

25 October 2018

Cameroon – Journalist Michel Biem Tong arbitrarily arrested and held without charge

On 23 October 2018, journalist **Michel Biem Tong** was arrested at the office of the Ministry of Defense in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Colonel Joël Émile Bamkoui had requested Michel Biem Tong to come to the office to discuss allegations against him of supporting the Anglophone separatist movement. Michel Biem Tong went to the office to clarify that the allegation was incorrect, at which point he was arrested. He has been denied any contact to the outside world and his lawyer and colleagues have not been informed of his exact whereabouts.

[Michel Biem Tong](#) is a journalist and human rights defender working in the Anglophone region in Cameroon. He is the director of **Hurinews.com**, a Cameroonian news site focusing on human rights issues. Since the beginning of the crisis in the Anglophone region in 2016, Michel Biem Tong has been researching and reporting on human rights violations committed by all parties involved in the turmoil. In his reporting, he has called on the government to find a solution to the crisis to mitigate the suffering of citizens in the region. Most recently, he was working in the Anglophone region to report on human rights violations committed during the election period; the presidential election took place on 7 October 2018.

On 22 October 2018, Michel Biem Tong received several text messages from Colonel Joël Émile Bamkoui, requesting him to go to the military security office in Yaoundé to discuss recordings in which the human rights defender allegedly voiced his support for the Anglophone separatists in the Northwest and Southwest of the country. Michel Biem Tong first refused to attend and maintained that he had never spoken in support of the separatists, and therefore there could be no such recording.

Following this exchange, the Colonel called Michel Biem Tong, accused him of lying about the nature of his work and threatened him by saying that he would find and hurt him. On 23 October 2018, Michel Biem Tong went to the Colonel's office in order to clarify his position. At that point, he was arrested. Since his arrest, Michel Biem Tong's colleagues have been unable to reach him. They have not been informed of any charges against him, and they have contacted the military security office to no avail.

Front Line Defenders believes that Michel Biem Tong's arrest is linked to his peaceful reporting as a journalist in the Anglophone region of Cameroon, is concerned at the crackdown against human rights defenders working in the region since 2016.

Front Line Defenders calls on the Cameroonian authorities to:

1. Inform the colleagues and lawyer of Michel Biem Tong of the place of his detention, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to him;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Michel Biem Tong, as Front Line Defenders believes that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Cameroon and guarantee in all circumstances, but especially following the presidential election, that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.