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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Human Rights Situation in Cameroon

Franciscans International (FI) wishes to draw the Council's attention to the systematic human rights violations perpetrated against the English-speaking minority by the predominantly French-speaking national authorities in Cameroon.

The English-speaking community, who represents approximately 20 per cent of the population, has been historically marginalized and discriminated against because of the differences created by the British colonization. The current crisis started between 2016 and 2017 when English-speaking lawyers, students and teachers began protesting against their under-representation and the de facto progressive imposition of the French language in courtrooms, schools, and other administrations by the Francophone government. The latter responded by sending its security forces and by violently repressing the protests, which resulted in arbitrary arrests, and the killing of civilians. The political crisis in Cameroon has deepened since October 2017 when Anglophone separatists proclaimed independence, declaring a new state of "Ambazonia".

As confirmed by testimonies from FI's contacts on the ground and the report of the OHCHR Technical Mission to Cameroon in 2019 [1], the military have committed violations including violent repression of protests, widespread destruction of property especially burning down of houses, clinics and schools, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual assault, rape, and extrajudicial executions. On the other side, secessionists have committed abuses such as arson, looting, kidnappings, killings, and violence against civilians through coercion [2].

As of today, more than 4'000 civilians have reportedly been killed as a result of the armed conflict. The attack on 230 villages caused mass exodus with more than 730,000 civilians internally displaced and 68,000 having fled from the conflict areas to neighbouring Nigeria and other countries and towns in the Francophone regions.

Despite the gross and systematic human rights violations against the anglophone minority, the international community has failed to provide an adequate response. Following international pressure, in late September 2019, the government organised a Major National Dialogue, which, due to lack of consultation, was rejected by all the major actors in the Anglophone areas and which yielded no positive impact for the civilian population. In addition, the recent release of the report of the OHCHR Technical Mission to Cameroon, more than two years after the High Commissioner's visit, did not contribute to decrease the continuous unlawful killings by the military and violence against the civilians, as reported by FI contacts on the ground and NGOs reports [3].

In this context, we would like to draw the Council's attention to the situation of children, which is of particular concern. For more than 5 years, nearly 700,000 children have been denied sustainable access to education. Schools are at the core of the tensions and conflict, as the Kumba massacre in a bilingual school showed on October 24, 2020, leaving 7 students dead. According to our sources, access to elementary schooling in the Kumbo area in December 2021 was a concern as many schools are only partially and timidly starting to reopen: children, like the rest of the population, live in constant fear of attacks by armed forces or separatist groups and therefore do not go to school every day.

In addition, latest official sources indicate that in the Southwest region, separatist forces are abducting pupils and students in order to spread terror during the examination period. This illustrates the critical position of education in the conflict, as schools are used as means of pressure by both sides. This was the case on June 16 and 29, 2021 in Bui Department, Elak-Oku village, where separatist groups fired gunshots during the end-of-year exams [4].

As a result, conditions of access to education in the Anglophone region do not comply with Cameroon's international commitments, including the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Safe Schools Declaration endorsed by Cameroon in 2018.

Furthermore, recent events have shown that children are still directly targeted by the military in response to alleged separatist attacks: the murder of a 3-year-old girl and two teenagers in December 2021 illustrates the profound disrespect for the human rights and lives of children [5].

We urge the government of Cameroon to declare a ceasefire as soon as possible. We also exhort the government to ensure that the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of all Cameroonians are equally respected and protected, regardless of language, cultural identity or political affiliation in application of ratified international human rights conventions. Finally, we urge Cameroon to take all necessary measures to fully respect children rights in armed conflict situations [6], in accordance with its international commitments.

[1] OHCHR, Summary of the Report of the OHCHR Technical Mission to Cameroon (5-29 September 2019), available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CM/ANNEXE-Summary-report-November-2021.pdf> (last accessed 06 February 2022).

[2] For a detailed review of the human rights breaches observed since the beginning of the crisis, see. R. WILLIS AND OTHER, University of Oxford, Human Rights abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis, A submission of evidence to UK Parliament, 30 October 2019.

[3] See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, Cameroon: Soldiers on Rampage in North-West Region. 3 February 2022.

[4] See UN OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, Cameroon : NWSW, Situation Report 32, 30 June 2021.

[5] See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, op. cit.

[6] For the situation of children in armed conflict in Cameroon, see UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SECURITY COUNCIL, Children and armed conflict, report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2021, A/75/873 – S/2021/437, para. 220 to 232.