

Cameroon detains journalist for a week, fails to disclose charge

Authorities in Cameroon should immediately release or disclose charges against Michel Biem Tong, editor of the privately owned Hurinews website, who was detained on October 23 after being summoned to the State Secretariat for Defense in the capital, Yaoundé, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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Prior to his arrest, Tong had published articles criticising the Cameroonian government's handling of grievances of Anglophone Cameroonians from the western regions of the country in the run-up to presidential elections on October 7, according to a friend of the journalist who spoke to CPJ on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

"Michel Biem Tong has been in detention for a week and Cameroonian officials have yet to give any reason for his arrest," said Muthoki Momo, CPJ's sub-Saharan Africa representative. "Journalists in Cameroon are too often arrested for simply trying to keep the population informed about the political and economic situation in the country."

According to a letter Tong sent before his arrest to the same friend, the journalist had anticipated his arrest after he received repeated calls from a Cameroonian military official known as Colonel Joel Emile Bamkoui to present himself at the State Secretariat for Defense, known by its French acronym, SED. The summons were connected to an alleged audio recording in which Tong expressed sympathies toward the Anglophone separatists in western Cameroon, according to the friend. In his letter, Tong denied having made any such recording.

CPJ could not immediately determine whether Tong had been granted access to a lawyer.

"We are concerned about the arrest of Michael Biem Tong and we have been discussing with authorities to know why he has been arrested," said Denis Nkwebo, president of the Cameroonian journalists' trade union, of which Tong is a member.

Hurinews published a [statement](#) by a Gabonese network of civil society organisations, known by its French acronym ROLBG, [calling](#) for Tong's release and extolling "his numerous writings supported by credible and richly documented information", about the government's alleged human rights violations in the Anglophone regions.

CPJ's repeated calls to the Cameroonian minister of information, Issa Tchiroma Bakary, went unanswered, and calls to Cameroonian police went unanswered. When contacted by CPJ, Bamkoui declined to comment on Tong's case.

Since 2016, Cameroon has repeatedly jailed journalists for reporting in the western regions of the country, according to CPJ [research](#). Cameroonian President Paul Biya was in early October [re-elected](#) for a seventh term.

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