

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2010 CAMEROON

THEME: “LET EVERYTHING THAT HAS BREATH PRAISE GOD”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction:

The Republic of Cameroon is located in the centre of Africa above the equator at the extreme end of the Gulf of Guinea. It is open to the Atlantic Ocean with a coastline of 402 kilometres. It is bordered by Nigeria in the west, by Lake Chad in the north and Chad in the northeast, by the Central African Republic in the east, and by Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea in the south.

The total surface area is 475,440 sq km, which is comparable in size to Papua New Guinea or slightly larger than California in the United States. The administrative and political capital is Yaoundé while the economic capital is Douala. There are approximately 240 local languages corresponding to the 240 ethnic groups. The official languages are French and English with a dominance of the French language. The national currency is the Franc CFA, which is the common currency among 14 countries of Central and West Africa who cooperate financially.

I. GEOGRAPHY

Cameroon is divided into many geographical regions. The coastal plain is in the south. In the interior, the land is covered by a thick tropical forest that gives way to the savannah and the semiarid grass-covered plain called the Sudanian Sahelian steppe, which ends with the swamps along Lake Chad, in the north.

The main topographical feature of Cameroon is the Adamawa massifs¹. This mountainous area separates the north from the south of Cameroon. The Adamawa plateau extends towards the south of Cameroon. Mount Cameroon is one of Africa's largest volcanoes, rising to 4,040 meters (13,255 ft.). It rises from the west coast through a tropical rainforest to a bare summit, which is cold, windy, and occasionally brushed with snow. Mount Cameroon has the most frequent eruptions of any West African volcano. Emissions of toxic gases from Lake Nyos in one of these craters led to the death of more than 3,000 people in 1986. The Adamawa plateau is also a watershed for Cameroon.

¹ In geology, a **massif** is a section of the planet's crust that is demarcated by faults or flexures. In the movement of the crust, a massif tends to retain its internal structure while being displaced as a whole. The term is also used to refer to a group of mountains formed by such a structure. The massif is a smaller structural unit of the crust than a tectonic plate. The Adamawa Massif extends into Nigeria.

The word is taken from French (in which the word also means "massive"), where it is used to refer to a large mountain mass or compact group of connected mountains forming an independent portion of a range.

II. CLIMATE

The Republic of Cameroon has a variety of climates from the north to the south. There is a dry season and a wet season of different lengths in different areas of the country. The Saharan area has a dry season that is 7 to 8 months long, while the equatorial area has 7 to 8 months of rain annually. Thus we have a Sahelian² hot and dry climate in the north and a humid equatorial climate in the south. On the Western highlands, there is a temperate cool climate. The mean temperatures range from 24°C to 30°C, although it may reach 15°C in the west and 43°C in the Extreme North Province.

III. POPULATION

In 2006 the population of the Republic of Cameroon was estimated at 17,340,702 with a birth rate of 2%. The fertility rate remains high but the infant mortality rate is at 64 per 1000. Adult life expectancy is 51 years. Cameroon's population is divided between urban and rural areas. Population density is highest in the large urban centers, the western highlands, and the northeastern plain. In contrast, the Adamawa Plateau, southeastern Bénoué depression, and most of the South Cameroon Plateau are sparsely populated.

The Baka of Cameroon are among the oldest inhabitants of the land. Historically they were called Pygmies, a name which is no longer considered respectful. The Baka are a hunter-gatherer people, inhabiting the south-eastern rain forests of Cameroon. Their exact numbers are difficult to determine, but estimates range from 5,000 to 28,000 individuals. The men hunt and trap in the surrounding forest using poisoned arrows and spears to great effect. The men also fish using chemicals obtained from crushed plant material. They disperse the chemical downstream using fast moving river water. The non-toxic chemical deprives the fish of oxygen, making them float to the surface where they are easily collected by Baka men.

Another method of fishing, performed only by women, is dam fishing, in which water is removed from a dammed area and fish are taken from the exposed ground. Women also gather wild fruits and nuts or practice beekeeping while tending to children.

The group remains in one area until it is hunted out. Then they abandon that camp for a different portion of the forest. The group is communal and makes decisions by consensus. The Baka usually establish camps of huts constructed of bowed branches and large leaves. (Though today, more and more homes are being constructed following Bantu methods.) They often set their camps along roadsides to better facilitate trade. They provide forest game in exchange for produce and manufactured goods and are still largely unaccustomed to the cash-based economy.

The Baka are skilled in using various plants to treat illness and infertility. Children's health is of particular concern, as children are more susceptible to disease which often results in death. The Baka practice traditional medicine and their skills are such that even non-Baka seek out their healers for treatment.

² The Sahel is the area of grasslands south of the Sahara. The wealth of the states came from controlling the trade routes across the desert. Their power came from having large pack animals like camels and horses that were fast enough to keep a large empire under central control and were also useful in battle.

They worship a forest spirit known as Jengi whom they perceive as both a parental figure and guardian. Each successful hunt is followed by a dance of thanksgiving known as the Luma, which is accompanied by drumming and polyphonic singing.

Today, the greatest threat to the Baka's way of life comes from multi-national logging interests. As the forests disappear, the animals and plants upon which the Baka rely vanish as well.

IV. HISTORY

1. The Peopling of Cameroon

According to Greenburg's linguistic theory, the zone covering the southwest of the current Cameroon and the southeast of Nigeria was the birth place of the Bantus people in 1000 BCE³. The Tikars, Bamileke, and Bamouns settled on the high plateau in Cameroon. In the North, Sao civilisation developed in the Lake Chad Basin.

2. The Period before Colonisation

In the 6th century BC, Hanno, the Carthaginian navigator, arrived on the coast of Cameroon, discovered Mount Cameroon in eruption, and named it the chariots of gods. In the 16th century CE, Cameroon came under the control of the Karnem-Bornu Empire.

In 1472 the Portuguese navigator Fernando Po arrived in the Gulf of Guinea in the Wouri estuary. He found so many prawns that he named it *O Rio dos Camaroes* (River of Prawns). The Portuguese name *Camaroes* was reformed by the Spanish to *Cameroes*, then to *Kamerun* by Germans, then to Cameroun and Cameroon by the French and English respectively.

In 1436 the Portuguese introduced the slave trade that ended on 10 June, 1852 when the kings of Douala, Bell, and Akwa signed separate treaties with the British government prohibiting it.

In 1841 Joseph Merrick, a black Baptist pastor from Jamaica, arrived on a coastal island named by the navigator Fernando Po and founded the mission station in Douala.

3. Colonisation

On 12 July, 1884, the kings and chiefs of Douala signed a treaty with the German government. Two days later German sovereignty was unilaterally declared by Natchigal Imperial Commission on the west coast of Africa.

In 1916 Franco-English forces invaded the German protectorate of Cameroon, and in 1919 Cameroon was placed under the mandate of the League of Nations. The League of Nations gave 4/5 of Cameroon to France and the rest to Britain, which was administered from Nigeria. In 1945 the whole of Cameroon territory was placed under the United Nations Trusteeship.

4. Independence

In 1958 French Cameroon obtained its internal autonomy within the French Community and proceeded to independence on 1 January, 1960. British Cameroon was divided into two after a self-determined referendum. The population of the British Northern Cameroon,

³ BCE= Before the Common Era
CE= Common Era

mostly Muslims, chose to be attached to Nigeria, while the inhabitants of the British Southern Cameroon, mostly Christians and animists, voted to join French Cameroon. In the same year, a federal Republic of Cameroon was formed under the President Amadou Ahidjo, while John Ngu Foncha became vice president.

The first of October, 1961 marked the reunification of the British Southern Cameroon and the French Cameroon. On 20 May, 1972 the United Republic of Cameroon was born. On 6 November, 1982, in conformity with the constitution, the then Prime Minister Mr. Paul Biya became the President of the United Republic of Cameroon after President Amadou Ahidjo, the first President of Cameroon, resigned. On 4 February, 1984, with the modification of the constitution, the country became the Republic of Cameroon

V. GOVERNMENT

Cameroon is a Democratic Republic and the political system is presidential, administered by executive, legislative, and judicial parts. The country is organised into Provinces, Divisions, Sub-Divisions, and Districts.

The ten provinces of Cameroon are: Adamawa, Centre, Littoral, East, Far North, North, Northwest, South, Southwest, and West. Each province is administered by a Governor, and a province is split into divisions administered by a Senior Divisional Officer. Each division is then divided into districts placed under the authority of the District Officer.

VI. DEMOCRATISATION

1. Main Stages

Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) was the first political party in Cameroon.

In 1987 Cameroon returned to a multi-party system. The principle of multiple candidates was initiated by the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), the ruling party, during municipal elections in 1987 and was reintroduced during legislative elections in 1988.

In 1990 a series of political upheavals led to requests for more rights and liberties. With these requests, democratization occurred. This resulted in passing laws on liberties in December 1990 and legalisation of political parties in February 1991. Among these were the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP), and Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC). These first political parties requested the organisation of a sovereign National Conference. Instead a tripartite conference was held, where the party in power, the opposition, and the civil society participated from 30 October to 25 November, 1992.

2. Recent Stages

Progressive improvement on the legislative system anticipated presidential elections of 11 October, 1992 and was the second main step in the electoral calendar which emerged from the tripartite conference. The electoral law for this election was adopted at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly. After a national debate and popular consultation, the government proposed the reform of the National Assembly in December 1995.

The new Constitution was promulgated on 18 January, 1996. The main renovation of this revised constitution was to change the Presidential Mandate from 5 to 7 years, renewable once. Twin elections, legislative and municipal, took place successively in 2002 and 2007. The presidential election took place in 2004.

VII. EDUCATION

More than 60% of Cameroonians are younger than 25 years old. Education is obligatory from 6 to 11 years. In 2003 31% of children fell in this group, but only 5% got to the secondary level. General and technical education in Cameroon is carried out by the government and a good number of private universities. The first university in Cameroon was founded in Yaoundé, the nation's capital, on 26 July, 1962. Since May 1, 1998, Cameroon has six state-owned universities and about five private universities.

While education is compulsory in Cameroon, tuition fees at the secondary school level means that some parents are unable to send their children to school. Fewer girls enroll in primary school in Cameroon than boys. A number of problems plague the educational system in Cameroon, including rural/urban disparities in school attendance; limited access to formal and vocational education for children with disabilities; children falling behind in their primary education; a high drop out rate; and lack of primary school teachers especially in the rural areas. Early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, and domestic chores are some of the socio-cultural prejudices that contribute to low education rates.

Cameroon is said to be a source, transit, and destination country for children trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and domestic servitude, nannies, and street vending. Besides poverty, malnutrition strikes more than one in five children in Cameroon and threatens the development of their intellectual and physical capabilities and survival. Malaria, HIV and AIDS, and malnutrition are the main causes of child mortality, which account for 77 percent of all diseases affecting children in Cameroon, according to the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.

VIII. AGRICULTURE

The principal resource of the country is agriculture, which engages approximately 69% of the active population. The principal export products are coffee, cocoa, cotton, tobacco, timber, rubber, banana, and palm produce.

IX. ECONOMY

Cameroon is rich in natural resources. The economy is based largely on agriculture and an estimated 70% of the population are farmers. Other sources of revenue come from forestry, minerals, and petroleum. The economy had an important growth between 1977 and 1985 due to valorisation of the petroleum resources and agricultural exportation.

In 1988 the devaluation of the Franc CFA impacted Cameroon and people suffered from a serious economic crisis. Cameroon embarked upon a readjustment policy under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund; the revaluation of the CFA in January 1994 permitted the re-launch

of the exportation. Cameroon also benefited from the heavily indebted poor country initiative (HIPC Funds), which led to debt alleviation.

X. HEALTH

In Cameroon the government is in charge of healthcare under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. The structural adjustment programme permitted the reorganization of primary healthcare. Epidemics and endemic health problems like malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS constitute the principal causes of mortality and morbidity. There are benefits from the state-funded programmes to fight against diseases in Cameroon.

Also, vaccination for children between birth and 5 years and for pregnant women is freely carried out in the national vaccination programme. In this light, since 1 May, 2007, HIV/AIDS infected persons are entitled to anti-retroviral drugs free of charge in all approved health centres over the Cameroon National Territory.

The organizational structure of the Ministry of Public Health is pyramidal: at the base are the health units, provincial hospitals, and two reference hospitals (one in Yaoundé the other in Douala).

XI. TOURISM/CULTURE

Cameroon is described as “Africa in miniature” and therefore has enormous touristic potentials. Cameroon is inhabited by many species of plants and animals unique to the continent. One can travel through the green equatorial South to the warm and bright savannah and the steppes in the North, and pass through the highlands of the West and the beaches with fine green and yellow sands in the Littoral and Southwest provinces. Cameroon offers a striking variety of landscapes. Mount Cameroon is one of the highest peaks in Africa; Lobe Falls is unique in Africa. Cameroon is blessed with astonishing cultural wealth, with more than 240 ethnic groups, each with its specific culture. Cameroon is well known for its styles of music, particularly makossa and bikutsi.

XII. CHURCHES

There are three main religious groups in Cameroon: Christianity 60%, Islam 20%, and Indigenous Beliefs 20%. Christians are made up of Catholics who are in the majority, followed by Protestant denominations, alphabetically: The Anglican Church (AC), The Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun (EEC), Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun (EELC), Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne du Cameroun (EFLC), Eglise Presbyterénne Camerounaise (EPC), Eglise Protestante Africaine (EPA), Native Baptist Church (NBC), Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), Union des Eglises Baptistes du Cameroun (UEBC), Union des Eglises Evangélique du Cameroun (UEEC).

Other Christian groups include Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Revivalists.

The Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon, CPCC/CEPCA, regroups eleven denominations of Protestant churches. These churches, as well as Catholic and Adventist ones, are involved in social welfare such as education, health care, and community development.

XIII. WOMEN

Cameroon signed the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against woman in 1983. The constitution promotes equality between men and women and the civil law provides equal rights in the areas of inheritance, credit, and employment. However, the right of tradition often discriminates against women. Only male heads of household have land rights. Socially, the place of a woman is still influenced by patriarchal tendencies. A giant step towards assuring women's rights was accomplished by efforts women made and have not stopped making at all levels in Cameroon. Cameroonian women are involved in the struggle for peace, justice, and integrity in Cameroon. They assist HIV/AIDS and leprosy patients; they put all their talents and resources at the disposal of their children, who are at the centre of their lives.

1. Economics

Women in Cameroon are involved in small businesses, farming, and common initiative groups (GIC). All these activities contribute towards the growth of the local economy. Many women work as bayam-sallams, also written buyam-sallams. Bayam-sallams are market women who buy foodstuff in rural areas and sell it in the cities. The term was coined in the 1980s when the role of female foodstuff retailers became increasingly important in the Cameroonian economy. In the 1990s its usage was adopted by leading Cameroonian politicians and statesmen who used it in discourse in the absence of a more appropriate French equivalent.

2. Politics

In 1970, Madam Delphine Tsanga was appointed the first female minister to head the ministry of social affairs. She left this post only in 1984 after being in government for 14 years, thereby marking a path other women have since followed. Today, the number has grown and continues to do so; women work in all domains usually occupied by men and hold positions as police, soldiers, magistrates, journalists, doctors, archivists, teachers, and administrative lawyers.

3. Religious Activities

Cameroonian women shine in every religious activity, where they are 60% of the membership, as compared with men. They are organised in Christian fellowship groups, where they carry out seminars and workshops to fight against poverty. During these workshops they teach others small scale projects like soap production, preparation of smoked fish, fruit preservation, production of natural juice, and tie-dyeing fabric.

Cameroonian women support their sisters who have been ordained ministers or are theologians waiting for ordination.

XIV. CHILDREN

Most of the challenges faced by Cameroonian children have to do with forced labour, trafficking, and poverty-related survival measures as well as lack of access to education. Cameroon has child labour laws but faces the problem of enforcing them. The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years including for apprenticeships. Children are prohibited from working at

night, and children under 18 are prohibited from moving heavy weights, performing dangerous and unhealthy tasks, and working in confined areas. The law specifies that children cannot work in any job that exceeds their physical capacity, and the Labour Inspector can require child labourers to take medical examinations to determine if such a situation exists. Violations of child labour provisions are punishable by fines and imprisonment. The law prohibits slavery, child trafficking, servitude, and procuring prostitutes including sharing the profits from another person's prostitution. The Ministries of Social Affairs, Labour, and Social Insurance are said to have been charged with enforcing the child labour law through site inspections of "registered" businesses, for example. Evidence suggests that a lack of resources hinders efforts to combat child labour, hence the following identified challenges:

- Incidence and nature of child labour varies from load-bearing in the markets and motor parks, street vending, car washing, domestic servant-hood, and child care.
- According to Ministry of Social Affairs, children from large rural families are "loaned" for labour in exchange for monetary compensation in urban areas where they serve as domestic servants and sometimes as prostitutes.
- Cameroon has been identified domestically and internationally as a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking of children for the purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Trafficked children also work in cocoa, tea, banana, and rubber plantations; in spare parts shops; and in bars and restaurants.
- Children are trafficked from the Anglophone provinces in Cameroon to the USA, Europe, and the Francophone cities of Yaounde and Douala to work as domestic servants, street vendors, and prostitutes as well as in child care; the children's unfamiliarity with the language makes it easier for employers to assert control.
- A combination of unsafe drinking water and lack of basic sanitation, along with poor hygiene, contribute to the deaths of about a third of Cameroonian children born each year.
- Factors such as illness, the daily journey to fetch water, and the absence of hygienic facilities in most schools keep older children – particularly girls – out of class and uneducated, perpetuating the cycle of ignorance and poverty.
- The urban/rural divide reveals some of the largest disparities in access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation with less than half the rural population having access to safe drinking water.
- Domestic chores fall to girls and women and essentially tasks like carrying water for the household take precedence over education.
- Malaria accounts for more than 40 percent of all deaths among children under the age of five, yet less than 1 percent of children sleep under insecticide-treated nets.
- The three northernmost provinces lag far behind the rest of Cameroon in school attendance. In these areas, half of all the girls are out of school.