



MINISTÈRE DE LA COMMUNICATION
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION

UPDATE OF THE BALANCE SHEET OF THE GIGANTIC STAMPEDE AT MECCA DURING THE 2015 HAJJ

PRESS CONFERENCE

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY
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Yaoundé, October 15, 2015

Distinguished Journalists,

As you are already aware, a gigantic stampede that occurred on 24 September 2015 in Mina, close to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, during the ritual known as “the Stoning of the Devil”.

Indeed, this tragic incident whose final toll is still to be determined, may have, according to some sources, caused thousands of deaths, including some of our compatriots on pilgrimage to the Holy Places of Islam.

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, President of the National Hajj Commission had then, as you certainly remember, published a release to inform the public opinion of this issue and present a provisional balance sheet as well as the first emergency measures taken by the **President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul Biya**, to give the necessary support to affected pilgrims, and express the condolences of the **Head of State** to the families of the deceased, as well as his message of comfort, assistance and solidarity to the injured.

As the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, President of the National Hajj Commission pledged, I’m here to bring you more information on this tragedy.

First of all, on the preparatory provisions taken by the Government for the Hajj 2015, through the National Commission set up to that effect, I would like to indicate that the Cameroonian Government has complied with the Participation Protocol issued by Saudi Ministry of Hajj.

The rules in this Protocol include the authorized quota of pilgrims for each country. For 2015, this quota was 4 500 pilgrims for Cameroon, exactly the same number as in 2014.

For this year’s edition, 61 supervisors were authorized by the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, that is, 14 for the Adamawa Region, 14 for the North, 10 for the Far North, 6 for the

Centre, 6 for the West, 3 for the East, 3 for the Littoral and 3 for the North-West Region.

Let me indicate that the role of the supervisors is of paramount importance in the conduct of the Hajj. As a matter of fact, supervisors authorized by the National Hajj Commission are the only ones authorized to register pilgrims. In this capacity, they are supposed to personally know each and every pilgrim under their supervision. Besides, seminars were organized for them in the chief towns of the abovementioned regions.

As usual, a medical supervision was provided to the Cameroonian delegation. For this year's pilgrimage, the medical team was made up of two (02) doctors and seventeen (17) nurses.

All in all, every measure was taken to ensure a smooth participation of Cameroonian pilgrims in the 2015 Hajj. A total of 4465 pilgrims making up the Cameroonian official delegation left for Mecca within the framework of the 2015 Hajj, including 3195 from Garoua and 1270 from Douala.

As soon as this tragic event occurred on September 24, 2015, a crisis unit was set up by the official delegation, backed by our diplomatic and consular missions in Saudi Arabia. This unit remained in permanent liaison with the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

The search carried out by Cameroonian authorities present on the scene of this tragedy relied on the supervisors to identify our compatriots who died and confirm the deaths in hospitals. The situation called for the systematic search for pilgrims who were not present for roll call and considered in the first place as missing or unaccounted for following the stampede.

These search and identification operations relentlessly continued every day under especially difficult conditions due to the following:

- The high number of all victims from different countries;
- Distances between hospitals and mortuaries that received corpses in Mina, Mecca and Jeddah;
- The decay of some corpses;
- The absence, in many cases, of any identification information to ascertain the names or nationalities of the deceased.

To date the balance sheet of this tragedy as far as Cameroon is concerned is as follows:

With regard to deceased Pilgrims: 76 dead, including 61 identified in hospitals and 15 confirmed dead by their supervisors.

With regard to the Injured: about forty in number, received adequate assistance in Saudi hospitals, free of charge, before the medical team of the official delegation of Cameroon took over. All of them have now recovered and are out of hospital.

With regard to pilgrims reported missing: to date, we have numbered 28 who are still missing. This number has been subject to variation based on the identification and confirmation of dead pilgrims.

It is highly probable that more than three (3) weeks after this incident, most of the missing pilgrims are either dead, not found or unidentified. Thus, the final toll may unfortunately be heavier.

Besides, it is worth mentioning that several unidentified bodies were hurriedly buried on instructions from the Saudi authorities.

According to Moslem tradition, the bodies of our deceased compatriots will not be repatriated but rather buried on the spot, in Saudi Arabia.

Return flights which started on 5 October 2015 ended on 13 October 2015. Upon arrival, the pilgrims were welcomed by administrative authorities who reiterated the **Head of State's** message of comfort, assistance and sympathy as well as the solidarity of the entire Cameroon nation.

The same message was equally conveyed to them in Saudi Arabia by the Secretary of State for Health, sent on special assignment by the Head of State to meet our compatriots.

On special instructions of the President of the Republic, a special financial assistance of 70,000,000 CFAF was made available. It shall be distributed to the families of the victims after their identification by administrative authorities.

Distinguished Journalists,

This is the first evaluation that can be made of the participation of Cameroonian pilgrims in the 2015 Hajj, unfortunately marred by the tragedy that occurred in Mina on 24 September 2015.

The handling of this tragedy has once again confirmed all the personal attention and interest of the **Head of State His Excellency Paul Biya**, to the smooth conduct of this major religious event.

As it is the case with each edition, the National Hajj Commission shall produce within the shortest possible time frame, a comprehensive balance sheet on the conduct of the just ended Hajj.

Thank you for your kind attention.