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Le Bâtonnier de l'Ordre

The Bar President

OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUÉ

ON THE PURPORTED ESTABLISHMENT OF DENTONS IN CAMEROON

The President of the Cameroon Bar Association has been alerted by colleagues, the business community and stakeholders to communications widely circulated on professional social networks, notably LinkedIn, on the specialist platform *Africa Legal*, and on the official website of Dentons (www.dentons.com), alleging they established presence in Douala, Cameroon, of Dentons, through a partnership with the local law firm, Kouengoua Minou Nkongho (hereinafter "SCP KMN"), renamed **SCP Dentons KMN**.

This is not an isolated case. It forms part of a broader trend observed over recent years, whereby "global" or "international" law firms seek to claim a formal local presence in Cameroon through partnership or referral agreements with domestic firms. The scale of the most recent communications, emanating directly from Dentons, the world's largest law firm by number of countries, makes public clarification indispensable.

This communiqué is also an occasion for the Bar to reaffirm its commitment to the development of Cameroonian law firms, the protection of their economic and professional rights, and the strengthening of their capabilities in the context of the globalization of legal practice.

I - The Facts: Communications That Leave No Room for Doubt

From October 2024, Dentons publicly announced its entry into Cameroon in the following terms:

Official Dentons Press Release (17 October 2024)

"Building a presence in Cameroon, DRC, Ethiopia and Senegal accelerates Dentons' momentum in building the leading Pan-African law firm, owned and controlled by Africans. As the first global law firm located in the cities of Douala, Kinshasa, Addis Ababa and Dakar, Dentons is well-positioned to serve our clients."

Source: Official Dentons communiqué, 17 October 2024, republished by *The Global Legal Post*, *LawFuel*, *Iberian Lawyer*, among others.

Dentons Official Website (consulted April 2026) read thus:

"Founded in 1984, Dentons KMN (formerly Kouengoua Minou Nkongho, 'KMN') is a full-service law firm based in Douala."

Source: www.dentons.com/en/global-presence/africa/cameroon/douala

These communications unambiguously present the SCP KMN as a component of the Dentons global network, under the name "Dentons KMN". Such a presentation contravenes the regulations governing legal practice in Cameroon and is misleading to clients, investors and parties as to the legal nature and status of the entity they are consulting.

II - The Applicable Legal Framework

Legal practice (by the Bar) in Cameroon is governed by two foundational texts: Law N° 90/059 of 19 December 1990 organizing practice at the Bar, and Ministerial Decision N° 41/DPJ/SG/MJ of 12 April 2005 on the homologation and publication of the Internal Regulations of the bar.

Section 5(1) of Law N° 90/059 provides thus:

"Persons wishing to practice at the Bar must satisfy the following conditions. They must: 1. Be of Cameroonian nationality and enjoy their civil rights. (...)"

Section 73(1) and (3) of Law N° 90/059:

"(1) Subject to the existence of a reciprocity agreement with his country of origin, a member of a foreign Bar may be authorized by the President of the Court trying the matter to plead in a given case. The said judicial and legal officer shall inform the Legal department of his decision within twenty-four hours.

(3) Furthermore, within the framework of agreements, authorization to practice or undergo training may be granted by the Minister of Justice, upon the recommendation of the Bar Council, to members of a foreign applicants' pupillage (...)"

Section 4(3) of Law N° 90/059:

" Advocates residing in the same town may practice their profession in the same chambers in the form of professional partnership, after the approval by the Bar Council. They shall inform the Procureur General, whose jurisdiction their place of residence is located.

In such a case, the partnership shall be liable for professional act of each of its members."

Ministerial Order N° 41/DPJ/SG/MJ of 12 April 2005 (Internal Regulations):

Article 62 (4) - *Headed paper is among other to the effect that only the names of lawyers practicing within the firm concerned may appear on its letterhead. Structures for the pooling*

of resources may not use letterhead liable to create the impression in the minds of the public that they constitute a practice structure."

In application of these provisions, the Bar reiterates the following:

- No foreign entity — regardless of its size or international reputation — may establish itself in Cameroon to practice law, either directly or indirectly, outside the conditions set out in Articles 5 and 73 of Law N° 90/059 organizing the practice at the Bar.
- Referral agreements between Cameroonian law firms and foreign firms do not confer right of partnership or right to insert its names in the nomenclature of the local firm so as to be considered as a law firm with a local presence or establishment in Cameroon
- The name, "Dentons KMN", does not exist on the Roll of the Cameroon Bar Association. Its use is contrary to Articles 4 and 73 of Law N° 90/059 and to the provisions of the Bar's Internal Regulations.
- The continuous communications of Dentons as a local law firm based in Douala with the nomenclature "Dentons KMN", constitute elements of unlawful practice of the Advocate's profession within the provision of Section 43 of Law N° 90/059 organizing practice at the Bar.

III- The Bar's Position: Openness to Collaboration, Protection of the Profession

The Cameroon Bar Association is not closed to the world. It resolutely encourages professional collaboration between Cameroonian firms and international firms, which represent, when conducted in compliance with the law, a remarkable opportunity for the development of skills, transfer of knowledge and international visibility for our colleagues.

What the Bar protects with equal determination is the professional and economic space of the Cameroonian law firm and the Cameroonian advocate. Yet the reality of our Bar is that of a pyramid whose broad base consists of a young majority of practitioners who practice alone or in small structures, often under difficult economic conditions. These practitioners face competition that sometimes exploits the ambiguities of partnership agreements to the advantage of foreign partners. It is precisely these rights that the Bar seeks to defend.

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A lawful collaboration enhances the Cameroonian firm, allows it to grow and promotes a progressive transfer of skills. It does not absorb or rename it under a foreign brand or use it as a vehicle for indirect practice on local territory. The Bar invites international firms wishing to collaborate with Cameroonian colleagues to do so in accordance with these principles.

IV - A Call for Vigilance

The Bar calls upon all stakeholders, particularly colleagues of the Cameroonian Bar, to exercise vigilance:

- **To parties and investors:** before entrusting a mandate to a firm presenting itself under an international brand name, verify that the lawyers representing you are duly enrolled on the Roll of the Cameroon Bar Association. Only enrolled lawyers are authorized to practice law in Cameroon and can be held accountable before the Bar's statutory organs or institutions.
- **To Cameroonian lawyers:** ensure that international collaboration serves to elevate local practice to international standards, not merely reduce it to a postal address, and that it preserves local professional identity rather than diluting it.
- **To international law firms:** the Cameroonian legal market is open for business, subject to the laws in force. We encourage all to engage as committed partners, by respecting our professional sovereignty, and observing the official rules that apply to foreign entities

Yaoundé, this 1st day of September 2026

MBAH Eric MBAH, Esq.
The President of the Cameroon Bar Association

