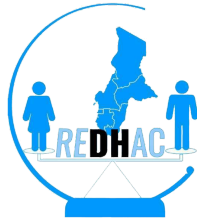




IFOR INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP
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Centre for Human Rights
and Democracy in Africa
CHRDA
promoting and protecting human rights and democracy



TO: Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva, 7 February 2019

Call for the UN Human Rights Council to mandate the establishment of an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission or similar international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in the so-called Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, write to urge your delegations to support the call for the UN Human Rights Council to mandate the establishment of an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission during the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council, or to initiate similar international mechanism, to investigate alleged serious human rights violations and abuses in the so-called Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Since September 22, 2016, the Cameroon government has been carrying out a systematic and ruthless military campaign against the people of the English-speaking North West and South West regions. Initiated in 2016 to suppress peaceful demonstrations for the rights of the populations in the regions, the campaign has violated numerous provisions of international human rights law. It has forced more than 30,000 people to seek refuge in Nigeria and at least 437,000 to become internally displaced persons (IDPs) per the December 13, 2018, report to the UN Security Council by Ms. Reena Ghelani, director of U.N. humanitarian operations. This 40% plus jump in IDPs between June and December 2018 led Ms. Ghelani to warn that Cameroon is now “one of the fastest growing displacement crises in Africa.”

In a December 13, 2016 report¹, the Country Rapporteur for Cameroon and Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)'s Hon. Commissioner Reine Alapini-Gansou wrote:

The Special Rapporteur has received information that the strikes and protests are allegedly provoked by what has been dubbed, "the Anglophone problem," due to discontented Anglophone Lawyers, Teachers and Civil Society in English-speaking Cameroon legitimately and peacefully seeking a halt to: the gradual, but systematic destruction and obliteration of the Common Law Legal System and the Anglosaxon System of Education; the marginalisation and neglect by the administration of Cameroon of the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon; and the return to Federal system of governance.

In addition to expressing concern for the 9 peaceful protesters murdered across the regions in a September 22, 2016, protest, Commissioner Alapini-Gansou also expressed deep concerns over human rights violations that included:

killings of civilians; the deployment of armed military personnel, special security forces (BIR) and war machines to these two regions; the disproportionate and deathly use of force and violence to dispel peaceful and unarmed Lawyers, Teachers, Students, civilians and protesters in Bamenda, Buea and Kumba; the raping of students in Buea; the arbitrary arrests, detention and merciless beatings orchestrated by the police, gendarmerie, military and the BIR following strikes and protests that have been going on since October 2016.

In the months that followed, both nonviolent protests and government persecution of nonviolent protesters escalated. To prevent the people from reporting these abuses to the outside world, the Cameroon government cut internet access to the English speaking North West and South West regions for six months in the first half of 2017, and have since returned it only intermittently and at their arbitrary discretion.²

During an October 1, 2017, protest in particular, Amnesty International reported more than 20 peaceful protesters were shot dead, several severely injured and more than 700 arbitrary arrests by Cameroon forces.³

In response to these atrocities, and for the first time in four decades-long history of dissent, some within the Anglophone territory took up arms to defend their communities.

Since November 29, 2017, Cameroon forces have moved from attacking peaceful protesters and suspected protesters to a full out scorched-earth policy, part of the "war" declared by the President of Cameroon against those the state radio called "terrorists who seek secession." This escalation was in response to attacks on a military convoy and a police post by armed assailants.⁴

The "war" has involved mass atrocities against women, men, and children, with the burning of entire villages.⁵ In May, 17, 2018, the US Ambassador to Cameroon, Ambassador Peter Henry Barlerin, stated publicly that the Cameroon government is guilty of "targeted killings, detention without access to legal support, family, or the Red Cross, and burning and looting of villages".⁶

On June 1, 2018, in relation to attacks on teachers, students and schools by armed groups and government forces in the wake of further deterioration of the human rights situation in the region, the

Representative of UNICEF in Cameroon, and the Director of the Regional Office of UNESCO for Central Africa and Representative for Cameroon issued a joint statement⁷ indicating that:

UNICEF and UNESCO in Cameroon are therefore asking all stakeholders and leaders to immediately stop attacking schools, teachers and education officials and allow safe and unfettered return of all students to the classroom to continue with their studies and examinations.

Impartial, rigorous investigation is urgently needed in order to uncover the details and motives behind these reports. Only impartial, rigorous investigation can interrupt the cycle of escalating distrust of authority, and escalating misuse of authority.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has received multiple reports on these serious human rights violations. The former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein reported to both the 37th⁸ and 38th⁹ sessions of the UN Human Rights Council that the Cameroon government has continued to refuse his office access to investigate these alleged crimes.

The new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet reported to the 39th session that "there is still no mechanism in place which could envisage a halt in hostilities in the short term."¹⁰

We strongly believe that a UN HRC-mandated Independent International Fact-Finding Mission would have the immediate effect of quelling violence and saving lives. The establishment of an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Myanmar and Sri Lanka had the immediate effect of dissipating much of the violence on the ground.

We urgently appeal to the members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to address this situation during its 40th session by establishing an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission or a similar international investigatory mechanism, and communicating its plans for action as quickly as possible. We entreat the UN HRC not to allow the Cameroon government's noncooperation to have the last word. When such noncompliance is left uncontested, it threatens to undermine the entire infrastructure of international human rights law. Now a member of the UN HRC, the Cameroon government has a special, heightened responsibility to model accountable behavior. We entreat the UN HRC to not allow the Cameroon government to block this urgently needed process.

Accept, Your Excellencies, our Highest Regards:

- Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC) — Cameroon
- The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) — Cameroon
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Denis Hurley Peace Institute (DHPI) — South Africa
- Pax Christi International
- BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz (Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Inc.)
- Rev. Dr. J Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Matt Meyer, Secretary General, International Peace Research Association (IPRA)
- Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
- Muslim Peace Fellowship
- Zagros Center for Human Rights — Switzerland
- Sam Soya Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (SSCDHR) — South Africa
- Truth Telling Project — USA
- Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA)
- South African Communist Party (SACP)

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