



CAMEROONIAN JOURNALIST'S CONVICTION SHOULD BE OVERTURNED ACCORDING TO TRIALWATCH REPORT

This statement can be attributed to a spokesperson for the Clooney Foundation for Justice. For further inquiries, please contact media@cfj.org.

Trial Grade: D

February 17, 2022

CHARGES

Defamation, use of insulting language, and false reporting

OUTCOME

Convicted and sentenced to 23 months imprisonment, with credit for time served, fined, and ordered to pay damages

The conviction of a Cameroonian journalist, who spent nearly two years in detention in cramped and unsanitary conditions in Cameroon's notorious Kondengui prison, was unfair and the proceedings unjustifiably delayed, said a [TrialWatch Fairness Report](#). Paul Chouta's appeal should be expedited, and his conviction overturned.

Mr. Chouta, who has previously reported on government abuses, was convicted last year of defamation, publication of insulting language, and false reporting. He was sentenced to 23 months' imprisonment, with credit for time served, and ordered to pay a fine. He is now appealing his conviction. CFJ and Debevoise & Plimpton have also [submitted a complaint](#) on Mr. Chouta's behalf to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

The report, by staff at the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights, which monitored the trial as part of the Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch initiative, found "a lack of care and professionalism exhibited by the authorities." Among other things, the authorities failed to bring Mr. Chouta to court on four occasions, the prosecution failed to summon relevant parties, and the judge forgot to return the case file to the registrar for scheduling and on another occasion was unable to locate the record of the proceedings. As of January 2022, eight months after Mr. Chouta's conviction, a written judgment had not been made available. This delay is just the latest in a series of unjustified hold ups.

The report also found that the proceedings violated numerous other fair trial rights and Mr. Chouta's right to freedom of expression. The report said, "**the length of Chouta's trial and his detention for almost two years cannot but send a warning signal to other journalists who dare criticize the state.**"

Mr. Chouta's case is part of an alarming trend in Cameroon—a crackdown on dissent that has resulted in the detention of numerous journalists. In 2019, one journalist even died in custody, which the Cameroonian authorities [subsequently tried to cover up](#). Mr. Chouta's case also shows how easily Cameroon's overbroad speech laws, which limit freedom of expression and [have been criticized by the UN](#), can be abused.

In addition to reversing Mr. Chouta's conviction, CFJ calls on Cameroon to implement previous UN recommendations regarding revision of its speech laws.