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PROJET D'APPUI À UNE GOUVERNANCE CARCÉRALE BASÉE SUR LES DROITS HUMAINS AU CAMEROUN

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ALTERNATIVES TO IMPRISONMENT IN CAMEROON

Call for Papers

Theme

The effectiveness of alternative sentences in Cameroonian criminal law: issues, challenges and legal and practical perspectives

Context and Rationale

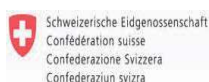
The Cameroonian criminal justice system is at a crossroads, marked by profound changes that call into question the effectiveness of traditional criminal sanctions. Historically characterised by a heavy reliance on imprisonment, Cameroon faces **chronic and alarming prison overcrowding**, with occupancy rates sometimes exceeding the nominal capacity of prisons by two or more times. This situation gives rise to detention conditions that are often inhumane and degrading, undermining not only the fundamental rights of prisoners but also the objectives of social reintegration and the prevention of reoffending.

In response to this crisis and in line with international human rights standards, the Cameroonian legislature, through **Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Criminal Code**, has explicitly introduced alternatives to imprisonment, notably community service (TIG) and reparative sanctions. These legislative innovations represent a major turning point in Cameroon's criminal policy, aimed at reducing prison overcrowding, promoting restorative justice measures and offering more effective pathways to resocialisation for offenders.

Alternative sentences have been the subject of various studies, including articles, theses, research papers and reports by specialised national and international organisations. Most of these studies have emphasised the importance of these alternative sentences as a lever for penal reform. Studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Cameroon, highlight the challenges associated with their implementation.

At the heart of these innovations lies the need for a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system in Cameroon, which is by no means a recent concern. In his seminal work, **Human Rights and Criminal Law in Cameroon**, Professor **Adolphe Minkoa She** (1999) had already highlighted the ontological incompatibility between respect for human dignity and the dominance of custodial sentences within a judicial system characterised by a 'prison-first' approach.

In the wake of the major legislative reform, an analysis of this transition was carried out as part of pioneering research at the University of Dschang, conducted under the auspices of the URDA, where **Dieudonné Soweng** brilliantly dissected the mechanics of introducing these new



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With the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Cameroon, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Swiss Embassy



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sanctions, whilst lamenting that the reform remained a pipe dream, hampered by overly timid 'textual innovations', notably the absence of an implementing decree and a lack of logistical resources on the ground, which made its implementation difficult. In the same vein, Professor **Anatole Minkada's (2019)** reflections on *the advent of alternative sentences* have highlighted the gap between legislative innovation and the imperatives of their socio-political contextualisation.

The need to move beyond textual formalism in order to put open-prison sentences into practice is acknowledged by the state apparatus itself. Whether it be the Ministry of Justice, which publishes annual reports on human rights, or the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CDHC) in its capacity as a national human rights institution (NHRI) and national mechanism for the prevention of torture, it is clearly recognised that the implementation of alternative sentences is an urgent necessity.

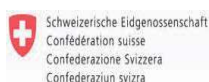
A consortium of three Cameroonian and French civil society organisations has recently launched a feasibility study on the application of alternative sentences in Cameroon, with the main objective of analysing the factors facilitating and/or hindering the enforcement of alternative sentences and proposing ways and means for their effective implementation.

The planned national symposium forms part of the implementation of the project to support human rights-based prison governance in Cameroon (PAGOC). It therefore builds upon and enriches this project and is intended to be a genuine heuristic endeavour, bringing together academics, practitioners within the criminal justice system and civil society actors in a bold exploration of the grey areas and loopholes in Cameroonian criminal law, the current legal, social, cultural and economic obstacles relating to the application of alternative sentences, and the possible and plausible prospects for their development in Cameroon, drawing lessons from national and international experiences.

From this perspective, the absence of legislation governing the application of alternative sentences is not viewed as an inevitability, but as a source of practical and technological innovation, with a view to uncovering the foundations of a reinvented, inclusive open-environment criminal justice system rooted in the realities of sub-Saharan Africa.

Objectives of the Symposium

- To analyse the regulatory and institutional framework for alternative sentences in Cameroon.
- To identify the obstacles and challenges associated with the implementation of alternative sentences.
- Propose avenues for reform and strategies to ensure the more effective and efficient implementation of alternative sentences.
- To foster dialogue between academics, legal practitioners, policy-makers and civil society actors to foster a shared understanding of the usefulness and necessity of alternative sentences.



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Thematic Areas

Proposals for papers may, but are not limited to, the following thematic areas:

Theme 1: The regulatory and institutional framework for alternative sentences in Cameroon: between legislative comprehensiveness and the ineffectiveness of the specific implementing legislation

- **The paradox of legality:** an analysis of the legislative impasse arising from the absence of implementing legislation relating to the alternative sentences provided for in the 2016 Penal Code;
- Comparison with other African and international legislation;
- The role of institutions (the judiciary, the prison service, local authorities, civil society, and the Cameroon Human Rights Commission) in the implementation of alternative sentences.
- **The judge's discretionary power in the absence of implementing regulations on alternative sentences:** can (or do) Cameroonian judges impose alternative sentences based solely on the Criminal Code?
- **The State's responsibility and the urgent need for implementing legislation:** an analysis of the political, budgetary and administrative reasons for the delay in signing the and legislative proposals to remedy the situation.

Theme 2: Implementation and practical challenges of alternative sentences: judicial practice and the enforcement of sentences in the absence of implementing legislation

- Analysis of judicial practices and the perceptions of judicial actors (judges, lawyers, court clerks): workarounds and the resourcefulness of those involved; how do judges, lawyers and court clerks collaborate on a day-to-day basis to apply or advocate for alternatives despite the absence of a decree?
- Community service: implementation procedures, monitoring and evaluation,
- **mapping of local initiatives:** survey of local authorities, NGOs or religious institutions in Cameroon willing to host convicted offenders (for community service in particular) but hampered by legal uncertainty;
- Penalty and reparation: mechanisms, assessment of harm and the victim's role
- **The experience of traditional and informal measures:** how does the criminal justice system draw on alternative dispute resolution methods (criminal mediation, traditional palaver) to compensate for the state's shortcomings?

Theme 3: Socio-economic and penal issues, and human rights challenges

- Direct and indirect costs of imprisonment;
- Cost-benefit analysis, funding and sustainability of alternatives to imprisonment;
- **Restorative justice:** the role of victim compensation and social reconciliation;
- Economic value and tackling inefficiencies in the criminal justice system;

- Effects on prison overcrowding and conditions of detention;
 - Contribution to social reintegration and the protection of human rights. **Theme**
- #### 4: Legal and practical perspectives: advocacy for the completion of reform and possible innovations to ensure the effectiveness of alternative sentences
- **The urgency of specific legislation and legislative advocacy:** legal and political strategies to accelerate the signing of the specific implementing legislation by the competent authorities.
 - **Proposals for legislative drafting and text formulation:** model implementing decrees inspired by Cameroon's administrative and decentralised realities (the role of town halls, chiefdoms, etc.).
 - **Transitional alternatives:** the use of ministerial circulars (Ministry of Justice) as provisional guiding frameworks to provide certainty for judges' decisions whilst pending the decree?
 - **African models for the implementation of alternative sentences, with or without implementing legislation:** a comparative analysis to understand how other states have put their penal reforms into practice.
 - **Digital solutions and technological innovations:** the digital interconnection of Cameroon's national criminal justice system; electronic tagging in Cameroon: a technological gimmick or an emergency solution to prison overcrowding? The role of artificial intelligence in penology: recidivism algorithms; blockchain and distributed ledgers to assist the Sentence Enforcement Judge (JAP) in ensuring transparency in the enforcement of community service orders?



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Submission

Researchers, academics, legal practitioners, postgraduate students and civil society representatives are invited to submit papers.

Proposals for papers must include:

- A clear and concise title.
- An abstract of 300 to 500 words outlining the research question, methodology, main arguments and expected results.
- Five keywords.
- A brief biographical note on the author (maximum 150 words).

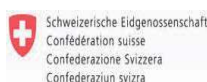
Proposals must be submitted in French or English. Please send full abstracts and biographical notes to: stscolloque26@gmail.com , with a copy to: gdbernard2026@yahoo.com and viratal6@gmail.com

Important Dates

- **Deadline for abstract submission:** 10 July 2026
- **Notification of acceptance:** 20 July 2026
- **Deadline for submission of full papers:** 31 August 2026
- **Conference dates:** 22 September 2026 (provisional)

Target Audience

This conference is aimed at academics, researchers, judges, lawyers, prison service staff, representatives of international and non-governmental organisations, students of law and social sciences, and anyone interested in issues relating to criminal justice and human rights.



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Scientific Committee

Chair: Prof. Bernard-Raymond GUIMDO DONGMO, Vice-Rector for Research, Cooperation and Industry Relations at the University of Dschang

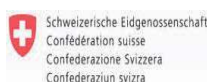
Vice-Chair: Prof. James MOUANGUE KOBILA, Chair of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CDHC)

Members:

- Prof. Gaëtan FOUMENA, Head of the Department of Comparative Law, University of N'Gaoundéré.
- Dr Mukete THALE, Magistrate
- Dr Maurice ONANA, Lecturer at the Catholic University of Central Africa
- Dr François Xavier ESSOMBA MENOUNGA, Lecturer and Researcher, ENSTMO, University of Ebolowa, member of the Research Group on Social Sciences for Development in Africa, sociologist/economist.
- Dr Martine TANA AHANDA, Judge and President of ACAFEJ Centre
- Leopoldine AKOA, Magistrate, Vice-President of the Central Court of Appeal and the Military Court of Yaoundé. National President of the Cameroonian Association of Women Lawyers (ACAFEJ)
- Joseph Désiré ZEBAZE, National Coordinator of RECODH. Historian, human rights expert
- Ms Sandrine DACGA, Lawyer and ASFF country representative, human rights expert.
- Théophile SOBGWI, Executive Secretary of RIDEV
- Mr Jean-Jacques NDJEKIDA, Magistrate
- Timothy FONYUY KIVEN, Programme Officer, OHCHR
- Bernard OMBOCK BEBALL, social sciences design engineer for development, Head of Reintegration at PAGOC,

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- Ousmane KOUANDOU NCHOUWAT, lawyer.
- Anaëlle Lucie NGUELEMO, lawyer.



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