



RESEAU DES DEFENSEURS DES
DROITS HUMAINS EN AFRIQUE
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CAMEROON: Assassination of Eric Ohena Lembembe, the investigation remains at a standstill

Douala-Geneva-Paris-Yaoundé, July 11, 2014. A year after the murder of Eric Ohena Lembembe, a journalist and human rights defender committed to protecting the rights of the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI) in Cameroon, the working of justice remains at a standstill. Alternatives Cameroun, ADEFHO, CAMFAIDS, REDHAC, MDHC and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint FIDH and OMCT programme, denounce the dysfunctions of the justice system in this case and fear that they are a sign of the lack of political will to shed light on the circumstances of this assassination.

When it comes to reviewing the progress of the justice system's work, the evidence is overwhelming: bungled investigation, blocked instruction and disdain and even intimidation of the victim's relatives. Initially assigned to the police station of the 1st district of Yaoundé, the investigation was then carried out by the National Security Central Administration, before finally being transmitted to an investigating judge who, one year after the murder, has only summoned **Eric Ohena Lembembe's** mother, sister and brother in a procedure and by means of actions which contain numerous irregularities: no photo nor fingerprint has been taken at the scene of the crime ; the medical certificate indicating the nature of the death does not mention the burns and other injuries visible on Eric Lembembe's body, etc.

Simultaneously, the family and relatives of the victim are facing what can be qualified as intimidation. Several friends as well as Eric Lembembe's family were placed in custody by the police at the very beginning of the investigation ; the relatives and witnesses summoned by the investigating judge have yet never been heard despite the attempts and reminders of the lawyers of the civil party, etc.

"The Cameroonian judiciary must absolutely undertake a fair and honest investigation on Eric Lembembe's murder", declared Dominique MENOGA NANGA, founder of CAMFAIDS. ***"Claiming that Eric is responsible for his own murder is insulting. Nobody deserves to die because of his identity or that of the person he loves"***.

In January 2014, the Observatory undertook an international fact-finding mission on the situation of the LGBTI rights defenders in Cameroon and has noted the fragile environment and the intimidation aiming at defenders of the right to health and the human rights of LGBTI people, in a context of criminalization of homosexuality. This mission also met with several witnesses, relatives of the victim and justice actors in order to review the progress of the investigation of Eric Lembembe's death. A mission report will be published in the weeks to come.

Eric Ohena Lembembe was the Executive Director of Cameroonian Foundation for AIDS (CAMFAIDS). He was working in collaboration with several organisations such as Alternatives Cameroun and the

« Association pour la défense des homosexuel-les » (ADEFHO). He had contributed in particular to the preparation and the dissemination of a report published by Human Rights Watch in March 2013 and had addressed recommendations during the Universal Periodic Review of Cameroon in front of the UN Human Rights Council in May 2013. He also contributed to the blog *Erasing 76 Crimes* and had taken part in the writing process of the book *From Wrongs to Gay Rights*. Eric Ohena Lembembe was found murdered in his home, at Yaoundé, on July 15, 2013. According to the testimonies, he was beaten to death by his attackers, his neck and feet were apparently broken, his face, his hands and his feet burnt with an iron.

“It is a particularly heinous and violent crime which targeted a man committed to defending the rights of a vulnerable part of the Cameroonian population. We repeat that justice must be particularly exemplary concerning hate crimes”, declared Karim Lahidji, FIDH President, and Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

Our organisations fear that the attitude of the police and judiciary authorities in this affair is a reflection of these institutions' disregard for the respect and protection of LGBTI people's human rights in Cameroon. ***“The cameroonian authorities' inertia in this case is all the more worrying that it might reinforce the sentiment of impunity of the authors of the crimes and persecutions against LGBTI people, and feed the stigma and discrimination against these people and the defenders of their rights”***, added Michel Togue, a lawyer at the Bar of Cameroon and Legal Advisor for CAMFAIDS.

Alternatives Cameroun, ADEFHO, CAMFAIDS, MDHC, the Observatory and REDHAC renew their call to the competent Cameroonian authorities to conduct an independent, effective, rigorous, impartial and transparent investigation in order to identify the perpetrators, bring them before an independent, competent and impartial court in accordance with international and regional human rights protection instruments, and to apply criminal, civil, and/or administrative sanctions as provided for by the law.

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