prisoners of Conscience to document personal stories of their ordeals at the hands of the agents of the Government of Cameroon. The stories cover circumstances of their arrests or abductions, conditions of detention, trial or lack thereof, and treatment by the authorities. Stories help to identify a trend inhuman and arbitrary arrestation. It also facilitates the exposure of the systematic repetition of violence committed against prisoners of conscience. Till date, the campaign has completed 10 personal stories.

- **#FridayInBlack Advocacy**



ReleaseThem has launched an advocacy Campaign to mourn for victims of the armed conflict in Cameroon and empathize with Prisoners of Conscience. The Campaign advocates for supporters and sympathizers both in Cameroon and the world at large to dress up black on Fridays and to take to social media with the Hashtag #FridayInBlack to draw

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international attention to the plight of prisoners of conscience and other victims of the war in the Cameroons.

### ● **Develop a network of Partners**

The #ReleaseThem Campaign has partnered and is partnering with national and international organizations, institutions, human rights defenders and activists which include the Southern Cameroons Alliance (SCA), MwanAfrika Education Foundation, the University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights (UPCHR), the Victoria Relief Foundation (VRF) and the Southern Cameroons European Women (SCEW) e.V. Since the launching in January, more key partners have collaborated with the campaign, including PRAWA, Stand Up for Cameroon and individual prominent human Rights Defenders. The impact made by human rights defenders as a joined force makes a difference.

### **Planned Initiatives**

- Research collaboration with partner organizations, concerning the investigation of human rights abuses in Cameroon in order to project #ReleaseThem's voice at the highest levels of decision making.
- Development and launch of a comprehensive Human Rights report on Cameroon to complement the reports from traditional human rights international NGOs like HRW and Amnesty international.

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