

UNCLASSIFIED
MEMORANDUM

DATE: 1/4/11

TO: DS/DSS/TIA/OSAC

From: RSO Yaounde, Chris Berry

SUBJECT: OSAC Crime and Safety Report

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats:

Criminal activity continues to be a major concern for the official and private American community in Cameroon. The U.S. State Department rates Cameroon as a critical crime threat country. High unemployment and an under-equipped police force continue to fuel criminality in Yaounde, Douala, and other towns in Cameroon. Street crime is endemic in major metropolitan areas. Wealthy Cameroonians, expatriates, and members of the diplomatic community continue to be targeted. Persons have been robbed inside and outside their residences, on the street, and in shops. Numerous reports were received of increased street crime, thefts from vehicles (occupied and unoccupied), residential break-ins, highway banditry and armed robberies in the weeks leading up to and during the 2010 holiday season. These crimes are economically motivated and often involve violence, especially when victims attempt to resist or fight back. These crimes have been committed against Cameroonians as well as expats including American citizens.

One item of particular interest was the December 2010 robbery of a number of Peace Corps volunteers during the late evening hours in the beach resort town of Kribi. Three armed men (two with machetes and one with a handgun) entered the restaurant the volunteers were in and proceeded to grab backpacks, handbags and other items of perceived value that were in plain sight. Three "intimidation/warning shots" were fired by one of the assailants during the robbery and the restaurant manager, a security guard and two volunteers were injured as well.

Residential crime also occurs frequently and most diplomats, expatriates, and wealthy Cameroonians rely on 24-hour private security guards to protect residences and other property. Most residential break-ins are perpetrated by small groups of armed bandits. The preferred method of entry is using stealth techniques (during a rainstorm to mask their movements, or sneaking past a sleeping guard). However, bandits are increasingly overpowering guards to enter residences, usually using some ruse to get the guard to open the gate. Persons resisting such break-ins are likely to be injured and women of all ages are often sexually assaulted. The U.S. government provides 24-hour security for all of its official residences in Cameroon as unguarded properties are vulnerable and inviting for burglaries.

Road Safety:

Cameroon's road networks, both paved and unpaved, are poorly maintained and unsafe at all times of the year. Vehicles are poorly maintained and there is no mechanism or requirement to inspect for roadworthiness. During the rainy season, many roads are barely passable with four-wheel-drive vehicles. Livestock and pedestrians create constant road hazards (especially at night) and road safety rules are frequently ignored. There are few road and traffic signs; speed limits are neither posted nor enforced. Buses and logging trucks travel at excessive speed and are a constant threat to other road traffic.

Travelers on roads near the borders with the Central African Republic and Chad should ensure that they have adequate vehicle fuel, cooking fuel, food, and water for several days, as well as a reliable means of communication, such as a satellite or cell phone, or radio.

Political Violence

There were no instances of political violence or terrorism directed against Americans in 2010. Ethnic/linguistic differences between the Anglophone and Francophone segments of the population continue to be a potential source of friction. Radical Islamic fundamentalism has not been a significant factor in Cameroon. However, recent reporting has indicated that there is a growing fundamentalist Islamic presence along the northern borders shared with Nigeria and Chad.

Cameroon has not experienced significant civil unrest since February 2008. Although a rapid resumption of violence is considered unlikely, U.S. citizens living in or visiting Cameroon are encouraged to stay abreast of local political and social developments that could signal instability in the country. Presidential elections are scheduled for 2011 and could involve both peaceful and potentially violent protests.

Post-Specific Concerns

Although the Government of Cameroon has made excellent progress in reducing instances of piracy off the coast of Cameroon near the Bakassi Peninsula, piracy still remains a concern. Attacks against oil platforms and ships off the coast often involve armed assaults and kidnappings. In the past, these 'pirates' have claimed a political motivation for their activities, but the U.S. Embassy believes that these are crimes perpetrated by thieves who are exploiting a weakness in Cameroon's existing law enforcement and security structure. The government has deployed a rapid reaction maritime security force to help patrol the waters along the Bakassi Peninsula between the Nigerian border and the Cameroonian coast.

Armed vehicle hijackings also continue to be a major cause for concern. Some victims of vehicle hijackings are taken in the car by the bandits for several miles to ensure that any anti-theft device is deactivated. Persons resisting a theft are likely to be injured or killed by the bandits. The bandits prefer luxury four wheel drive vehicles such as Toyota Land Cruisers. Most vehicle hijackings occur at night against vehicles with a single occupant and the U.S. Embassy recommends that people avoid driving alone on highways between major cities after dark.

Security in the northern, western, and eastern provinces of Cameroon and involving coupeurs de route has been an ongoing problem. Coupeurs de route are gangs of armed bandits that target vehicles on the main commercial routes in the rural areas of Cameroon. These gangs are known to operate out of areas close to the borders of Chad, Central African Republic and Nigeria. The bandits are known to be more active on market days in the larger towns. The government of Cameroon continues to have success in breaking up these gangs using rapid reaction forces stationed near the borders.

In response to these types of crimes, Cameroonian military and police checkpoints are established throughout the country. Although the expatriate community is normally not affected by the police road stops, the police have used these checkpoints to extort bribes, especially from individuals who do not have all their personal and vehicular documents in order. Many times the amount of documentation requested is excessive and difficult to provide. On several occasions, vehicles have been stopped by intoxicated police and military. All persons should attempt to cooperate and follow the instructions of police at checkpoints to avoid problems. It is not recommended to pay bribes or on-the-spot fines.

The main roads in Cameroon are also dangerous for safety reasons. A large percentage of the population has not received any formal driver training and obtaining a driver's license through corrupt activities is common. The U.S. Embassy prohibits its employees from traveling outside of major cities after dark. Large logging trucks, as well as other vehicles, travel the roads after dark. Often these vehicles travel without lights and are frequently broken down on the side of the road or even in the road. Drinking and driving is also a major concern and poses a significant risk after dark.

Police Response

Local law enforcement and security personnel continue to face significant difficulties stemming crime. Suspects are rarely caught and police response (if they respond at all) to an incident is often delayed. The police and security forces lack training, and equipment. In some cases, police forces have perpetrated criminal acts or they have been complicit with criminal elements. Security roadblocks set up throughout the country serve mostly as a venue for police and military gendarmes to extort bribes from motorists.

If U.S. citizens encounter difficulties, they should contact the local authorities and the U.S. Embassy. Any American detained by local authorities should request to contact the U.S. Embassy immediately.

All American citizens living in or traveling to Cameroon are encouraged to register with the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Yaounde: + 237 22 20-1500 ext. 4341 and to register online at www.travel.state.gov.

Police and Fire contact information:

Police:

Dial 17 on landlines or 117 on cell phones.

Fire:

Dial 18 on landlines or 118 on cell phones

Medical Emergencies

Medical and life safety services in Cameroon are limited. Any person living in or traveling to Cameroon should ensure that his/her health insurance covers medical evacuation via air ambulance.

Local Hospitals

Yaounde General Hospital: + 237 22 21-2018, + 237 22 21-2019, + 237 22 20-2244 or + 237 22 20-4477

Note: A physician should be contacted when a patient is taken here.

Dr. Njuimo Georges: direct line: + 237 22 21-2018, mobile: + 237 77 71-0913

Yaounde General Hospital has about 100 in-patient beds. This hospital is the most advanced available locally and is kept generally clean. There are seven operating rooms for use if personnel and equipment are available. Nursing care is fair on the general wards and in the intensive care/surgical recovery areas. The emergency ward is open 24 hours daily. Some physicians are excellent but medical care is somewhat unpredictable.

Yaounde Central Hospital: + 237 22 23-4020

Central Hospital has several very competent physicians with at least 20 in-patient beds and a surgical suite.

Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Yaounde (CHUY): + 237 22 31-2566, + 237 22 31-2103

CHUY is the university teaching facility. Most specialties are available. It has good up-to-date ambulance service and a 24-hour Emergency department but not to U.S. standards.

Ambulance Service

Cameroon Assistance Sanitaire, in Douala: + 237 33 42-7037, Fax: + 237 33 42-0079.

Cameroon Assistance Sanitaire response time is 3.5 hours to 4 hours. It has planes and ambulances and will service Yaounde if time permits.

Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Yaounde (CHUY): + 237 22 31-2566/ 22 31-2103

CHUY has several fully stocked ambulances available.

Yaounde General Hospital: + 237 22 21-2018

Yaounde General Hospital has two ambulances.

SAMU (Emergency Ambulance Service), located at Yaounde Central Hospital: + 237 22 23-4020

SAMU will transport patients to any desired facility.

Air Ambulance Service

Cameroon Assistance Sanitaire, Douala: + 237 33 42-4891, 33 42-7037 Fax: 33 42-00-79.

Contact: Mr. Soussie 33 30-9020

Missionary Medevac Helicopter in Bamenda (Northwest Province): + 237 33 36-1285

Contact: Pilot David Carmen or Baptist Mission

SOS Assistance SA of Geneva: + 41 22 785-6464

Telex medical evacuation from Cameroon to Europe: + 41 22 785-6424

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Most hotels in Cameroon provide a basic level of security for their guests by employing security guards. However, travelers should remain vigilant with regard to personal security at all times. Walking during the day in Cameroon is generally safe but travelers, especially single females, should not walk alone. While out in town during the evening hours, it is best to go with friends or in a group. People have been less likely to become victims when they have been in groups.

Travelers should avoid open displays of large amounts of cash. Anyone who has been the victim of a crime should immediately file a report with the police. If a traveler is involved in an accident or other altercation and an angry crowd gathers, the traveler should immediately go to the police, hospital or nearest hotel and ask the front desk to call the police.

Local guard companies are limited in the quality of the service they offer. However, residences are less likely to be burglarized with a guard present.

In addition:

- Avoid walking on the streets at night. Travel by car whenever possible.
- Ensure that your car is in good working condition.
- Avoid traveling in isolated areas.
- Park only in well-lit areas at night.
- Keep emergency equipment in your vehicle and make sure you have a cell phone with you.
- Vary your routes and times.
- Remain alert and be aware of your surroundings. The more security conscious you appear the less attractive a target you will be.
- Lock your vehicle doors immediately upon entering. If you have children, put them in the car, get in, lock the doors and then put on everyone's safety belt.
- Do not leave valuables, bags, backpacks, laptops, mobile phones, etc. inside your vehicle in plain sight.
- Keep your vehicle doors locked and windows up while driving.
- Avoid crowded places and demonstrations.
- Be especially cautious when entering/leaving restaurants, bars and clubs at night.

Further Information

American Embassy Yaounde switchboard: + 237 22 20-1500

American Citizen Services: Ext. 4341

Regional Security Office: Ext. 4014/4185/4017

Marine Post 1: Ext. 4040

OSAC Country Council

Cameroon's OSAC Country Council meets quarterly in Yaounde

The chairperson for 2010 is Gavin Kirk from AES Sonel - BP 4077 Douala, Cameroon, *Poste 5768; GSM : (00 237) 77 11 78 24*

For further information on OSAC Cameroon contact RSO Yaounde or visit the OSAC website at www.OSAC.gov