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**Arresting Roadside Corruption: What Prospects
Remain for Anglophone Cameroon.**

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Arresting Roadside Corruption: What Prospects Remain for Anglophone Cameroon

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Abstract

Introduction: Corruption is a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of several communities worldwide. The phenomenon has serious consequences on investment, trade, aid, inequality, government expenditure and services, just to name a few. In Cameroon, its effects are widespread in both Private and Public sectors including the education, justice, customs, taxation, finance, administration, military and police. Based on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Cameroon was classified as the most corrupt country in the world in 1998 and 1999 and was ranked 149th out of 158 countries in 2020 following the implementation of several anti-corruption measures. This reveals that irrespective of the Cameroonian anti-corruption initiatives, high rates of corruption are still observed in the country. Roadside corruption is prevalent in Cameroon and is being orchestrated by both the police and other forces of the law and order. The practice is monotonous and considered a way of life by most Cameroonians. With the degeneration of the Anglophone crisis into violence, many troops of the forces of law and order have been deployed to Anglophone Cameroon to monitor and maintain security in this region.

Purpose: To investigate the implications of the heavy presence of uniform men on roadside corruption in Anglophone Cameroon.

Methodology: Secondary data was consulted and interviews were conducted with some road users in Bamenda.

Findings: Respondents revealed that roadside corruption was a major problem and that the uniform men took advantage of the crisis situation to compel them to pay fines without collecting receipts and equally extort money from them even in situations where they presented all their valid vehicle and personal identification papers. This has made many drivers to care less about the regularization of their papers.

Unique Contribution to Practice and Policy: There is need to galvanize NGOs and civil societies to organize training programs and sensitization campaigns to inform road users on all vehicle documents, accessories, high way code and all the fines and procedures associated with defaults. The government should regulate and monitor the activities of patrol teams deployed in times of crisis and create several hotlines through which road users can call to report cases of road side corruption. Also, road users should be encouraged to regularize themselves with all necessary documents as requested by state regulations and to understand the high way code and all the procedures associated with the payment of fines in case of defaults.

Key words: *Corruption, roadside corruption, anti-corruption, Cameroon, public sector, private sector, Transparency International Corruption Perception Index*

Introduction

Corruption can be defined as improper or selfish exercise of public power for private profits such that it constitutes a breach of law or a deviation from societal norms (Pozsgai-Alvarez, 2020). Corruption is the canker worm that destroys the fabrics of societies in many nations. Corruption dates back to 335BC when Aristotle cautioned States that revolution could be prevented by reducing the social inequalities emanating from corrupt practices by those in public affairs (Owiti, Kibwana, & Wanjala, 1996). Corruption is an ancient practice that remains very destructive to human societies and is considered an impediment to development and human progress (Zucman, 2021). Corruption is a complex phenomenon experienced in several forms by different societies. It is deeply rooted in the political institutions and bureaucracy of states. Its negative effects on development vary from country to country depending on the degree of control of corruption in each country. Just like in other developing countries of the world, corruption is wide spread in Cameroon and has ravaged the Cameroonian society in most of its sectors, notably education, judiciary, administration, military, police, customs, taxation and finance, with the police being perceived as one of the most corrupt institutions in the country (Bechem, 2018). Corruption is manifested in Cameroon in several ways including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, tribalism, fraud, theft, patron client relationships and the falsification of records and official documents. Between 1996 and 2020, Cameroon's position in Transparency International's Corruption Perception (CPI) rose from 153th to 149th out of 158 countries. This at least demonstrates the state's willingness to curb the rate of corruption in Cameroon.

Arresting corruption in Cameroon: A myth or reality?

Cameroon has put in place several measures to combat corruption in Cameroon although these are yet to have a significant effect on Cameroon's position according to the transparency international corruption perception index and global corruption barometer. Corruption is punishable by the Cameroon legal arsenal. For instance, section 134 of the Penal Code penalizes any civil servant who indulges into any act of bribery with an imprisonment of 5 to 10 years or with a fine that ranges from 200 000 to 2 000 000F CFA. Where the act is not part of the duties of the corrupt person but has been facilitated by his position, the penalty is 5 years of imprisonment with a fine from 100 000 to 1000 000F CFA. This section further provides that such sanctions are doubled when the perpetrator of the corrupt act is "a judicial or legal officer, a Judicial Police Officer, an employee of the institution in charge of the fight against corruption, the head of an administrative unit or any other sworn public servant or employee".¹ Corruption in the public service is also punished by sections 312(Corruption of employees 137(Indulgence), 142(Undue demand), 160(Compulsion of public servant), 161(Procuring Influence), and 184(Misappropriation of public funds) of the Penal Code.

The creation of the National Anti-Corruption Commission NACC (CONAC) in 2016 which could be considered a replacement of the Operation Sparrow Hawk, leads the fight against corruption by

¹ Section 134(4) of the Cameroon Penal Code

carrying out the investigation of corrupt officials and transmitting the reports to the presidency in order to instigate the prosecution of the perpetrators of corrupt acts. The office of the Supreme State Audit is also strongly involved in the fight against corruption by auditing the different administrative departments and carrying out investigations in cases of suspected acts of embezzlement. The special criminal tribunal created in 2011 has the competence to prosecute state officials who misappropriate state resources valued at or above 50 Million Francs CFA. Since its inception, the court has heard and tried many top government officials including the former prime minister, former minister of territorial administration, the former minister of finance as well as numerous managers of public enterprises and parastatals.² The Inter-Patronal organization of Cameroon (GICAM) and the Business Coalition against Corruption (BCAC) are institutions that also fight against corruption in the private sector by enlightening company personnel on the importance of a corrupt free business milieu. Transparency international also contributes to the fight against corruption in Cameroon through sensitizations and by carrying out investigations and openly denouncing acts of corruption.³

In spite of all these measures put in place by the state to combat corruption in Cameroon, the prevalence of corrupt practices in the fabrics of the Cameroonian society is still alarming. As earlier mentioned, the transparency international corruption perception index 2020 reveals that Cameroon only scores 20/100 and is ranked 149/158 countries. The transparency international global corruption barometer also reveals that 72% of Cameroonians perceived that corruption increased in 2019 and that 48% of public service users paid a bribe in 2019.⁴ This illustrates that the rate of corruption in Cameroon is still high with most Cameroonians perceiving the police as one of the most institutions where bribes are taken by both low and high rank officials. Police corruption entails a range of activities including the collection of money from road users, accused persons and complainants. Many police men in Cameroon are inefficient and abuse their powers by demanding payments at checkpoints and in exchange for unlawfully releasing detainees.⁵

Roadside corruption is one of the malpractices orchestrated by the police force as well as other forces of law and order. For the purpose of this paper, *roadside corruption* can be understood as the extortion of money from road users by the 'men in uniform'. This constitutes a serious cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Cameroonian society and requires redress.

² [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325275111 Corruption in Cameroon Public Perception on the Role and Effectiveness of the Different Anti-Corruption Agencies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325275111_Corruption_in_Cameroon_Public_Perception_on_the_Role_and_Effectiveness_of_the_Different_Anti-Corruption_Agencies) Accessed 31/03/2021 at 8:30PM

³ Ibid

⁴ [Cameroon - Transparency.org](https://www.transparency.org) Accessed 01/04/2021 at 11:46AM

⁵ <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/cameroon/> Accessed 27th/05/2021 at 12:50 PM

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness on the increase in roadside corruption in the Northwest region of Cameroon following the insecurity caused by the Anglophone crisis and to explore the policy implications aimed at redressing the issue.

Roadside Corruption in Anglophone Cameroon: Has the crisis made a bad situation worse?

The Situation of Roadside Corruption in Cameroon

Roadside corruption in Cameroon is as old as the state itself. Within cities and localities, roadside corruption is mostly orchestrated by the police force although other ‘men in uniform’ are also involved in these corrupt practices at border check points between different localities within the country. In some Sub-Saharan African countries like Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Uganda, South Africa and Zambia; citizens perceive the police to be the most corrupt institution (Pyman et al., 2012). Roadside corruption in Cameroon is orchestrated by the police, gendarme, forestry guards, customs, road prevention officers and at times the military depending on the prevailing security situation. However, as mentioned above, roadside corruption is mostly attributed to the police force because they are at the forefront of checkpoints within cities and localities. Notwithstanding, the other forces are not free of roadside corruption when they exercise their duties along borders and on the high way. This is mostly observed in mixed patrols and check points as well as those in charge of the radar and road safety on the highway.

The Cameroon National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) explained that some of the corrupt practices observed on road axis in Cameroon include; the collection of bribes in case of infringements, the diversion of toll roads and road weighing stations’ revenues, the issuance of fake toll tickets, and the operation of illicit control teams on roads axes.⁶ The transporters’ unions operating along the Douala-Ndjamena highway revealed (in a report published in 2018) that the police, gendarmerie, customs, and road prevention officers have set up 120 checkpoints through which all 78,000 trucks operating on this corridor go through per trip and pay bribes.⁷ As explained by one respondent below, these uniform men at checkpoints extort money from road users, who have defaults with their vehicle papers, personal identification papers like the National ID card and driver license; car accessories like the first aid box, fire extinguisher, triangle, metallic wage, etc; or who have violated any rule of the high way code or traffic lights and/or who carry along prohibited or undeclared goods.⁸

Many road users in Cameroon attest that the general practice of uniform men at check points is just to request for money without necessarily inspecting the required papers. This has made many drivers to care less about the regularization of their papers as many of them attest that even when their papers are up to date, uniform men will always turn to other motives that will enable them to

⁶ <https://www.businessincameroon.com/public-management/1112-11127-conac-launches-operation-to-detect-corruptpractices-on-road-axes> Assessed 27th/05/2021 at 2:40 PM

⁷ Ibid

⁸ See respondent’s view on page 10

extort money. This situation is prevalent in Cameroon and has become common knowledge to the citizens who believe that every police officer's interest at a check point is to collect 500frs per vehicle although the practice have proven that they even collect more money at times depending on the temperament and the level of default of the road user. Arguably, this practice has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Cameroonian society so much such that citizens now consider it as a normal way of life.

Has the Anglophone crisis made a bad situation worse in Anglophone Cameroon?

The Anglophone crisis dates back to the long-term grievances expressed by Anglophones with respect to their exclusion from the running of state affairs and the feeling of being politically and economically marginalized with their cultural identity ignored.⁹ The Anglophone crisis that degenerated to violence since 2016 has led to several implications on the security, humanitarian, economic and political facets. The government of Cameroon has taken several measures to resolve the crises yet the boys have remained in the bushes and have continued to orchestrate violence in this region. As such, the government is trying to contain the deteriorating security situation by deploying several police, gendarme and army officers to the region. This has led to the proliferation of numerous check and control points as well as patrols in the region. In as much as the heavy presence of men in uniform in this area is required for security purposes, many road users of this region have reported several scenarios where the men in uniform have extorted money from them even when they haven't violated any rule. Below are some of these scenarios to illustrate this position.

"C'est sont les gars qui vendent les chiens en ligne pour de l'argent. Vous allez donné pour nous" explained by one young road user in Bamenda.

Many of such cases have been reported by young car owners in Bamenda who attest that the police men at numerous control stations hardly request for their car documents to inspect, they rather go straight away to requesting for money especially when the car owner looks neat and is driving in a Runx or Blade which is considered a car mostly used by scammers.

"Before I want reach for Matazen, I don already change ma one, one thousand give motor boy so that yi co just di jump down for each control di give the money so that make them no delay we for control", said a bus driver (in Pidgin English) who drives at Moghamo. "Before I di ever start for go, I di ask any man way yi get problem with ID card or way yi don carry something way them fit disturb we for road then we just arrange so that for each control I co just handle the situation make we begin go we quick quick" he added.

This bus driver at Moghamo reveals his adaptability to the situation of the numerous check points at the border leading to Bamenda. He explained that he had already counted all the check points and always prepares a thousand francs each that he hands over to his bus conductor to give at every check point to avoid delays. He also attests that he negotiates on behalf of passengers who do not

⁹ Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads | Crisis Group Accessed 13/04/2021 at 11:00AM

have ID cards. Once the conductor jumps down and settles the control, his vehicle is not stopped and that's how he avoids delays at these check points. This explanation suggests that these men in uniform are more concerned with the extortion of citizens than the security checks for which they are deployed.

"I di ever just prepare the line way I co work dey, then when I settle control for that line, I no get me problem again for dey. I co work now freely the whole day whether I double passenger for front or not", said one taxi driver in Pidgin English.

This is another scenario where a taxi driver attests that once he pays some money to the men in uniform controlling a particular section of the town, he then drives in that section for the whole day without any problem whether he has papers or not or whether he over loads or not. This further illustrates that most of the men in uniform at check points care more about extorting money from citizens rather than the security concerns which are their primary objective. *"Dem drop me for check point for Santa for ask ma ID card I show na ma certificate of lost document. Them tell me say na fake then keep me for control sotay I finally pay 3000frs before them leave me", said an anonymous passenger in Pidgin English.* Here, the passenger attests how he paid 3000F CFA at the check point at Santa for failure to present his National ID card even when he had a valid certificate of lost document.

"Ma own case be worst because them stop me for control for ask ID card way ma ID bedon loss and I be get only Birth certificate for ma skin. Them start di ask me money then di talk say I be Amba boy start di threaten me until some big man came ask me for call the person way I di go for meetop yi for Douala. I call ma Uncle yi confirm ma situation before them leave me", explained by another anonymous passenger in Pidgin English.

This is another passenger who attests that he traveled without the National ID card thanks to the intervention of a superior officer who rescued him from the hands of younger officers who already labeled him as an 'Amba' boy. He had misplaced his ID card and was living in a village where the crisis have deeply affected its functioning so it was very difficult for him to get a certificate of lost document so he had to take the risk to travel to Douala just with his birth certificate. It can be argued that if he wasn't lucky enough to have a superior officer intervene on his behalf, he would have been charged to pay a huge sum of money because his case was severe.

Upon arrival at Matazen in the early hours of the 6th of March 2021, I also realized that just from Matazen to Up-Station had over 10 control check points with mixed patrols. Vehicles are stopped by all these check points whereas their distance apart is very minimal. One of the passengers with whom we traveled together had cow skin "Canda" that she was taking to Bamenda. Upon inspection at the control point at Matazen, the bag containing the Canda was removed from the bus by a forestry personnel and she had to plead and pay 1000F CFA before her bag was released (writer's observation). Also, I saw many passengers who had issues with their identification papers and were struggling to negotiate with the men in uniform. This goes a long way to show that most of the officials who find themselves in control and/or patrol teams look for the slightest opportunity to exploit the masses rather than exercising their proper functions for the interest of the state.

Time way I be go Bamenda with ma motor, da first control for matazen hold me check all ma books yi correct, them inspect ma metallic wage, triangle, fire extinguisher and first aid box. All ma things dem be correct but them open ma first aid box then tell me say I no get all the things way yi need for dey inside first aid box. Them delay me for dey sotay I pay 2000F CFA before them leave me, said a private care owner in Pidgin English. This is a private car owner who attests that although he had all his papers correct with all the car accessories required, the uniform men at the Matazen check point still extorted 2000F CFA from him on the premise that his first aid box didn't contain all the required drugs that are expected to be there. This scenario suggests that uniform men always exploit the ignorance of the masses to extort money from them as they always look for motives that can justify extortion.

Ma own situation for Matazen be really funny, I reach for da control some Genderme officer inspect ma books talk say ma books correct say I fit go but some police man take ma books tell me say ma books be fake because the horse powers for ma motor way them writam for insurance no correspond with the horse power for motor way yi dey for grey card (Immatriculation card). I even try for explain say yi fit be na simple typographical error way insurance people be makam time way they bedi prepare ma insurance. The man still deny for accept. I finally call some big man for police then yi call for the control station then them give ma books after them don waist me more than 1 hour for dey, said another private car owner in Pidgin English. This is a scenario where a car user is stopped at one of the check points at Matazen with a mixed patrol. The gendarme officer controls his documents and confirms that they are valid while a police man controls the same documents and says they are fake documents because the horse-power of the vehicle that is written on the insurance document doesn't correspond to that which is written on the grey card. He is delayed there for hours until he finally calls for a superior officer to intervene before his vehicle was released. These numerous check points have unnecessarily increased travel time within the region as uniform men device all sorts of strategies to extort money from civilians.

"When you reach Matazen, just know you say da mixed control them co ask you all kind documents and things them for your motor. Them di control all ID card them for passengers and then inspect your motor. Them co check all documents for motor, them co ask driving license and National identity card and when you get all these documents, them co start di control other things like first aid box, fire extinguisher, triangle, metallic wage and plenty other things. Them co just di fine na way for ask thing way you no getam so that you co give them money. So yi be faster for just give them money then go you because even when your papers be correct, them di always find ways for take money from you." Another road user explains in pidgin English.

This is a scenario where a clandestine driver who drives between Bafoussam and Bamenda explains how men in uniform seek for all possible motives to extort money from road users, by inspecting their vehicle papers, their National ID card and driver license; car accessories like the first aid box, fire extinguisher, triangle, metallic wage, etc. He further ascertains that it is faster to just give them money and leave rather than letting them control all your papers because after all, they will always find a way to make you give them money.

“We way we di travel from Bamenda go other villages for Northwest our own situation just worst. We di meetop plenty Amba control and police and military control them and we di pay money all side. As Police and military control di take money from people them way them get problem with their identification papers, Amba them di take support from all passengers. Them di say yi no be obligatory but all man di pay for yi safety”, said a passenger who frequently travels from Bamenda to Nkambe in the Donga Mantung Division. She attests that numerous Amba checkpoints exist alongside military and police check points on the highway from Bamenda to Nkambe and money is extorted from citizens at these check points for varying reasons. These examples justify the fact that the right to privacy enjoyed by citizens has been jeopardized and that travel time to these regions has increased due to the numerous searches and national ID card checks perpetrated at these check points.

These scenarios are not exhaustive but illustrate some of the techniques used by the men in uniform and secessionist fighters to extort money from the inhabitants of Anglophone Cameroon. The crisis have made things easier for them because due to the deteriorating security situation, people are scared to retaliate to this exploitation and just play along because with the prevailing crisis situation where there is no clear cut between rebels and civilians, many innocent civilians have been shot dead by the military while secessionist fighters has also killed innocent people after labeling them as black legs. This article regards roadside corruption more from the lens of acts perpetrated by government forces - police and military. Hence, it can be argued that the heavy deployment of the police, gendarmerie and military officers to manage the deteriorating security situation of these regions has further exacerbated the exploitation of road users. Several scholars advocate for robust domestic legislations and police reforms to mitigate police corruption which is vital in remedying the situation.

Although there is a need to reform the police and other forces that orchestrate roadside corruption, it is important to note that these structures vary between and within countries and that reforms do not constitute a one-size-fits-all. In China for instance, attempts to redress police corruption were made through several institutional reforms that included the dismissal of 387 policemen who were incompetent and exhibited bad conduct (Sun & Wu, 2010). Also, a reeducation campaign was undertaken to occupy Chinese policemen with off-duty legal and physical training so as to enhance their legal abilities and to reduce the free moments they have to get involved in corrupt practices (Hualing, 2005). Several Procedural Regulations were constituted to place restrictions on police behavior although these reforms faced severe challenges due to the fact that the institutional supervision of police forces remained under political control and due to the country's vast geographical layout that disrupted attempts to centralize the control of police corruption (Pyman *et al.*, 2012). Countries like Singapore and Georgia have curbed police corruption by; reducing discretionary decision-making, improving working conditions for policemen, monitoring the lifestyle of policemen, radical restructuring, enhanced psychological testing, civilian review, risk assessment and the introduction of independent anti-corruption agencies (Holmes, 2020). All these strategies of curbing police corruption as practiced in different countries also constitute measures for arresting roadside corruption as the latter is mostly orchestrated by policemen. It is in this light

that Cameroon adopted all the anti-corruption initiatives as explained earlier, including the creation of a special police unit referred to as “La Police des Polices” which is in charge of monitoring police conduct as well as all acts of police corruption.¹⁰ Irrespective of all these measures, roadside corruption is still prevalent in Cameroon and the situation is aggravated in crisis situation as revealed by the respondents of this study. As such, there is an urgent need to involve civilian groups, road users, NGOs and civil society organizations to support government’s initiatives in curbing roadside corruption.

Summary of findings

Roadside corruption remains a real problem in Cameroon that needs to be addressed. Many road users perceive the police as one of the most corrupt institutions in the country, with the respondents of this study revealing that roadside corruption worsens in crisis situation. Respondents reveal that uniform men adopt all sorts of motives to extort money from road users even in situations where the latter do not have any defaults. Also, the study revealed that there are no measures to curb the corruption levels of uniform men in times of crisis where most citizens panic before these officers due to the prevailing security situation. The government of Cameroon has established several anti-corruption measures with specific measures to curb police corruption but the country is yet to achieve significant results as far as reducing roadside corruption is concerned.

Conclusion

In as much as the government has implored top-down accountability approach to curb the rate of corruption in Cameroon, the transparency international corruption perception index 2020 reveals that Cameroon only scores 20/100 and is ranked 149 out of 180 countries, thereby suggesting that much still has to be done in fighting corruption in Cameroon. Hence, a bottom-up approach is required to compliment the top-down accountability approach and to make the fight against roadside corruption more effective. The below recommendations are entry points where civil societies, NGOs, road users and the government can harness for a better Cameroon.

Recommendations

Bottom-up accountability machinery can greatly contribute to curbing the rate of roadside corruption in Cameroon.

➤ The Civil Society and NGOs

Civil societies and NGOs should undertake the following actions:

- 1) Organize training workshops with the drivers’ union on the following;
 - All the documents a vehicle is expected to have before it circulates and how these documents can be acquired

¹⁰ <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/discipline-les-defis-de-la-police-des-polices-92028.html> Assessed 27th/05/2021 at 11:10 AM

- All Personal identification papers a driver is expected to have and how these documents can be acquired
 - The fines levied for failure to having those documents and the procedure and venue where such fines are paid
 - The competences of the different officers found at control points. Who is competent to inspect what?
 - Train on the different accessories a vehicle is expected to have before it ploughs the high way including what the transport law provides for a complete first aid box.
 - The fines levied for failure to having those accessories and the procedure and venue where such fines are paid.
 - Train on the high way code and what constitutes violations and the fines associated with such violations as well as the procedure and venue for payment.
 - Encourage the respect for traffic lights and sensitize on the fines associated with violations and the modalities of payment.
 - Train drivers on road worthiness. The state the car is required to be in before it plagues the high way and the fines associated with any defaults. Drivers should know for instance, the fine associated with driving without a driving mirror, trafficator light, head lamp, etc.
- 2) Organize a massive nationwide sensitization campaign to encourage road users to regularize themselves and their vehicles by making them to understand that it is more costly to circulate without papers or with other defaults.
- 3) Mediatize the campaigns and trainings: This is the most crucial phase that is required to raise national consciousness and to send a signal to the uniform men that citizens are now aware of what is required from them to plague the road. Public and private Tv and radio stations as well as the social media is vital here.

➤ **The Government**

- 1) The government should create many hotlines through which citizens can call to report roadside exploitation and mediatize these hotlines to send a signal to uniform men.
- 2) The government should regulate and monitor the activities of patrol teams deployed in times of crisis. For instance in a stretch of road that has over ten mixed patrol points, the government can structure two or three teams that will be in charge of controlling vehicles, drivers and passengers while the others concentrate on monitoring the security situation. The practice has been that all the numerous control points undertake vehicle checks thereby exacerbating the extortion of money from road users.

- 3) The government should reinforce and implement disciplinary measures to uniform men who are caught in acts of road side corruption. Public shaming of such officers through the broadcast on national tv, radio and social media is relevant.
- 4) The government should consider increasing the salaries of uniform men because most of these uniform men especially the low rank officers earn very low salaries that barely cover their day-to-day expenses. ➤ **The Road Users**
 - 1) All road users should regularize themselves with all necessary documents as requested by state regulations before circulating in the country
 - 2) All road users should strive to master the high way code and all the procedures involved in case of payment of fines following defaults.
 - 3) All road users should make use of hotlines to report corrupt uniform men in case of abusive and/or illegal extortion.

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