

UNITED NATIONS
TRUSTEESHIP
COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

T/PET. 5/880
22 May 1956

ENGLISH

ORIGINAL: FRENCH

PETITION FROM THE PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF THE WOURI VALLEY
CONCERNING THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

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

Note by the Secretariat: This communication was transmitted
to the Secretary-General by the United Nations Visiting
Mission to Trust Territories in West Africa.

Bellé Victor,
Paramount Chief of Wouri Bwellé,
Yabassi.

To the United Nations Mission to the Cameroons

Subject: Petitions addressed to the
United Nations Visiting Mission in the Cameroons.

First of all, in my own name and on behalf of all the people I represent,
I have the honour to wish you success in your Mission and a pleasant stay in the
Territory.

There is no doubt that at such a time as this you will have a very hard task
to perform in the Territory which will prevent you from visiting the Nkam Region
and seeing what a state it has been in for a long time.

For that reason I have the honour to inform you by this letter of some
important matters concerning this Region, and in particular the Wouri Valley,
which I represent at the present time.

The people of the Wouri Valley are dissatisfied: for a long time they have
been asking that an administrative post should be set up in their Cantons, for a
number of reasons. To begin with they are geographically far from Yabassi, the
subdivision to which they now belong, and from Douala, their former subdivision,
from which they were detached. If the people of the Wouri Valley had remained

under the administration of Douala, their former subdivision, they would have already had an administrative post in their cantons, since there are a number of administrative posts in the suburbs of Douala, such as Bassa, New-Bell and Bonabéri, and many others are being set up, even nearer the large town of Douala where the people can easily obtain identity cards, copies of certificates of birth, death or marriage and sundry information and where there are courts of first instance to settle questions of customary or civil law, whereas we suffer from the lack of these things, buried as we are at the bottom of our Valley. Basing our case on the above-mentioned reasons, we say that the first administrative post to be set up should be in the Wouri Valley, as we have been asking for a long time.

We enclose the letter putting forward this request which we addressed to the High Commissioner of the Republic, a copy of this same letter which was sent to the Territorial Assembly of the Cameroons and a copy of the letter received in reply from the President of the Territorial Assembly of the Cameroons.^{1/}

Emigration from the Wouri Valley, Yabassi

Emigration from the Wouri Valley to the large town of Douala is a social scourge, to combat which vigorous measures are required.

At the time when "Forced Labour and the Indigénat system" were in existence in the Cameroons, the people of the Wouri Valley thought fit to flee to the large town of Douala to take refuge there.

The great progress in health conditions in the Territory has led to a rapid increase in the numbers of this emigrant population. In fact these emigrants, no longer able to find in that large town a small piece of land on which to plant their little crops and no longer able to find work in offices or small businesses, have turned themselves into gangsters and have become real disturbers of the peace in the town of Douala. We constantly hear stories of murders, thefts, killings and various misdeeds at night, and yet these emigrants have their own region which

^{1/} Note by the Secretariat: The enclosures referred to have been place in the Secretariat files and are available to memebbers of the Trusteeship Council on request.

they could help to develop. On all sides there are great stretches of uncultivated land and well-wooded forests where any inhabitant can cut wood to build himself a house or make a boat and take his produce to Douala. The roads are deserted and ill-kept and the villages are isolated while these unemployed people throng the large town of Douala.

I would add that it is difficult to take a proper census of this more or less sedentary population and hence not all these emigrants pay their taxes.

I have the honour to request you, in conjunction with the local authorities, to find a remedy for this situation, or in other words to replace this emigration by compulsory permanent Immigration.

Dredging of the Nkam River

The bed of the Wouri River, the upper reaches of which are called the Nkam, is characterized almost everywhere by enormous sandbanks, especially in the dry season, and is very difficult to navigate in a small boat. It takes about two days to travel from Douala to Yabassi - a distance of about sixty km. There are abundant crops along the banks of the river, cultivated in the most favourable spots, but the river which we ask to have dredged, is the only way by which this produce can quickly reach the consumers at Douala and Yabassi.

We therefore ask that the river, our only means of communication, should be dredged so that produce, letters and replies will be able to circulate. In addition to these material pleasures there will be the heartfelt joy of being in direct communication with other centres.

Pleas of the African Chiefs of Yabassi-Nkam

The African Chiefs are valuable coadjutors of the French Administration. If I may say so, they have an important role to play in the Territory. It seems to me that their lot is hard. Do not the chiefs have to give hospitality to various personages in their concessions? But what resources have they to perform this hard task? Their monthly salaries are not sufficient for the various tasks they have to perform. The Paramount Chiefs of the Nkam Region are paid not more than 4,000 francs a month, while those of Douala, for example, receive quite large monthly salaries. Besides the heavy expenses incurred in connexion with their position, they have large families to support. As well as that they have to

entertain local notables almost every day. By virtue of their office they are regularly invited to take part in various festivities and official entertainments. On those occasions they must always be correctly and immaculately dressed. But how can they pay for all those clothes? Their functions often oblige them to travel long distances and these unfortunate men have to pay heavy travelling expenses. Consider how many times in a year a Paramount Chief has to travel and each time he has to pay up and gets no travelling allowance whatever. This great injustice weighs heavily on the Paramount Chiefs of the Nkam Region and I do not think it is the same in other parts of the Cameroons. We beg you to study this matter with great care because it appears to everyone to be most unjust. Some people think it is enough to have the title of Paramount Chief but is there not a saying that "honours without money are nothing but an illness"? If that is so the Yabassi Chiefs are truly ill and the only cure would be to raise their monthly salaries a little. The Yabassi Chiefs have become positive beggars running about the streets to get their daily bread. Thus little by little they forfeit their honour and their dignity and in the end the whole French Administration is the loser. An impecunious Chief can easily swindle his people in order to "make ends meet".

I know Chiefs who have missed several official entertainments because they had not the small sum needed to pay for the journey from their remote villages to the town. Where is their dignity in the eyes of the people? Will the people they represent have news of the Administration? No! I say, because the Chiefs did not attend the receptions.

I enclose some short notes recently received (documents in proof).^{1/}

General Survey of the Nkam Region

The region of Nkam is one of the oldest regions in the Territory. After all the time the French Administration has been in the Cameroons, it is now classified lowest among all the regions of the Territory. There are even subdivisions which are regarded as more important. It has always been one of the most extensive

^{1/} Note by the Secretariat: The enclosures referred to have been placed in the Secretariat files and are available to members of the Trusteeship Council on request.

regions in the Cameroons but from this vast expanse there has been large-scale emigration, which has depopulated entire villages, and there is a great lack of administrative posts, communications, schools and branch dispensaries; that is the general situation in the Nkam Region.

We place our hopes in your kindness with regard to the various questions we have brought to your attention, and have the honour to be etc.

Long live France!

Long live the French Cameroons!

Long live the United Nations Visiting Mission.

Wouri-Yabassi, 24 October 1955.

(Signed) Bellé Victor
Paramount Chief of the
Wouri-Yabassi Valley
