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PETITION FROM THE BABIMBI BRANCH OF THE UDEFEC CONCERNING
THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

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Union Démocratique des Femmes Camerounaises (UDEFEC)
Babimbi Branch,
P.O. Box 65, Edea

Petition to the Secretary-General
of the United Nations,
New York.

The women of Babimbi, members of the UDEFEC, the only women's organization in the Cameroons fighting alongside men to raise their own standard of living and that of the population of their country, have the honour to lay the following grievances before the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

They associate themselves with the statements made by Mr. Ruben Um Nyobe and Kingue Abel, particularly with regard to their own area:

Social life: The Babimbi area, where there are about 30,000 women, has only one medical centre with 48 beds for maternity and surgical cases, and other diseases. It must be pointed out that these beds are without bedding, which means that expectant mothers must bring all their bedding or else have to lie on the bare boards with their new-born children. Expectant mothers, if they have no attendant from their own family, have food served to them in rough basins and sometimes even given them by hand or, in particularly striking cases, the macabos are put on the ground and the soup in the utensils considered best for black women, that is the Cameroonian women. Where there is no maternity hospital, there naturally is no orphanage to accommodate children who have had the worst misfortune of losing their mothers when only a

few months, days or even hours old. In order to save the lives of such unfortunates, the father is obliged to travel to Douala by way of Edea, a distance of more than 200 kilometres. Worse still, the region has no welfare organization to protect the health of pregnant women. Similarly, children who have left the centre receive no further treatment and die young owing to the neglect of our rulers.

Children who have reached school age cannot find schools. At present, the district has one school at Ngambe, one at Imogombengue, twenty-seven kilometres from the first mentioned, one at Ibaikak, thirty kilometres from Imogombengue, one at Ndom, over forty kilometres from Ngambe and a new one at Issondje, more than a day's journey on foot from Ngambe. The position is that children capable of travelling long distances are no longer accepted in these few schools on the ground that they are grown up. As a result of that unhappy state of affairs, they miss their education and drift to the big cities to visit the cinema and see films about cowboys, Zorro, bandits, gangsters etc. The women fear that if these conditions continue, the population will be riddled with hooligans.

We the women grieve to state that widows are deprived of everything. They receive no assistance either from the Administration or from the settlers for whom their husbands worked.

The women are also grieved that the Administering Authority takes no steps to kill off the animals which are causing such serious damage to the plantations. So they are dying of hunger with the children they have to bring up without assistance from their husbands.

Cultural life: The Cameroonian women complain that their children are not taught any sports. They thus grow up weaklings. Worse still, the children learn nothing but passages from plays written centuries ago by Molière and no teaching is given on indigenous history, or customary and traditional dancing; the children only learn the history of distant countries so that a child who can recite details of the map of France does not know the name of the river flowing through his own village.

Economic life: The women of Babimbi indignantly report that their area possesses only 27 kilometres of roads. It must be pointed out in passing that that section of road is a gold mine for the French settlers, who ask 250 francs, i.e. nearly 10 francs per kilometre for transportation over it whereas

elsewhere transportation costs 2 francs per kilometre. One example out of many: the journey from Yaoundé to Mbalmayo, distance of 52 kilometres, costs 100 francs. It must not be forgotten that, under a former plan of works to be carried out, there was to have been a Kpongo-Ngambe-Bafia road, but alas, the women of this area regretfully note that no work has been put in hand for over 25 years. The section of road linking the Babimbi area with Edea has a death-trap: the Sanaga. That natural hazard is always causing tragedies and the women of Babimbi have recently lost several of their children there. On rare occasions it is possible to cross this great river on a ferry which is hardly worthy of the name, it is more like a raft; this means that the products of the region cannot be exported, which is the cause of our chief trouble - poverty. Then there are heavy taxes amounting to 1,400 francs which weigh heavily on their children who work the land.

They add that it was for protesting against this lack of communications, that Mr. Penda Pierre, Chairman of the association known as Solibabi, was imprisoned. It may usefully be pointed out that Mr. Penda Pierre has been transferred to the Penitentiary at Yoko, leaving a family of three minor children. Worse still, the area has only one market or heading centre, where cocoa is seized from their children by the local authorities which sell it on their own behalf on the pretext that it is of poor quality.

Consequently:

The women, authors of this petition, request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to take their grievances into consideration and to recommend to the Administering Authority of our country that pending the achievement of independence:

It should provide in their area:

- one hospital with a maternity section,
- dispensaries throughout the area,
- a maternal and child welfare service,
- schools with kindergartens, in all large towns
- a physical training centre in the chief town of the area,
- inclusion in the educational syllabus of subjects relating to our country, language, history, dances,

- Construction of the Kpondo-Ngonge-Bafia road to enable their children to travel freely to Douala, thus facilitating the sale of their products; the construction of a bridge over the Sanaga to remove the women's daily anxiety lest their children drown.

They strongly protest against the arbitrary arrest of their Chairman, Mr. Penda Pierre and request his release.

In connexion with the celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the women wish to draw the Secretary-General's attention to the fact that the Administering Authority is failing to observe that Declaration.

They request that a recommendation should be made to the Administering Authority to relinquish its evil policy of arrest and imprisonment, repression, seizures, persecution and slander, etc.

Hoping this will be done, the women of the Babimbi branch of the Union démocratique des femmes Camerounaises, conscious of the noble principle which he deccends, including respect for human rights, the right of peoples to self-determination and the maintenance of lasting peace, beg the Secretary-General to accept the assurances of their highest consideration.

Ngambe, 13 December 1954

(Signed) Marthe Penda

Secretary

Babimbi branch of the UDEFEC.
