API Experts Preserve Buea MINCOM Archives

By the end of this year, decaying photo negatives, ground sheets and registers shall be out of harm’s way.

A team of experts is currently at work in Buea to put in electronic form the 58-year-old Cameroon Photo Press Archives (CPPA) bequeathed from British colonial administration to the then Ministry of Information and Culture (INFOCAM), now Ministry of Communication (MINCOM).

The experts told Cameroon Tribune that the exercise aims to preserve and protect in order to secure a modern and sustained access to vulnerable photographic material established since 1955 and which is now at risk of decay. The project to dematerialize the CPPA is led by Dr. Jurg Schneider (historian affiliated to the University of Basel, Switzerland) and Rosario Mazuela (Spanish and graduate of Philology from the University of Granada, Spain).

They have employed five local technicians and added to two staff members of the South West Regional Delegation of the Ministry of Communication where CPPA is based. Their project is carried out under the canopy of the African Photography Initiatives (API), which the duo “founded in 2007 with the goal to move Africa’s visual heritage in the limelight of public and academic interest.”

Funded by the British Endangered Archives Programme, the Swiss Federal Office for Culture, and the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel, the API job in Buea entails scanning and filing some 150,000 photo negatives, 4,000 ground sheets (photo booklets), and nine registers. The importance of this exercise lies squarely in the effort to protect the photographic and documentary coverage of social, political, cultural, economic and international events in the history of Anglophone Cameroon from 1955 to 1995.

To lay the groundwork for this mission, the expatriates made assessment trips to Cameroon in June 2011 and October 2012. Their work is expected to be completed this year in two phases. They began effectively last 25 February to run for three months. The second two-month phase would be undertaken from September to October. In November, a seminar will hold in Basel to prepare students on how to use African archives for research. In February 2014, students from the Universities of Basel and Buea will begin using the preserved archives for their research programmes.