

# Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*  
**Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them**

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Thursday, 10 May, 2018

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Dear President Biya and Honourable Ministers and Officials:

**Re: Arrest and arbitrary detention of five members of the association - Avenir Jeune de l'Ouest (AJO).**

I write on behalf of Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote international human rights, the rule of law, and the integrity of legal systems through advocacy, education, and legal research. LRWC is a volunteer-run NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

LRWC is concerned by reports of the arrest and arbitrary detention of five members of the association Avenir June de l'Ouest (AJO), which promotes the rights of LGBTIQ persons with HIV and sex workers in western Cameroon. LRWC reiterates the calls by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) that Cameroonian authorities guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the five members of the AJO, ensure their immediate and unconditional release, and guarantee that their right to a fair trial for all of the charges made against them is respected.

**Arrest and arbitrary detention of five members of the association – Avenir Jeune de l'Ouest (AJO)**

## **Background - Reports of arrest and arbitrary detention:**

Reliable sources have informed the Observatory that on April 20 2018, at approximately 7 pm, the executive director of AJO, the warden and a care worker were arrested by men in civilian clothing who were members of the territorial police, as they were leaving the AJO premises. On the morning of April 21, two other care workers from AJO were arrested at their respective places of residence. No arrest warrant was produced during any of these arrests. The five members of AJO were taken to Dschang central police station where they are still detained in a single cell with neither sanitary facilities nor beds. Despite their serious medical conditions, the prisoners have not seen a doctor.

On April 23 and 24, they were questioned by the Dschang territorial security officers who informed them of charges of “homosexuality” brought against them under article 347 -1 of the Cameroon Penal Code. Under that article, they could face up to five years in prison, and a fine of 200,000 CFA (about 300 Euros). Those accused of homosexuality in Cameroon are regularly subjected to an anal examination which is a form of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment which can be tantamount to torture. During their interrogation, the police officers told the members of AJO that they had been “on their trail for some time.”

The five members of AJO did not have access to their lawyers until April 24. In addition, the territorial security officers made false statements to their lawyers, claiming that the AJO members had only been in custody since April 22, 2018.

Earlier, in September of 2017, the members of AJO received threats from unidentified individuals who had daubed insults on the walls of the AJO offices. During the same period, the executive director of AJO had received death threats over the telephone from an anonymous caller. Following these threats, a complaint was filed against unknown persons; police authorities failed to follow up on the matter.

The Observatory has strongly condemned the judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of these five members of AJO, who appear to have been targeted and punished for peaceful and legitimate activities in defence of human rights and of the rights of LGBTIQ persons specifically, against a backdrop of intense discrimination and criminalization of such persons. This is of particular concerns as threats and attacks against the physical integrity of LGBTIQ rights defenders in Cameroon have in recent years reached alarming proportions in a climate of almost complete impunity.

### **Accordingly, LRWC urges the Government of Cameroon to:**

1. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the five members of AJO and of all human rights defenders detained in Cameroon.
2. Proceed to the immediate and unconditional release of the five members of AJO and all human rights defenders detained in Cameroon.
3. Put an end to all forms of harassment, including judicial harassment, against the five members of AJO and all human rights defenders in Cameroon.
4. Ensure that all judicial proceedings brought against the five members of AJO are conducted in accordance with the right to a fair trial, guaranteed in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon.

### **Arrest and arbitrary detention of five members of the association – Avenir Jeune de l’Ouest (AJO)**

5. Conform with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December, 1998, and specifically its Articles 1, 5(b), and 12.2.

6. Conform with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and regional and international human rights instruments ratified by Cameroon.

Sincerely,



Robert G.W. Lapper, Q.C.  
LRWC Cameroon Co-Monitor.

Copied to:

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**Arrest and arbitrary detention of five members of the association – Avenir Jeune de l'Ouest (AJO)**