



**Franciscans International**  
A voice at the United Nations

**Submission by Franciscans International (FI)**

**Written contribution for adoption of the list of issues prior to reporting  
(LOIPR) of Cameroon  
in the 142<sup>nd</sup> Session  
of the United Nations Human Rights Committee review of the  
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

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## Introduction

1. This submission is prepared by Franciscans International (FI). FI is a faith-based International Non-Governmental Organization with General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. It was founded in 1989 to bring to the UN the concerns of the most marginalized and disadvantaged. Using a rights-based approach, FI advocates at the UN for the protection of human dignity and environmental justice.
2. The focus of the present submission is the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by the Government of Cameroon, in particular in the context of the Anglophone crisis<sup>1</sup> in the North-West and South-West Regions characterized by massive human rights violations, *inter alia* extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and impediments to the rights of individuals belonging to minority communities.

## General context of Cameroon

3. Cameroon is a country in Central Africa, with a population of 29,394,433 million<sup>2</sup>, and comprised of more than 250 ethnic groups. The country was a former German colony before becoming a trusteeship of the United Nations jointly controlled by France and the United Kingdom, forming a dual administrative system. Due to different colonial power structures, the territory was arbitrarily divided between a French-speaking part and an English-speaking part until the plebiscite of 1961 unifying the former French and British colonies under a federal government. The Anglophone Regions – the North-West and South-West Regions – enjoyed relative autonomy in their governance, political structure and judicial system under this system.
4. On 20 May 1972, Cameroon became a Unitary State after a referendum organized by President Ahmadou Ahidjo, absorbing the Anglophone areas into the current and largely Francophone United Republic of Cameroon. This move sparked huge discontent among the Anglophone Regions and led to the development of several Anglophone movements, and growing perception and experience of socio-economic marginalisation. This constitutional reform marked the beginning of a gradual and systematic marginalisation of the English-speaking population, which accounts for approximately 20% of the Cameroonian population.
5. Cameroon's dual colonial rule left a long-lasting imprint on its modern-day institutions and political structure. English and French are constitutionally recognized as official languages and the country has a dual legal system combining civil law in the eight Francophone Regions and common law in the two Anglophone Regions.
6. The UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has expressed concern over reports of inequality between the English- and French-speaking populations in the enjoyment of their rights. The Committee reported the widespread centralisation of governmental institutions, which has resulted in the predominance of the French language and generated further disadvantage for the English-speaking population<sup>3</sup>.
7. The Anglophone crisis started at the end of 2016 when English-speaking lawyers, students, and teachers launched protests due to their under-representation and the de facto imposition of the French language in courtrooms, schools, and other administrations by the

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<sup>1</sup>The term of Anglophone crisis refers to the on-going conflicts taking place in the North-West and South-West Regions in Cameroon. In his press statement after the official visit in August 2024, Mr. Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights mentioned three simultaneous security crises in Cameroon. One of them is, ... " the situation in the North-West and South-West regions, with ongoing serious human rights abuses and violations against the civilian population...", referring to the Anglophone Crisis. See : <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/08/un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-concludes-official-visit-cameroon>.

<sup>2</sup> MacroTrends, Cameroon, 2024 <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/CMR/cameroon/population>

<sup>3</sup> CERD, Concluding Observations, 26th September 2014 (CERD/C/CMR/CO/19-21)

Francophone government. The latter responded by sending its security forces to violently repress the protests, resulting in arbitrary arrests and killings of civilians. The Government proceeded to arrest critics of the government and resorted to an internet shutdown for several months.

8. Since 2016, Cameroonian State forces and separatist groups have committed grave human rights violations in the two Anglophone Regions in North-West and South-West, killing at least 6,000 civilians since the beginning of the conflict<sup>4</sup>. The situation has been escalating since October 2017 when Anglophone separatists proclaimed independence by declaring a new state of “Ambazonia”, with the UN declaring a humanitarian crisis in the following year<sup>5</sup>.
1. Armed forces particularly the *Brigade d’Intervention Rapide* (BIR) are accused of extrajudicial and unlawful killings of civilians, alleged separatists and separatists. Security and police forces have reportedly resorted to arbitrary and illegal detention of opposition activists or voices critical of the government and prolonged pre-trial detention including incommunicado detention. The Government is further accused of conducting enforced disappearances of individuals, held without any charges filed against them or without informing families of their whereabouts. Reports of torture of separatists in detention facilities alongside incidents of sexual and gender-based violence during raids have also emerged.
9. Armed separatist groups are accused of killings, kidnappings, sexual and gender-based violence and overall intimidation of civilians in the two Regions through general strikes known as “ghost town” operations<sup>6</sup>. They have continuously obstructed the right to education since 2017, attacked schools and students and professionals.
10. At least 6,000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and separatist fighters since the violence started, and 583,112 persons were internally displaced as of June 2024 because of this conflict, with at least 2 million people needing humanitarian aid in the North-West and South-West<sup>7</sup> Regions. Various Cameroon-based human rights organizations reported a significant increase in human rights violations during 2023 – reports point to more than 400 killed in both Regions in 2023 alone, with at least 160 kidnappings and 869 cases of arbitrary arrests<sup>8</sup>.

## Legal framework <sup>9</sup>

3. The Government of Cameroon ratified the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1984. It has not ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty. It does not make any reservation to the Covenant.
4. Cameroon recognizes the primacy of international law over its national legislation and has incorporated several provisions from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other ratified international human rights conventions in the preamble of its Constitution.
5. The Preamble of the 18 January 1996 Constitution specifically recognizes equal rights and obligations for all, freedom and security for all, and protection of minorities and indigenous peoples. The Preamble also enshrines other civil and political freedoms, including freedom of

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<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/cameroon>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, 29 May 2019 <https://press.un.org/en/2018/db180529.doc.htm>

<sup>6</sup> UN OHCHR, Summary of the report of the OHCHR Technical Mission to Cameroon, 5-26 September 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/ANNEXE-Summary-report-November-2021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Cameroon, 31st May 2024 <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/cameroon/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unmondeavenir.org/cameroun-droits-humains-1943-cas-de-violences-et-de-violations-des-droits-humains-enregistres-en-2023/>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Common core document forming part of the reports of State parties: Cameroon, 2013 (HRI/CORE/CMR/2013), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/774477?ln=en&v=pdf>

opinion, religious belief, conscience and worship; freedom of expression, assembly and association, and right to recourse to justice<sup>10</sup>.

6. Article 1 of the Criminal Code establishes that criminal law is applicable to all persons, without any distinction, and enshrines the right to recourse to justice before civil courts. Article 436 of the Code of Criminal Procedures establishes that “appeals may be made against any ruling, including rulings made by military tribunals, unless otherwise provided for by law”.
7. Act No. 2005/007 of 27 July 2005 on the Code of Criminal Procedure offers better guarantees of defence rights than the Criminal Code throughout legal proceedings, included providing information to the nature and grounds for the charge and length of detention. Failure to comply with custody rights during police investigations can result in invalidations of proceedings under Article 584 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
8. In addition, for violations under common law, the maximum period of custody is 48 hours, renewable once. However, that time may be extended twice with the written permission of the State Prosecutor.
9. Circular No. 00700/SESI of 23 June 1993 and circular No. 00001806/DGSN/SG/SDD of 22 June 2011 establishes provisions for conditions of detention to prevent abuse and cruel and inhuman treatment, including prolonged detention.
10. Article 142 of the Criminal Code prohibits discrimination, i.e., refusing access to a public space or employment because of an individual's race or religion, and is a punishable offence between one month and two years of imprisonment and a fine of between 5,000 and 500,000 CFA francs.
11. Several laws have been adopted to prohibit discrimination and promote equality for all in various areas including education (article 7 Act No. 98/04 of 14 April 1998 on the orientation of education in Cameroon).
12. In response to growing discontent from Anglophone Regions in the 1970's, the leadership in Yaoundé considered grievances of the English-speaking community by adopting several measures. These include:
  - a) The law No.96/06 of 18 January 1996 revising the 1972 Constitution contains a provision stipulating that laws can consider specificities of certain Regions to decide on their organization and functioning.
  - b) Institutions were set up to promote decentralization including the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development, the National Decentralisation Council, managed by the prime minister, and a National Advanced School of Local Administration to train civil servants.
  - c) This legal provision became the foundation of the Special Status law of 2019, adopted after a major national dialogue convened by President Paul Biya. Law n° 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities<sup>11</sup> establishes regional “assemblies” for the North-West and South-West Regions with greater powers than regional “councils”. This law provides for Anglophone assemblies’ participation in drafting policy on education, at Yaoundé’s invitation, and run regional development institutions. The assemblies may be consulted by the capital on judicial policy for the common law system. These assemblies are bicameral: each chamber is comprised of a 70-member House of Division Representatives indirectly elected by town councils and a 20-member House of Chiefs. The assemblies vote for a regional executive composed of a president, vice president and commissioners. The chief executive of the Region is the president, although his relationship with the Yaoundé-nominated governor is unclear.

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<sup>10</sup> Common core document forming part of the reports of State parties: Cameroon, 22 May 2013 (HRI/CORE/CMR/2013)

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Justice, Law No 2019/024 of 24 december 2019 bill to institute the general code of regional and local authorities <http://www.minjustice.gov.cm/index.php/en/instruments-and-laws/laws/298-law-no-2019-024-of-24-december-2019-bill-to-institute-the-general-code-of-regional-and-local-authorities>

- d) The Decree No. 2017/13 of 23 January 2017 lays down the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Commission on Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism<sup>12</sup>. This Commission was created to ensure promotion of French and English equally, conduct studies to propose measures to strengthen bilingualism and receive petitions against discriminations arising from noncompliance with the constitutional provisions on bilingualism and multiculturalism, and report to the President of the Republic.

### **List of Issues and proposal for questions**

#### **Rights of Individuals belonging to minorities (Article 27)**

13. Cameroon's constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal rights for all, and protection of minorities, are not fully implemented in practice.
14. Language equality is not enforced to its full extent despite the creation of the National Commission on Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism<sup>13</sup>. Members were nominated in 2023, and the Commission is yet to fulfill its mandate to strengthen bilingualism and receive petitions against discriminations arising from non-compliance with the constitutional provisions on bilingualism and multiculturalism.
15. The Special Status granted to the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon has not adequately addressed the core grievances of English-speaking Cameroonians<sup>14</sup>. Language rights, notably the demands for English-speaking teachers and legal practitioners or policy and legal documents to be translated in English are not addressed in the newly adopted decentralized framework.
16. There is an overall perception that the Special Status is instrumentalized to tighten the control and organize the repression in the Regions, as separatists continue to engage in conflict to oppose the Special Status, including targeting and kidnapping of government officials and army, but also Anglophone leaders who are in favour of the assemblies. The Special Status' flawed implementation presents serious impediments for the full realization of political participation of the Anglophone community<sup>15</sup>. The Special Status was not adopted through a comprehensive consultation process including separatist leaders who were not invited, or were still in prison, whereas some others boycotted. Women were excluded from this process, and not adequately represented in the newly created Regional Assemblies. The devolution of power to Regional Assemblies set out in the Special Status is in practice hampered by the influence of the central government in its composition, functioning and decision-making process<sup>16</sup>.
17. The Special Status sets up a three-tiered system of national, regional and municipal government. The municipal level deplores Yaoundé still being dominant in their decision-making process, whereas the regional level cannot function autonomously without administrative control from the governors appointed by the government.
18. Members in the Regional Assemblies are still heavily controlled by the central government. The Regional Assemblies do not reflect the diversity of opinions and voices of the Anglophone

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<sup>12</sup> Presidency of Republic, Decree No. 2017/013 of 23 January 2017 to lay down the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism <https://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/5215-decret-n-2017-013-du-23-01-2017-creation-cnpbm-en>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Al-Jazeera, Cameroon grants 'special status' to Anglophone region amid unrest, 21st June 2019 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/21/cameroon-grants-special-status-to-anglophone-region-amid-unrest>

<sup>15</sup> International Crisis Group, Briefing n°188/Africa: A second look at Cameroon's Anglophone Special Status, 31st March 2023 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/b188-second-look-camerouns-anglophone-special-status>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Regions, and therefore are unable to address the breadth of issues pertaining to the English-speaking community of Cameroon.

19. Centrally appointed governors possess veto powers for any decision arising for these assemblies. Each assembly must meet in their presence and requires approval from the governor for financial and budgetary decisions and external agreements, which leads to self-censorship of the members to act on important matters. In 2022, when the entrance exams for medical school seemed to have favored Francophone students, the Regional Assemblies did not exert any pressure on the government to question this measure.
20. The Public Independent Conciliator was established under the Special Status to protect the rights of citizens in dispute with regional institutions. This institution can mediate, resolve or report abusive actions to the central government, without impacting the possibility of judicial redress. The Conciliator can also address recommendations to the capital on improving policies regarding the Special Status. Since 2019, the office has received hundreds of complaints, and which were handled fairly<sup>17</sup>. However, the core of Anglophone grievances, such as disagreements with national institutions, remains unaddressed. The central government perceives these assemblies to only be forums of discussion of a range of issues such as health care, transport, social affairs or primary schools.
21. Funding for local and regional government was never entirely allocated to regional institutions. From the 15% of State revenue for regional institutions initially allocated by the 2019 law, only 7% was allotted in 2022, with a slight rise in 2023 to 8%<sup>18</sup>.

*Suggested questions for the State:*

- *Please provide information on policies and measures adopted to implement the constitutional provisions guaranteeing non-discrimination in the North-West and South-West Regions*
- *Please provide information on policies and measures taken to implement the provisions contained in the Special Status law for the North-West and South-West Regions, in particular regarding nomination, political and financial independence.*
- *Please provide information on measures and policies adopted to redress language inequality and access to education and other public institutions in English.*
- *Please provide additional information as to the functioning and mandate of the National Commission on Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure the effective functioning of the Public Independent Conciliator.*

**Right to Life (article 6), Prohibition of Torture (article 7), Prohibition of Arbitrary Detention (article 9) and Conditions of detention (Article 10)**

22. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2017, reports have emerged of arbitrary killings and executions, committed by both sides of the conflict, impeding civilian life in the North-West and South-West Regions. Separatists target government officials and workers, individuals working in education facilities, political leaders with affiliation to the central government or critical of the separatists, alongside civilians.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. “. Generally, according to observers interviewed by Crisis Group, they have handled the complaints fairly and gained users’ trust”.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

23. In 2024, the municipal councillor in Zhoa Council in the North-West Region was killed<sup>19</sup> and two civilians were killed in a clash with soldiers. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May celebrations which commemorates the day Cameroon became a unitary state from a federal state, separatists assassinated the mayor of Belo town<sup>20</sup>, also in North-West Region. Separatists publicly executed two unarmed men in the North-West Region on 4 October 2023 and accused them of being spies for the Cameroonian army. The Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF) claimed responsibility for the killings<sup>21</sup>. In November 2023, over 30 civilians were killed in two major attacks, the UN condemned both attacks<sup>22</sup>. In June 2022, armed separatists killed seven people and raped a girl, and attacked a university<sup>23</sup>. In April 2022, they stormed the campus of the Bamenda University for not observing an imposed lockdown in the area<sup>24</sup>.
24. Government-owned businesses were also targeted by violent attacks for refusal to enforce a region-wide boycott on businesses and schools. Attacks with machetes against government workers were reported as a retaliatory action<sup>25</sup>. Separatists shut down local schools to prevent Anglophone children from learning French, and imposed blanket closure of schools, impeding access to education of more than 700,000 children. Some children are also now becoming vulnerable to recruitment by armed separatist groups to join their ranks.
25. Students and individuals working at educational institutions are often victims of violent and often deadly attacks<sup>26</sup> as witnessed in June 2022 when separatists burned 2 schools, attacked universities, kidnapped 33 students and 5 teachers, and threatened and beat 11 students<sup>27</sup>. The start of the 2023 school year was disrupted by calls for a boycott, and killings of three individuals after opening of schools. Two head teachers were also reportedly killed in Belo. 2245 schools were not operating in both Regions because of attacks from separatists. In February 2024, armed separatists attacked a community school in Babungo village, in the North-West Region and kidnapped 17 teachers. A number of students and staff were assaulted, belongings were confiscated, and classrooms were vandalized<sup>28</sup>.
26. Humanitarian aid and health care for civilians is deeply disrupted by separatist attacks against medical facilities and staff. Médecins Sans Frontières has had to cease its operations, whereas many UN agencies still face difficulties to access the conflict zones due to a high level of insecurity and targeting. In February 2022, separatists fired at two vehicles from the Cameroon Baptists Convention Health Services (CBCHS) and killed a 46-year-old nurse. The killing was condemned by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator<sup>29</sup>.
27. Separatists use kidnapping as an intimidation tool against communities to enforce boycotts on education and businesses. Arbitrary arrests and detention of students, teachers, political leaders, medical staff, humanitarian workers, clergy, government officials have been reported. In June 2019, the now-late John Fru Ndi, a renowned politician, chairman of the

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch June 2024

<sup>20</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch May 2024

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Video Shows Killing by Armed Separatists, 13 October 2023  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/13/cameroon-video-shows-killing-armed-separatists>

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch November 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Separatist Abuses in Anglophone Regions, 27th June 2022  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/27/cameroon-separatist-abuses-anglophone-regions>

<sup>24</sup> Bamenda is the capital of North-West Region.

<sup>25</sup> University of Oxford, A Report on the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis, 30th October 2019  
[https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon\\_Anglophone\\_Crisis\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon_Anglophone_Crisis_Report.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Separatist Abuses in Anglophone Regions, 27th June 2022  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/27/cameroon-separatist-abuses-anglophone-regions>

<sup>28</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Cameroon, 31st May 2024  
<https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/cameroon/>

<sup>29</sup> Relief Web, Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon condemning the killing of a humanitarian health staff in the North-West region, 1st March 2022 <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/statement-humanitarian-coordinator-cameroon-condemning-killing-humanitarian-health>



Social Democratic Front and vocal advocate for the rights of the Anglophone minority, was kidnapped by separatists<sup>30</sup>. The archbishop of Bamenda, Bishop Cornelius Fontem Esua, was also abducted days prior to this kidnapping<sup>31</sup>. The Bishop Michael Bibi of Buea Diocese, in the South-West Region has been kidnapped twice and Bishop George Nkuo of Kumbo Diocese<sup>32</sup> once, and were freed few days after being kidnapped. And since October 2018, at least 350 people were kidnapped with a majority of children. Individuals were held for several days in separatist groups' camps, subjected to physical assaults before being freed in exchange of a ransom in most cases<sup>33</sup>.

28. Since 2017, State security forces arbitrarily arrested lawyers, individuals and family members suspected of ties with separatists, journalists reporting on the situation and political activists. They targeted individuals denouncing atrocities and are instead accused of being separatists or supporters<sup>34</sup>.
29. The Government has been using the 2014 Anti-terrorism Law against separatist fighters and Anglophone federalists as a mean to respond to the violence in both Regions. However, this law has been reportedly misused as resources and armed equipment allocated by international actors to support counter-terrorism efforts against Boko Haram has been diverted to target separatists and civilian population in the Anglophone Regions. This led to arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, and long pre-trial detentions, alongside trials of civilians in military courts<sup>35</sup>.
30. Armed forces further respond to separatist attacks with counter-insurgency operations often resulting in arbitrary killings, deaths in custody, excessive use of force by law enforcement, sexual and gender-based violence and extensive destruction of property, including entire villages. Human rights groups reported instances of security forces detaining and torturing civilians during raids against suspected separatist strongholds<sup>36</sup>.
31. The army carried out attacks around health centers by violently assaulting people around health facilities and resorting to summary execution of separatists<sup>37</sup>. Armed forces have employed the extensive destruction and burning of villages, homes and shops leading people to flee temporarily or leave permanently. The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa reported that 206 towns and villages were targeted with arson attacks<sup>38</sup>.
32. Between April and June 2022, Cameroonian security forces were responsible of summarily killing 10 people during counter-insurgency operations in the North-West Region. They burned several homes, destroyed health facilities and arbitrarily detained 26 people, and 17

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<sup>30</sup> Reuters, Cameroon opposition leader released after abduction in Anglophone region, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-separatists-idUSKCN1TU1oW/>

<sup>31</sup> US Department of State, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon, 2019

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>

<sup>32</sup> Kumbo is the second biggest city in the North-West Region.

<sup>33</sup> University of Oxford, A Report on the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis, 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019

[https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon\\_Anglophone\\_Crisis\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon_Anglophone_Crisis_Report.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International, Cameroon: Rampant atrocities amid Anglophone regions must be stopped and investigated, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/cameroon-rampant-atrocities-amid-anglophone-regions-must-be-stopped/>

<sup>35</sup> University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23: From January 2021 to April 2023, 2023

[https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Cameroon-Conflict-Human-Rights-Report-2022\\_23.pdf](https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Cameroon-Conflict-Human-Rights-Report-2022_23.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> University of Oxford, A Report on the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis, 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019

[https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon\\_Anglophone\\_Crisis\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon_Anglophone_Crisis_Report.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: New Attacks on Civilians By Troops, Separatists, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists>

<sup>38</sup> University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23: From January 2021 to April 2023, 2023

[https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Cameroon-Conflict-Human-Rights-Report-2022\\_23.pdf](https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Cameroon-Conflict-Human-Rights-Report-2022_23.pdf)



people presumably forcibly disappeared<sup>39</sup>. In December 2021, Cameroonian soldiers killed at least 8 people suspected of harboring separatists and burned down shops and homes in Bamenda in response to the attack of a military convoy by armed separatist fighters<sup>40</sup>.

33. Sexual and gender-based violence is used as a weapon of war in these Regions, without acknowledgment or investigations of those cases. Twenty women were raped allegedly by soldiers during the March 2020 attack in Ebam, Manyu Division in the South-West Region. They rounded up the members of 75 households and systematically raped over the women. No reparations or cases against perpetrators were instigated<sup>41</sup>.
34. In May 2019, reports of torture and incommunicado detention of alleged separatists by the Cameroonian army emerged, with the use of drowning and beatings to extract confessions. Some detainees have not returned according to local civil society. There are 26 documented cases of incommunicado detention and enforced disappearances at the Secretariat d'Etat à la Défense (SED) detention site between January 2018 and January 2019. But numbers are very likely higher<sup>42</sup>. Former detainees pointed out the involvement of low to mid-level ranking gendarmerie officers in acts of torture during their detention. Courts and police officials have discarded these allegations of torture and requests to halt incommunicado detentions<sup>43</sup>.
35. The army extensively used pretrial detention to arrest separatists or individuals allegedly supporting them, leading to poor detention conditions and overcrowding of detention centers. More than 1,000 Anglophone people arrested between 2016 and 2021 in relation to the Anglophone crisis are behind bars in at least 10 prisons across the country, including 650 in Buea, 280 in Yaoundé, 181 in Douala and 101 in Bafoussam. Dozens have been arbitrarily detained<sup>44</sup>. Accused individuals were detained under the 2014 Anti-terrorism Law using a broad definition of terrorism to curtail fundamental rights and freedoms, and enable civilians to be tried in military courts<sup>45</sup>.

*Suggested questions for the State:*

- *Please provide information on policies and measures taken to ensure implementation of State obligations in the context of the conflict, including related to the operations of law enforcement and armed forces.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure the safety of civilians, including those who are internally displaced, during clashes with separatists.*
- *Please provide information on monitoring, data collection and reporting efforts of casualties in the conflict.*
- *Please provide information on access to justice and access to effective remedies provided for families of victims of arbitrary killings and other grave human rights abuses.*

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<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Army Killings, Disappearances, in North-West Region, 11th August 2022

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/11/cameroon-army-killings-disappearances-north-west-region>

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Soldiers on Rampage in North-West Region, 3rd February 2022

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/03/cameroon-soldiers-rampage-north-west-region>

<sup>41</sup> The Intercept, Soldiers in Cameroon, a Close U.S. Ally, Commit Mass Rape, Report Says, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021

<https://theintercept.com/2021/02/26/cameroon-soldiers-mass-rape-report/>

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Routine Torture, Incommunicado Detention, 6th May 2019

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/cameroon-routine-torture-incommunicado-detention>

<sup>43</sup> University of Oxford, A Report on the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis, 30th October 2019

[https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon\\_Anglophone\\_Crisis\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/Cameroon_Anglophone_Crisis_Report.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Amnesty International, 24 January 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/cameroon-more-than-a-hundred-detainees-from-anglophone/>

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Routine Torture, Incommunicado Detention, 6th May 2019

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/cameroon-routine-torture-incommunicado-detention>

- *Please provide information on facilitating access to justice for victims while ensuring their non-stigmatization in the process, particularly victims of sexual and gender-based violence.*
- *Please provide information on special protection measures adopted to protect persons in vulnerable situations i.e children who are placed at a particular risk because of the conflict.*
- *Please provide additional information on actions taken to ensure access to healthcare in conflict-affected areas, and hold accountable army personnel and other actors involved in attacks on health centers.*
- *Please provide information on actions and measures taken to ensure security in areas affected by kidnappings and other actions perpetrated by separatists.*
- *Please provide information on actions and measures taken to investigate and hold to account those involved in kidnappings.*
- *Please provide information on steps taken to prevent misuse of the 2014 Anti-terrorism Law in the context of the Anglophone crisis, against separatists and civilians.*
- *Please provide information on the measures taken to end incommunicado detention and torture, and to hold those that have engaged in such unlawful conduct to account.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure due process rights are upheld to address arbitrary arrests and detention of civilians.*

### **Freedom of movement (Article 12)**

36. Separatists imposed arbitrary roadblocks and forced lockdowns called “ghost town operations” on Mondays since at least 2018, putting to a halt all activities and businesses in designated areas<sup>46</sup>. Failure to comply to these boycotts can result in violent retaliation measures such as assault, burning of properties, and killings<sup>47</sup>. These arbitrary decisions severely impact the capacity of civilians to move freely in their territory.
37. In February 2024, separatist groups violently enforced lockdowns in both Regions, to prevent the celebration of Youth National Day on 11 February. The bombing in Nkambe City, in the North-West Region killed one child and injured 40 people <sup>48</sup>.
38. “Ghost town” strikes were further imposed from 17 to 20 May 2024, paralysing businesses and movement in both Regions<sup>49</sup>. Taxi drivers were affected by imposed bans of taxis in Bamenda by separatists, who burned 7 vehicles. These actions were taken in response to in response to the government ban on night-time circulation of motorcycles to limit gunmen movements<sup>50</sup>.

#### *Suggested questions for the State:*

- *Please provide information on actions and measures taken to ensure the freedom of movement of civilians, including children.*
- *Please provide information on policies and actions taken to ensure security of persons in the context of repeated boycotts and obstacles to freedom of movement.*

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<sup>46</sup> Cameroon News Agency, Is there a chance ghost town days will stop this 2023, 5th January 2023 <https://cameroonnewsagency.com/is-there-a-chance-ghost-town-days-will-stop-this-2023/>

<sup>47</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch April 2024

<sup>48</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch February 2024

<sup>49</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch May 2024

<sup>50</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch June 2024

## Equality before the Law (Article 26) and Non-discrimination, Constitutional and Legal Framework within which the Covenant is Implemented, and Access to Remedies (article 2)

39. Accountability for human rights abuses committed by both parties of the conflict remains scarce despite attempts to address some of them through court proceedings. The army recognized its responsibility in some cases of killings and destruction of property leading to legal action, however many violations are yet to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. In the case of accountability for separatist violence efforts from authority remain limited with a lack of follow-up on investigations or trials, despite reports of crimes to authorities<sup>51</sup>.
40. Between 2021 and 2022, authorities announced opening five investigations into “alleged unlawful killings and torture committed by members of the army forces in separate incidents resulting in the death of 25 people”<sup>52</sup>. This includes the killing of nine people in the Missong village, in North-West Region in June 2022, for which the army formally recognized its responsibility<sup>53</sup>. There is however no public information available on these proceedings, considering that the trial of the Ngarbuh massacre, also in the North-West Region killing 21 persons, including 13 children, is ongoing since 2020. The hearing of three security force members accused is being repeatedly postponed, and initial trial hearings are being held in Yaoundé, making it difficult for victims to access the location situated at 480 km from their village.

### *Suggested questions for the State:*

- *Please provide information on measures enacted to investigate and provide adequate remedies for grave human rights abuses committed by armed and separatist forces.*
- *Please provide information on actions and measures adopted to ensure victims are able to file complaints which will be properly investigated while keeping victims informed of the outcomes of the proceedings.*
- *Please provide information on measures taken to ensure access to justice and remedies for victims.*
- *Please provide information on ongoing investigations on human rights violation committed by the members of armed forces.*

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<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International, With or against us: People of the North-West Region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, July 2023

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/AFR1768382023ENGLISH-1.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Military Killings Inquiry A Positive Step, 9th July 2022.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/08/cameroon-military-killings-inquiry-positive-step>