

UNITED NATIONS  
TRUSTEESHIP  
COUNCIL

DOCUMENTS  
INDEX UNIT

MASTER



Distr.  
GENERAL

T/PET.5/119/Add.4  
4 March 1953  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

---

PETITION FROM MRS. CHRISTINE ESSOMBA CONCERNING  
THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

Note by the Secretary-General: In accordance with rule 85 and supplementary rule F of the rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the Trusteeship Council and to the Government of Italy as the Administering Authority for the Trust Territory of Somaliland, a communication dated 26 January 1953 from Mrs. Christine Essomba concerning the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under French administration.

This communication forms a fourth supplement to the petition set forth in document T/PET.5/119.

COPY

Mokolo, 26 January 1953

From: Mrs. Christine Essomba,  
dressmaker, Mokolo (North Cameroons)  
To: The Secretary-General of the  
United Nations, New York.

Sir,

In reply to your letter T/PET.5/119 of 29 August 1952 answering my request of 11 November 1951, I have the honour to give you the following information.

When I wrote my previous letter, I was greatly distressed because my husband, Nicolas Essomba, had just been transferred to Mokolo prison. In order to arouse interest in his condition, I doubtless used somewhat exaggerated language because I was in such a turmoil of anger and despair.

I had in fact based my request on the accounts of former inmates of Mokolo when it was still a prison. And I thought, judging from the concurring opinions of all those I saw, that my request was well-founded.

I was very much afraid that my husband would die in Mokolo prison because, in the past, no one who was transferred there ever expected to come back.

Accordingly, in an effort to set matters right, I felt I must write to someone to make my case known and evoke the sympathy of those to whom I appealed.

After waiting a long time in vain for a reply, I resigned myself to the terrible fate imposed on us. I even went to Mokolo myself to die with my husband, if necessary.

I have been living in that town since 1952, waiting for his prison term to end.

From what I had been told by former inmates and others who had been to Mokolo, it seemed incredible that anyone from the South imprisoned there could survive.

Yet, when I arrived there, I found not only that my husband was in good health, but that Mokolo was not all that I had heard.

I am concerned specifically with the condition of the prisoner and shall confine my observations to that point.

While Mokolo may once have been as I described it, today the living conditions of the prisoners have completely changed. Substantial improvements have been made.

(1) The daily ration is according to regulations. The prisoner receives one kilogramme of millet daily and peanuts with which to concoct a sauce. Meat is served three times a week and salt every day.

A brand-new mill has been installed in the prison to grind millet and the finest flour is obtained.

As millet is the staple food in the North everybody must get used to it, as lack of means of transport makes it extremely difficult to supply the prison with foodstuffs from the South, such as macabos, yams and bananas. At certain times of the year, however, the millet is alternated with potatoes. Furthermore, a supplementary ration of peanuts is granted to the prisoners by the Warden to ensure a proper diet.

(2) New clothes, of white material, and new blankets have been distributed to all the prisoners.

New straw mats were also given out. Prisoners are no longer chained together.

Soap is given out every Saturday to ensure cleanliness and a barber shaves the prisoners once a month.

Hours for baths and washing were prescribed by regulation on 1 January 1952 by the Chef de Région himself, as have the hours for outdoor labour duty during the winter season; a copy of his instructions is posted in front of the prison.

(3) Prisoners who are ill report to the hospital every day and those found to be very sick are hospitalized.

In 1946, in fact, my husband had a serious eye ailment and had to be hospitalized several times at Yaoundé (Mixed Hospital).

He was treated by an eye specialist (Commandant Orly) who was the oculist at the time.

When Commandant Orly went back to France that year, my husband remained without treatment for a long time because there was no other oculist. The ailment grew worse until he was on the verge of blindness. It was a case of "bilateral pterygium" which had to be treated with a silver nitrate pencil applied to the infected place. He also had to wear glasses. He was treated three times a week.

As the folder containing the diagnosis was required to make up the file for the appeal for pardon which my husband submitted at Yoko in 1950, whenever he had a recurrence of the ailment he was treated simply with argyrol. As there was no oculist at Mokolo, my husband had to resign himself to suffering until after his release, when he could get treatment.

(4) Generally speaking, there is no longer any hard labour at Mokolo. In addition to carrying water and wood, nearly all the prisoners work in market gardens.

An experiment in rehabilitation of prisoners is being tried: some of them have been placed as apprentice carpenters in the woodworking shop of the Subdivision; others are working as masons. They have been there for a year; they are paid wages which are kept for them in the Registry. Some of them do quite well.

(5) Measures of leniency have been introduced. Since January 1952, some five prisoners have been put on probation and released.

At the end of September 1952, the Chef de Subdivision took my husband into his office as a secretary and it would appear that he is satisfied with his conduct at present...

I should state, finally, that the climate of Mokolo is not very severe. It is the best climate in the Northern region and is not unlike that of the South.

Those are the observations that I have made since I have been living at Mokolo and I hope you will forgive me for disturbing you and for the horrifying account that I gave of the hardships of the prisoners at Mokolo in my earlier petition.

I have the honour to be, sir

(Signed) Ch. Essomba

Received at United Nations Headquarters on 2 March 1953.