

19 May 2020

### Cameroon: Arbitrary arrest of human rights defender **Séverin Le Juste Bikoko**

On 16 May 2020, human rights defender **Séverin Le Juste Bikoko** was arbitrarily arrested by Gendarmerie officers in his family residence in Yaoundé. The defender remains in detention in a cell of the Gendarmerie station in Mimboman, Yaoundé.

[Séverin Le Juste Bikoko](#) is a human rights defender and member of *Tournons La Page Cameroun* (Let's turn the page – TLP), a movement promoting democratic processes and citizen participation. The TLP organisation is active in 10 African countries and advocates for freedom of expression and assembly in efforts to engage all levels of civil society in the democratic process. It mainly conducts its advocacy through demonstrations, campaigns and public debates.

On 16 May 2020 at approximately 6:30am, members of the Gendarmerie arrived at Séverin Le Juste Bikoko's family home to arrest him. They were not in possession of any warrant or official document justifying their presence, so the defender refused to be arrested and closed the gate of the residence. However, the gendarmes broke down the gate and arrested Séverin Le Juste Bikoko. His father **Jean-Marc Bikoko**, human rights defender and a focal point at national level for *Dynamique Citoyenne* (Dynamic Citizen), a network of Cameroonian civil society organisations which conducts independent monitoring of public policies, was present in the house at the time of his son's arrest. [Jean-Marc Bikoko](#) reported that the gendarme leading the arrest told him that they were arresting Séverin Le Juste Bikoko as part of an effort to arrest "bandits" in the area. The gendarme told Séverin Le Juste Bikoko's father that the human rights defender was allegedly refusing to comply with their attempts to arrest him, a claim which those present during the arrest denied. Séverin Le Juste Bikoko had not used violence or attempted to flee the gendarmes attempts, but had merely closed the gate to the Gendarmerie as they failed to produce evidence of an arrest warrant or any official document. The defender was arbitrarily arrested and placed in a cell in the Gendarmerie station in Mimboman.

On the mornings of 18 and 19 May, Séverin Le Juste Bikoko was brought before the public prosecutor, but is yet to be made aware of the charges against him. Jean-Marc Bikoko believes the arbitrary arrest of his son Séverin Le Juste Bikoko is in reprisal for their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities.

Séverin Le Juste Bikoko was previously [arrested](#) on 15 September 2015 along with Jean-Marc Bikoko and human rights defenders **Agnès Adelaide Metougou**, **Ndjalla Epangue Yves** and **Jessie Bikoko**. He was charged with disobedience and rebellion in relation to an incident during a workshop organised by *Dynamique Citoyenne* to mark the International Day of Democracy. Security forces arrested them for allegedly refusing to respect the orders of the sub-divisional officer, who had ordered the suspension of the workshop. However, no formal documents were presented to support this order. Following their arrest, the human rights defenders were taken to the Central Police Station No. 1 where they spent the night before being transferred to the police academy in the Tsinga neighbourhood of Yaoundé. On 23 September 2015, Séverin Le Juste Bikoko and the other defenders were released without bail by order of the Court of First Instance. They were originally due to appear again before the court on 28 October 2015, however the hearing has been adjourned several times and the next hearing is scheduled for 27 May 2020.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned regarding the arbitrary detention of Séverin Le Juste Bikoko as it strongly believes that it is directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

## Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cameroon to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Séverin Le Juste Bikoko and cease all judicial harassment against him, as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been arbitrarily arrested and is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Séverin Le Juste Bikoko, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Drop the charges of disobedience and rebellion against Séverin Le Juste Bikoko and human rights defenders Jean-Marc Bikoko, Agnès Adelaide Metougou, Ndjalla Epangue Yves and Jessie Bikoko from 2015, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Cameroon and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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