

UNITED NATIONS

TRUSTEESHIP
COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

T/PET.5/322/Add.1
21 October 1954
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

PETITION FROM THE BABIMBI PEOPLE CONCERNING
THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

(Circulated in accordance with rule 85 and supplementary rule F of the
rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council)

The inhabitants of
BABIMBI
P.O. Box 942
DOUALA

Cameroons Under French Administration

Douala, 10 October 1954

Subject: Shipwreck on 24/9/54 at the landing-stage of
SAKBAYEME-SONG MBENGUE
BABIMBI (Sanaga Maritime Region)

To the Secretary-General
of the United Nations
NEW YORK (U.S.A.)

Sir,

Further to our telegram of 24 September 1954, a copy of which is attached,
we have the honour to relate the following facts to you:

The purpose of this petition is to analyze the position of the BABIMBI group,
especially with regard to the many shipwrecks which have taken place at the
Song Mbengue-Sakbayeme landing-stage since the establishment of the Babimbi
subdivision, as follows:

In 1936, the first shipwreck took place; it cost the lives of many persons,
including a wedding procession, and entailed considerable material loss.

In 1948, a group of Cameroonian Evangelical youth returning from a religious
conference was submerged when crossing the Sanaga; over forty persons - men,
women and children - perished.

In 1951, a similar disaster took more than twenty lives.

At this time, when we are considering the petition of the thirteenth session of 26/2/54 from the inhabitants of Babimbi by the Solibabi Canal, to which the Administering Authority is trying to give the lie, there has been another disaster much more terrible than the preceding ones. There was another shipwreck on 24 September 1954, at 9.10 a.m. local time, at the same part of the Sanaga, and this disaster has caused the loss of over fifty lives and a considerable amount of property.

You are aware that in 1949, when the first United Nations Visiting Mission came to the Territory, our people did not fail to submit a petition to that mission, drawing attention to all the defects of the Administration.

In 1952, our people also submitted to the United Nations Visiting Mission some petitions concerning economic and social problems in the Babimbi subdivision.

The Administering Authority, however, goes on practising the same policy, which consists in keeping this population of over 60,000 inhabitants in inhuman and anti-social conditions.

The policy practised by the Administering Authority may be summarized as follows: the country is being left without hospitals, without adequate dispensaries, without schools and without roads.

As a result of several United Nations recommendations, the Administering Authority, eager to justify its statements before the international tribunal of the United Nations, had a ferry boat built in March 1954 and put into operation in May 1954. This contraption could hardly be called a ferry, but was more like a raft; it was moved by means of cables, one of which, about 2 cm in diameter, was stretched across the river serving as a slider for the one which was held by the ferryman and kept the canoes together. The raft was merely a collection of canoes, which in these parts are nothing but large tree trunks hollowed out in the form of boats. Planks of sawn wood held together the canoes, on which all the passengers, livestock, goods etc. were placed. This contraption was operated by human labour, since men had to be employed to pull the cable, and on 24 September 1953, this "ferry" capsized for lack of solid material and good workmanship.

There can be no doubt that the Administering Authority is doubly responsible for all these disasters which have struck the inhabitants of Babimbi. You see, ever since this notorious ferry was installed, Mr. PINELLI, the chief of the Babimbi subdivision, has forbidden the inhabitants of the two shores to use canoes to cross the river.

This agent of the colonial administration is doubly responsible for the tragic drama and ignominious mourning which has struck the people of Babimbi. This man forgets that throughout the world all landing-stages have to be supplied with lifesaving equipment in case of shipwreck.

This mass extermination of men, which we justifiably describe as the outcome of contempt and hatred, shows manifest negligence on the part of the Administering Authority towards the population of Babimbi, for in the space of eighteen years our population, although it has regularly paid its taxes, has been condemned to constant bereavements and is always seeing its dear children engulfed in the waters. We know that the money from one year's taxation could provide not only a bridge over the Sanaga but long stretches of motor roads. It is very unjust, if not scandalous, that after forty years of French colonization, the Babimbi subdivision, which was established in 1923, has no roads, no medical services, and not even any schools.

In the face of this situation, the population of Babimbi censures and disapproves of all the statements of the French Government in the United Nations, because these statements are tendentious and untrue.

The population of Babimbi urgently requests the Fourth Committee of the ninth session of the United Nations to send a mission in the near future to visit the Babimbi subdivision and we ask that the itinerary of the mission should be drawn up by the people of Babimbi themselves and not by the Administration, as was the case in 1949-1952.

THE INHABITANTS OF BABIMBI

Note by the Secretariat: Two press cuttings attached to this communication have been placed in the Secretariat files and are available to members of the Trusteeship Council on request.

The population of BABIMBI
P.O. Box 942, D O U A L A

Douala, 10 October 1954

Subject: Neglect of the Subdivision
of Babimbi (Sanaga Maritime Region)

To the President of the Council of
Ministers

HOTEL MATIGNON

P A R I S

United Nations for Information

Sir:

We have the honour to draw your special attention to the position of the people of BABIMBI (Sanaga Maritime region), who, after forty years of French colonialization, live under a system of absolute insecurity, as you must be aware.

The subdivision, which was established in 1923, according to its geographical situation, is situated 70 kilometres from Douala. It has a population of approximately 60,000 and is of considerable importance from the point of view of economic resources, if they could only be developed.

This immense population, which regularly pays its taxes amounting to millions and millions each year, is being denied all progress by the French administration.

Thus, in spite of its proximity to Douala,
in spite of its large population,
in spite of its undeveloped resources,
in spite of the immense sums in taxes which it pays to the Treasury, this subdivision has been grossly neglected by the Administration, for it has no roads, no schools, no hospitals or dispensaries and its inhabitants have to go hundreds of kilometres on foot along tracks which are hardly passable even for pedestrians; the children who are lucky enough to go to school walk dozens of kilometres and the child population is decimated by infant mortality. The people suffer from diseases of all kinds.

Moreover, the people are continually witnessing shipwrecks in the crossing of the Sanaga (SONG MBENGUE-SAKBAYEME).

In 1936, there was a disastrous shipwreck which cost many lives and considerable material losses.

In 1948, a group of Cameroonian Evangelical youth, returning from a religious conference, was submerged when crossing the river; a large number of people were drowned and much property lost.

In 1951, a similar disaster took place at the same spot, killing more than twenty persons.

On 24 September 1954, the population was plunged into mourning by a major shipwreck; over fifty people - men, women and children - lost their lives and considerable property was lost when a so-called "ferry boat", which in fact is nothing but a raft, was sunk.

The administration, which was trying to stifle the authentic sound of our petitions before the United Nations, was unmasked by this sad calamity suffered by our population.

We would beg you to give favourable consideration to our plea by requesting the local authorities of the Cameroons to build, among the other works which should be carried out in Babimbi, a bridge at the crossing where there are such frequent losses of life and property.

We have the honour to be etc.

THE POPULATION OF BABIMBI

The inhabitants of BABIMBI
P.O. Box 942,
DOUALA
CAMEROONS Under French Administration

Subject: Shipwreck on 24/9/54 at the
landing stage of SAKBAYEME-SONG-MBENGUE
BAMBIMBI (Sanaga-Maritime Region)

Douala, 10 October 1954

To the Minister of Foreign
Affairs of the French Government,
Chairman of the delegation to the
ninth session of the United Nations
General Assembly, NEW YORK
(USA)

Sir,

We have the honour to transmit you a copy of our letter to the President of the Council of Ministers in Paris with regard to the position of the Babimbi people (Sanaga-Maritime Region) after forty years of French colonialization.

Among the many disasters which have happened since 1936, the catastrophe of 24 September 1954, the disastrous and unforgettable results of which are weighing on the whole population and on many families, is the most terrible experienced by the Babimbi group. This tragedy caused the loss of more than 50 men, women and children and of considerable property. Moreover, the statements made by the Administering Authority have aroused great dissatisfaction among the people of Babimbi.

These statements are contradictory and therefore inaccurate, especially since the accident took place at 9.10 a.m., while the Administration authorities did not arrive until 4.10 p.m.

We do not want to enumerate all our grievances, about which we send petitions to the United Nations every year, but we consider that the French Government should bear in mind the trust which it has undertaken. The loss of life which the population of Babimbi has experienced for many years in effect represents negligence on the part of the Government. The people of Babimbi consider that the Administering Authority's opposition to the satisfaction of their legitimate claims is rendering its task of Trusteeship more difficult and will continue to do so. The people of Babimbi want Article 76 of the United Nations Charter to be applied. It is obvious that the money collected from taxation, instead of meeting the elementary needs of the population, is being used for tourist journeys which the French Government organizes annually for contingents of Cameroonian notables and their "dear children".

We therefore ask the Minister to intervene and arrange for a safe bridge to be built at the Sakbayemi Song-Mbengue landing stage, not only in order to put an end to the constant disasters, but to enable the population to move freely.

We have the honour to be etc.

THE POPULATION OF BABIMBI

(14 pages follow, with 410 names and signatures).
