
Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23

From January 2021 to April 2023

This is the third report by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group detailing human rights abuses committed in the conflict in anglophone Cameroon. The report builds on two previous reports conducted by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford to date (Willis et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2020).

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Report Summary

Conflict in the anglophone regions of Cameroon has been ongoing since 2016/17. Despite the severity of the violence and the wide-reaching effects, the conflict has consistently been recorded as among the most neglected displacement crises in the world (Norwegian Refugee Council 2022). Worryingly, the lack of international engagement with the conflict has worsened in recent years. A notable exception to growing apathy among the international community is the recent engagement of the Canadian government to support peace talks in the conflict regions. However, despite these commendable efforts, without wider political will to address the conflict, peace talks have once again halted in Cameroon, mirroring the failed Swiss peace process.

In this environment of silence, it is vital for civil society, humanitarian organisations, journalists, researchers, and other relevant actors to continue documenting and speaking out about the ongoing human rights abuses.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of human rights abuses in the Cameroon conflict between January 2021 and April 2023. By drawing attention to continuing patterns of violence alongside recent developments, we aim to provide material that can prompt further engagement with these pressing issues.

This report builds on two previous reports conducted by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford to date. The first report provides an overview of the history of the conflict in the minority anglophone regions of Cameroon, documents human rights abuses prior to the emergence of armed conflict in 2016, and details human rights abuses that have occurred since the start of the conflict up until 2019 (Willis et al. 2019). The second report was an empirical investigation, which incorporated interview data collected from civilians living in the conflict regions of Cameroon, suggesting causes of the conflict, and exploring solutions for peace (Willis et al. 2020).

Mindful of the lull in political engagement with the Cameroon conflict, we have produced this updated report on the human rights situation to spark further discussion about the conflict and to push for national and international actors to explore pathways to peace.

The current report is based on a review of human rights and news reports about the conflict published between January 2021 until March 2023. Human rights abuses reported during this period are analysed in accordance with the types of offence and themes documented in our earlier reports. As a result of this approach, we have identified patterns of human rights abuses that have been ongoing since the start of the conflict. This contextualised approach is important, because certain forms of violence—which were exceptional at the start of the conflict—appear to have become regular and ordinary, and thus no longer widely reported on. We therefore suspect that some acts of violence occurring in anglophone Cameroon are evading human rights monitoring. This leads us to posit that the abuses we report herein are likely only the tip of the iceberg.

The report is structured in two parts. The first part details crimes reportedly committed by state forces. The second part details crimes reportedly committed by non-state actors.

The analysis reveals that the types of human rights abuses committed previously are ongoing, while new forms of violence are also emerging. The Cameroon state forces are continuing to engage in village raids, massacres, and arson attacks; unlawful killings; arbitrary arrests; the use of torture; forced displacement; sexual violence; and targeting international humanitarian organisations. In addition to these longstanding violent practices, developments include the state's increasingly hostile response to asylum seekers returned to Cameroon from abroad, the threat of the death penalty in legal proceedings, the government's strategic

underplaying of the conflict's severity, and the breakdown of peace talks led by the Swiss and Canadian governments.

Similarly, strategies adopted by armed separatist groups have both continued and evolved. Armed separatists reportedly still kidnap and extort, loot and commit arson, kill state targets as well as civilians, and target schools. Emerging forms of violence reportedly include the use of extended lockdowns, extending activities into the Francophone regions, increasing military power, the growing use of improvised explosive devices, and sexual violence.

This updated investigation on the human rights situation in anglophone Cameroon leads us to recommend that:

1. Civil society continue supporting local communities to report crimes occurring in the conflict, and find ways for persons affected by the violence to be listened to and meaningfully engaged with;
2. Civil society continue documenting the human rights abuses being committed—even if these reports are ignored in the short term, in the long term such records will be vital in the process of peace and justice;
3. Stakeholders with relative power continue finding ways to keep the conflict on the political agenda, which includes organising public and political events and meetings;
4. Stakeholders with relative power share platforms with local civil society organisations so that the conflict continues to be addressed at national and international levels; and
5. Relevant parties continue finding ways to collaborate on solutions to the conflict.

These recommendations are made in the context of our previous recommendations (Willis et al. 2020):

1. For commentators to afford greater attention to the crimes committed by the Cameroon government and for a spotlight to be shone on international partners who have contributed to the accumulation of state power that has made these crimes possible.
2. For commentators and state representatives to avoid adopting a language of moral equivalence, which lends legitimacy to the Biya administration by failing to condemn in absolute terms the atrocities of state security forces. While violent crimes have been committed by multiple parties, differences of power must be heeded.
3. For nation states and other international parties to act multilaterally and place concerted pressure on the Cameroon government to end the violence, whether through trade sanctions, aid cuts, or other means.
4. For the international community to facilitate true dialogue, convened by an independent arbitrator, and to monitor the implementation of settlements reached. Representatives from disadvantaged communities should be invited to participate.
5. For representatives of nation states and other international agencies to avoid proclaiming whether a given option (e.g., secession) is non-negotiable—local stakeholders must have control of the available negotiating positions.

A note on methods

For this report, we reviewed and analysed two main types of sources: 1) news media covering individual abuse cases and reports and 2) commentary by international humanitarian organisations.

The news outlets we consulted include: Agence Cameroun Presse, Bareta News, BBC Africa, Cameroon Intelligence Report, Cameroon-Info.net, Cameroon News Agency, Catholic News Service, DW Africa, Le Monde, The New Humanitarian, Reuters, and Voice of America. While some of these outlets are more established and thus can be assumed to publish verified information, smaller outlets with fewer resources for verification, like Mimi Mefo Info, report more regularly on events and accordingly cover the Cameroon

conflict in much greater detail. Wherever possible, we triangulated the reporting of smaller outlets with reports from other news outlets, human rights reports, and commentary by other authors.

Organisations and authors whose reports we referenced include Amnesty International, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (hereafter referred to as CHRDA), the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Human Rights Watch (hereafter referred to as HRW), International Crisis Group, the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities hosted by the University of Toronto, and the US Department of State.

We searched these sources for coverage of individual abuse cases, of which we compiled a digital record and coded each incident by date, place, type of abuse, and alleged perpetrator(s). Some sources, such as HRW and the Database of Atrocities, conduct extensive research into the cases they report, including interviewing multiple witnesses and geolocating the alleged scenes. Those cases we consider to be reliably verified. For cases reported in news outlets, we provided additional coverage from other sources for triangulation wherever possible.

While, cumulatively, those individual cases start to paint a picture of the overall human rights situation, we will be contextualising them with broader analyses from the sources listed above.

Part 1) State forces: Reported crimes

There are distinct patterns of crimes committed by Cameroon state forces against civilians and persons suspected of engaging in separatist activity. Reported crimes detailed in this section include:

- Recurrent village raids by state forces, including arson and massacre
- Widespread sexual violence by soldiers
- Targeting family members and communities allegedly connected to suspected separatist fighters with unlawful arrest, detention, and killings
- Regular commission of torture and inhumane treatment of detainees
- Arbitrary arrests, detention incommunicado, long pre-trial detentions, and misuse of the 2014 counter-terrorism law
- Recurrent fear expressed by victims of retaliation and repeat targeting by state soldiers
- Widespread forced displacement of anglophone populations
- Government hostility and undue pressure placed on civil society organisations attempting to provide humanitarian assistance in the anglophone regions
- A tendency for the Cameroon state to downplay the severity of the conflict
- Elusive engagement with peacebuilding efforts, purportedly in preference for a military option

This report focuses on reported crimes committed since the beginning of 2021 onwards. However, because recent crimes of the state forces mirror crimes committed prior to 2021, the report also aims to highlight continuities in the forms of violence being used. All of these crimes are yet to be redressed and therefore warrant further attention.

1. Raids, arson, and massacres

A review of recent reports indicates a pattern whereby state military forces target anglophone villages with raids which may involve arson and looting. Extensive property destruction, in which security forces burn

down structures such as homes, businesses, and local government buildings, has been a tactic employed by the state since the conflict began.

The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa report that up to May 2019, state forces had targeted 206 towns and villages in the anglophone regions with arson attacks, causing inhabitants either to flee the area partially or fully (CHRDA 2019). Other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and BBC News Africa (2018b), have also independently reported security forces engaging in mass arson and property damage (Amnesty International 2018b; HRW 2019, 2020b). These allegations have been verified by eyewitness testimony, video evidence, and/or satellite images showing destroyed structures.¹ In the worst cases, multiple civilians have been killed during these raids.

Selected examples of raid, arson, and massacre prior to 2021

- a. Early Dec' 2017: state forces killed at least three unarmed men at a raid in Kajifu; eyewitnesses and residents reported a further nine men killed (Amnesty International 2018b).
- b. 13/12/2017: four unlawful killings by state forces, 23 arbitrary arrests and destruction of property in Dadi (Amnesty International 2018b).
- c. 14/12/2017: an elderly man was executed outside his house in Bodam and other dwellings destroyed by state armed forces (Amnesty International 2018b).
- d. 02/02/2018: security forces shot and killed at least one unarmed man in Belo, beat and arbitrarily arrested dozens, killed four in custody (Amnesty International 2018b).
- e. 04/04/2019: state forces killed five civilian men in Meluf, including one with a mental disability, wounding one woman (HRW 2019).
- f. 23/01/2020: state soldiers killed at least 14 people in the Ndoh village, wounding at least five others, including two youths (Amnesty International 2020)
- g. 14/02/2020: the Ngarburh massacre during which 23 civilians were killed, including 15 children (UN News 2020)

Selected examples of raid, arson, and massacres post 2021

- a. 10/01/2021: in Mautu, 9 civilians killed, including a child, several homes looted (HRW 2021b)
- b. 12/01/2021: the prize-winning Bafut ecovillage was burned down (U.S. Department of State 2021)
- c. 22/01/2021: in Bafia, several houses set on fire (U.S. Department of State 2021)
- d. 04/02/2021: in Mbalangi, several houses were burned (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022i)
- e. 16/02/2021: in Tad, several houses set on fire (U.S. Department of State 2021)
- f. 01/03/2021: in Kumbo, arson attack on the Life Abundant Primary Healthcare Centre (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022d)
- g. 09/06/2021: in Ndzeen, 33 shops, homes, and the Fon's palace looted by 150 soldiers of the BIR (HRW 2021c)
- h. 29/10/2021: in Kikaikom, several houses were burned (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022e)
- i. 08/10/2021: in Bamenda, soldiers retaliate to an IED attack by burning down and looting civilian homes & shops, shooting at least 2 teenage boys and an elderly disabled man (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2021)

¹ See the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: Database of Atrocities, hosted by the University of Toronto: <https://research.rotman.utoronto.ca/Cameroon/>; Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/cameroon>; Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/cameroon/>; BBC Africa Eye: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0707w39>; the Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa: <https://chrda.org/>; the International Crisis Group: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon>; and American Bar Association: https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule_of_law/where_we_work/africa/cameroon/news/.

- j. 29/10/2021: in Tashem, several houses were burned and looted (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022c)
- k. 17/04/2022: in Mbengwi, a bar was raided and 8 parked motorbikes at on fire (CHRDA 2022c)
- l. 21/04/2022: in Matondo II, several houses and motorbikes were set on fire by security forces in pursuit of separatist fighters (CHRDA 2022c)
- m. 24/04/2022: in Ndop, at least 24 civilians killed, over 60 injured (CHRDA 2022c; HRW 2022a)
- n. 01/06/2022: in Missong, 9 civilians including 4 women and a baby killed by soldiers from a nearby army camp (HRW 2022b)
- o. 08/06/2022: in Chomba, several houses were set on fire, the local health centre was looted, a woman and her 11-year-old foster child were arrested and held for 24 days at the BIR barracks in Bafut (HRW 2022a)
- p. 09/06/2022: in Belo, one man killed, one man injured, at least 12 homes burned, community health centre destroyed, at least 10 shops looted (CHRDA 2022c; HRW 2022a)
- q. 12/10/2022: in Wum, after clashes with Amba fighters, soldiers started shooting at civilians indiscriminately and tried setting houses on fire, according to witnesses. When reported, the number of deaths was unknown (Cameroon Intelligence Report 2022c).
- r. 17/12/2022: in Yer, at least 12 houses were burned and at least 3 persons killed (Cameroon News Agency 2022a)

These lists are not exhaustive, and the CHRDA records many other incidents, such as ‘Operation Bamenda Clean’ in September 2020, during which multiple unarmed civilians were intermittently killed.

2. Unlawful killings

In addition to mass killings, in the form of village massacres as detailed above, the state military has also reportedly killed individual civilians on multiple occasions since 2021. Such arbitrary killings are reflective of practices implemented by state forces since the start of the conflict, as detailed in our previous reports (Willis et al. 2019; Willis et al. 2020).²

Selected examples of unlawful killings of civilians by state forces since 2021:

- a. 08/06/2021: in Gom, a 72-year-old man was beaten and a 60-year-old woman (Nwang Lydia) shot through the leg. The man and his wife then had to carry Mrs Nwang towards the Gom military base. After 2km, they were told to drop her and she was shot through the chest and killed (HRW 2021c).
- b. 09/06/2021: in Mbah, a 58-year old man (the husband of a 53-year-old woman who was raped in Mbuluf on the same day) was shot through the head and killed. (HRW 2021c)
- c. 04/07/2021: in Bamenda, civilian Djibring Dubila Ngoran was shot in his car at a security checkpoint. In a press statement, military spokesperson Cyrille Serge Atonfack claimed Ngoran had been driving suspiciously and the shots that killed him were fired as deterrents to make him stop his car (Agence Cameroun Presse 2021; U.S. Department of State 2021).
- d. 19/09/2022: in Andek, two women (Abazie Susan and Etoh Basheba) were shot dead.
- e. 12/11/2021: in Bamenda, 7-year-old Brandy Tataw died through shots fired at the car she was in (BBC 2021a; CHRDA 2022c).
- f. 21/04/2022: in Njenka Bali, three men were killed by soldiers who were returning to their base at Njenka Hausa when they started shooting (CHRDA 2022c).
- g. 19/09/2022: in Bali-Nyonga, at night, soldiers entered several civilian houses and shot one nursing mother and one elderly woman (CHRDA 2022f).

² See also, *International Crisis Group*(2022) “*Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict*”. Burton 2021 “*Death by a thousand cuts: Cameroon struggles in fight against separatists.*” *African Arguments*.

- h. 17/11/2022: in Atokop, a tailor was dragged from his house and shot dead by members of the defence and security forces (CHRDA 2022g).
- i. 13/02/2023: in Buea, a young men from Ekona was killed in the context of a mass-arrest (CHRDA 2023).

The main targets of state violence are individuals accused of being separatist fighters. Reports continue to surface of fighters being extra-judicially killed by state military forces outside of combat situations.

Selected examples of unlawful killings of individuals claimed to be armed separatist by state forces since 2021:

- a. 31/07/2021: in Bambui, 2 separatist fighters known as Gen. Rasta and Col. John were killed during an operation by security forces (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022l).
- b. 01/06/2022: in Nyikob, an ex-separatist fighter (who reportedly dropped out two years earlier) was shot dead in front of his parents (Mimi Mefo Info 2022i)
- c. 08/06/2022: in Teke, men believed to be separatist General Deco and his assistant Neville were killed by members of the BIR (Mimi Mefo Info 2022f).
- d. 16/07/2022: in Bafut, two alleged separatist fighters, General A4 and Mama G, were found dead. They had been arrested alongside 5 other persons during a birthday party on the 22/06/2022 (Mimi Mefo Info 2022c).
- e. 01/08/2022: in Batibo, more than 30 alleged Amba fighters were reportedly killed (baretanews.com 2022a).³
- f. 23/08/2022: in Bafut, a commercial bike rider was detained because members of the state forces deemed his hairstyle suspicious. He was found dead near the location of his arrest hours later. His family states he had not connection to armed separatist groups (CHRDA 2022e).
- g. 08/10/2022: in Djotin, the ministry of defence claimed to have “neutralised” 12 separatist fighters (Cameroon Intelligence Report 2022d).
- h. 04/11/2022: in Ediki, a separatist fighter known as Gen. Gideon was questioned and executed (CHRDA 2022g).

Summary executing suspected separatists is a long-running tactic implemented by the state, reported on by HRW and Amnesty International, among other organisations. In the early stages of the conflict, our group logged several pieces of footage which indicated military executions are taking place in Cameroon (see Willis et al. 2019).

Again, these lists are not exhaustive. Notably, the recurrence of such incidents reveals a pattern of unlawful killings, which warrant investigation.

3. Misuse of counter-terrorism resources

Over the course of the conflict, the state has drastically expanded the reach of its anti-terrorism laws and counter-terrorism measures to address the conflict in the anglophone regions. Many commentators have expressed criticism of these measures. Research by Chris Roberts and Billy Burton (2020) indicates that the state had misused counter-terrorism support from international donors intended to be used against Boko Haram. Roberts and Burton argue that Cameroon has neglected its responsibilities in the North of the

³ The source for this incident is baretanews.com, which is not an established media news source, and therefore further verification is required. We are unaware of independent verifications of this incident. Still, the alleged incident is included in this report because of the magnitude of the crime described and because we have received several unverified informal reports that this type of crime is recurrently being committed. Alleged crimes such as these require imminent further investigation.

country and is instead employing counter-terrorism resources against its civilian population in the anglophone regions. They state that “there is ample evidence that armoured vehicles, munitions, small arms, helicopters, and surveillance drones and aircraft originally provided to fight Boko Haram have been redeployed and used in the Anglophone regions.” (Roberts and Burton 2020)

The state’s redirection of counter-terrorism resources into anglophone regions is reflective of its longstanding tendency to refer to all opponents of the regime as “terrorists and criminals”. Roberts and Burton note that the state has cast Boko Haram fighters, anglophone separatist fighters, anglophone federalists, and even opposition politicians as terrorists.

In 2022, Amnesty International reported on the poor treatment of anglophone prisoners by the state. Amnesty criticises Cameroon’s habit of arresting people arbitrarily, holding arrested persons incommunicado, subjecting prisoners to long pre-trial detentions, and stretching the 2014 counter-terrorism law *ad absurdum*. The law has been widely criticised for its broad and vague definition of terrorism and warned about as a tool for criminalising any oppositional protest. (Amnesty International 2015; Ashukem 2021; Kindzeka 2017; The Library of Congress 2014). It further facilitates the trial of civilians in military tribunals and stipulates lengthy prison sentences or even the death penalty as punishments (CHRDA 2021).

Contested terrorism cases currently followed by Amnesty International:

- a. Penn Khan, the Vice Principal of a high school in Bamenda, who was charged with “complicity in secession, financing of terrorism and complicity with the rebellion”. Yet the only piece of evidence produced by the state was a T-shirt with the words “Diaspora South Africa Standing behind West Cameroonians 4 a Federal Cameroon” and “We are Cameroonians, we are not extremists” printed on it.
- b. Protest leader Ngalim Felix Safeh was arrested during protests in 2016 and remains in pre-trial detention. His case has seen nearly 90 adjournments before the Yaoundé military court.
- c. Mancho Bibixy Tse, a protest leader and radio journalist based in Bamenda, was tried before a military court and sentenced to 15 years in prison for terrorism-related offences.

Ashukem 2021) discusses how the 2014 anti-terrorism law has been recurrently used against journalists, including Samuel Wazizi, who died under unknown circumstances in pre-trial detention; Macho Bibixy; Mimi Mefo Takambou, who has since been freed and fled to Germany; and a musician—all were arrested for criticising the government.

The 2021 US Department of State Country Report on Cameroon includes at least one case of a person (anglophone lawyer Nicodemus Nde Ntso Amungwa) arrested after a phone search purportedly justified by this law (reported to have occurred on 31/05/2021). Amungwa was accused of collaborating with separatist militia based on alleged evidence of state violence on his phone.

It appears the 2014 anti-terrorism law may also be being implemented to harass and target other marginalised groups. During an interview with a representative from CHRDA, our co-researcher, Kim Schumann, was informed that counter-terrorism searches seem to disproportionately affect demographics associated with “scamming” (mostly well-dressed young men) and homosexuality (mostly effeminate men and other transfeminine people). Based on anecdotal evidence, we suspect that these searches are often intended to elicit fear and are used as a means to collect revenue from accused persons, rather than forming legitimate criminal investigations.

4. Arbitrary arrests

Recent reports indicate that arbitrary and unlawful arrests continue. For example, the US Department of State (2021) reports that, on 31st May 2021, an anglophone lawyer was arrested while providing legal counsel for his client at a gendarmerie station. During the arrest, his phone was seized and searched. He was accused of having footage of military abuses taking place in the anglophone regions. The lawyer was then detained for 10 days. Upon his release, all charges against him were dropped.

The same report includes the arrest of several civilians, especially young men, in Mutengene, and Buea at Mile 16, Mile 14, and Molyko between the 18th and 30th August 2021.

Mass arrests continued into 2023: According to eyewitness reports, almost 100, young civilian men were arrested during a military raid in Ekona (South West) on the 12th of February, prompting women of the locality to march to Buea and demand both their release and an end to arbitrary arrests (CHRDA 2023; Mimi Mefo Info 2023a). In a similar military raid, 42 young men were arrested and taken from their homes in Matoh, Memem division (South West). As of 7th March 2023, their whereabouts are unknown (Mimi Mefo Info 2023c).

In their previous report, the U.S. State Department (2019) noted that police forces have arrested several journalists for investigating human rights abuses within the anglophone areas. The Cameroonian authorities have consistently violated the rights to freedoms of speech and assembly, particularly when it concerns criticism of the government. The crisis has deepened pre-existing practices of censorship; several NGOs that represent the interests of journalists argue that authorities have instigated a climate of fear, leading reporters to try avoiding persecution by self-censoring.

There were several notable cases of journalists being arbitrarily detained and, in some cases, killed in 2020. On 15th May 2020, security forces arrested a freelance journalist, Kingsley Njoka, purportedly for his critical stance on social media about government handling of the crisis (U.S. State Department 2019). A military tribunal later indicted him on charges relating to secession and collusion with armed separatist forces. In June 2020 it came to light that anglophone journalist Samuel Wazizi, accused of separatist affiliation, had died in detention. Up to that point his whereabouts had been unknown; he was taken into custody on 2nd August 2019 and passed away just 15 days later (U.S. State Department 2021).

As mentioned above in section III, arbitrary arrests also affect political activists. A notable case from 2022 concerns the well-known anglophone spokesperson Abdul Karim, who, according to his lawyer, was arrested in Bamenda on the 11th of August without an arrest warrant and has since been held in detention. As of December 2022, the reason for his detention remains unknown (Amnesty International 2022b).

In recent years, the unlawful arrest and detainment of the family members of suspected separatist fighters (in particular, wives) represents a worrying trend. The alleged ‘crime’ accused of these family members is that of being related to a suspect, which has no basis in law. CHRDA has recorded several examples of this practice, including the prominent case of Kongnso Antoinette Gohla, who was arrested and physically assaulted in the presence of her two children on 1st October 2021, in Buea. At the time, she was 8 months into a complicated pregnancy, and the father was alleged to be infamous separatist fighter “General No Pity”. While the fatherhood of her child is legally irrelevant, this rumour turned out to be false: Gohla and the fighter do have a child together from a past relationship that ended before the conflict erupted. However, she has since lived with a new partner, the biological father, who was eventually allowed to visit her in detention. The lawyers were barred from directly consulting with Gohla, and received information only from the father that she was badly bruised and in pain; they were also not informed when she was brought to the military tribunal (CHRDA 2022d).

Two months prior, on 3rd August 2021, security forces had allegedly stormed the compound of General No Pity's family and arrested several people. His brother and cousin were released two days later, while mother and uncle remained in detention (U.S. Department of State 2021).

Our group has also directly observed three cases of this category; two cases involving women arrested in their farms and detained in Bamenda. Another involved the arrest and disappearance of a young mother, who had been imprisoned by Rapid Intervention Battalion [BIR] soldiers in Kumbo for being the wife of a separatist general.

5. Torture

There are continued reports of the use of torture by the state. The Ministry of Justice and human rights bodies have reported that many prisons in Cameroon host several thousand beyond their designed capacity, causing endemic overcrowding and unhygienic living conditions. Additionally, reports allege prison guards use excessive force to punish dissent, frequently beating and humiliating prisoners. A prison riot in 2019 saw violent clashes with guards; several prisoners were beaten by gangs of guards, and live ammunition was used to suppress the protests (Amnesty International 2019).

Furthermore, several human rights groups have documented instances of security forces detaining and then torturing civilians during raids, leading to multiple deaths. Amnesty International (2018a) documents that security forces have been utilising a detention centre operated by the State Defence Secretariat in the nation's capital to routinely torture prisoners held there incommunicado. Amnesty International credibly allege routine use of torture against prisoners, including beatings, drownings, electrocutions, denial of medical provisions, overcrowding and restrictions of fresh air and access to clean water.

Many cases of this nature have been reported since 2021, demonstrating a continuation of these practices by the state security forces.

Selected examples of torture since 2021:

The following cases are included in the US Department of State 2021 Country Report on Cameroon:

- a. 11/02/2021: in Ndu, civilian Jean Fai Fungong was arrested, beaten, and subjected to water torture to extract information about his brother, an alleged separatist fighter. Video evidence emerged on 13th February; two days later, a Ministry of Defence spokesperson confirmed the case.
- b. 15/10/2021: in Yaoundé, Bar. Amungwa Nde Ntso Nico, lawyer to 48 separatist prisoners, reported state security forces "removed three of his clients [...] without official authorization and were holding them incommunicado". He reported mistreatment, their being forced to sign a document in his absence, and that they were "yet to be officially sentenced, despite multiple appearances before the Military Tribunal." (p.8)
- c. 09/2020: four members of the organisation *Stand Up for Cameroon*—Moussa Bello, Etienne Ntsama, Mira Angoung, and Tehle Membou—were arrested after a "Friday in Black" event (a decentralised initiative to wear all black clothing on Fridays and raise awareness of the ongoing conflict in the anglophone region and grieve its victims). On 31st December 2021, after 15 months of detention during which they were reportedly beaten and interrogated without legal counsel, a military tribunal sentenced them to 16 months and time served.

CHRDA (2022d) has reported on a string of recent offences committed by Chief Moja Moja, in particular—a traditional ruler in the South West region and also a member of the military—stating, "He has been witnessed on multiple occasions publicly humiliating and torturing unarmed civilians alleged to be separatist

fighters or to share separatist ideology.” He records the torture on video, which is then circulated on social media by himself or his supporters.

Incidents of torture by Chief Moja Moja specifically since 2021:

CHRDA reports 7 incidents involving 11 victims, all of which were filmed and uploaded:

- a. 04/11/22: two men were shown to be forcibly held and tortured with machetes before being transferred to Buea jail. After their release, they had to be hospitalised due to injuries caused by the torture. Moja Moja called them separatist fighters who had been sent to kill him over a land dispute with a businessman.
- b. 07/08/22: pictures show a man called Zuzu being held hostage. In the images, he is half-naked and forced to drink a beer called “33 Export”—the name being a metaphor for getting killed. He is verbally threatened with death. The same man is shown chained and lying on the ground surrounded by people. A video posted on the 9th shows the same man in Moja Moja’s car while he interrogates and accuses him of being a separatist fighter.
- c. 09/07/2022: Moja Moja showed himself forcibly pushing a man into the trunk of a car.
- d. 05/07/2022: Moja Moja and another man are seen forcibly shaving the heads of 4 young men while interrogating them about where they are from. The scene takes place outdoors.
- e. 27/06/2022: a video shows Moja Moja beating a man with a metal pole inside his palace. The man is forced to confess to being a separatist under duress. Another video shows the same man getting beaten in Moja Moja’s car.
- f. 26/05/2022: a video was uploaded showing a man sitting on the ground while Moja Moja shoots live rounds less than a metre past the man, attempting to force a confession.
- g. 05/04/2022: Moja Moja had himself filmed as he walks a young man through Buea while beating him. The young man is almost naked and crying.

CHRDA stresses that in all these instances, Moja Moja is acting in his role as a chief and/or member of the military, which is a condition for the legal classification of his acts as torture.

6. Death penalty

Whereas legal cases in the Cameroon conflict had hitherto been marked by lengthy pre-trial detention and disproportionate prison sentences, the Military Tribunal in Buea crossed another line in September 2021 when it sentenced four men to death by firing squad. The men were accused of killing at least 7 students during a shooting at a school in the South West region during October 2022 (CHRDA 2021; Reuters 2021).

Although the death sentence is unlikely to be carried out, these sentences point to a common trend in the conflict, which is for anglophone persons to become labelled as terrorists by the Cameroon state.

Commenting on this case, CHRDA issued the following statement: “This death sentence is unprecedented in the Anglophone Crisis and might represent a new turning point in addressing this security and human rights crisis”. They are “worried that the death penalty might become the new punitive tool of the Cameroonian authorities to address this crisis” (CHRDA 2021).

7. Treatment of returned asylum seekers

The treatment of deported asylum seekers has been comprehensively studied and described by HRW in their report titled ‘How Can You Throw Us Back?’ (2022c). Due to the importance of the report, its central findings are summarised in this section.

HRW interviewed 41 Cameroonian asylum seekers deported from the US between 2019 and January 2021. Based on the cases they followed, HRW alleges that Cameroonian authorities have subjected returned deportees and members of their families to serious human rights violations, including rape, torture and other physical abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention, inhuman and degrading treatment in detention, extortion, and threats.

Many deportees “were held without due process or incommunicado, in some cases in circumstances that may constitute enforced disappearances. Nearly all described squalid detention conditions with little to no food, medical care, sanitation, or protection from Covid-19”.

“[HRW] documented 13 cases of torture, physical or sexual abuse, or assault of deported people by state agents in detention, during or prior to arrests, or at their residences. Three women alleged that members of the security forces raped them, one after arrest and two in detention. Government forces punched, kicked, and beat men and women with batons, belts, machetes, guns, and whips.”

Additionally, authorities targeted the families of deported people (arrest and abuse of suspects’ family members is also brought up in section IV of this report).

Only some of the detained returnees were targeted for crimes they committed before their flight. Others were accused of sympathising or collaborating with separatists and/or making Cameroon look bad by fleeing it. An interviewee recalled that “[t]hey said we are the people that have gone out and spoiled the name of the country... so I have to pay for it dearly”.

HRW concludes: “Given that people deported to Cameroon may face serious risks to their lives, freedom, and safety upon return, the US and governments worldwide should suspend deportations there”.

8. Forced displacement

The forced displacement of anglophone refugees within Cameroon has been a feature of the conflict from its early days. In January 2022, OCHA estimated that between 550 and 600 thousand people have been internally displaced and 71,800 people are now refugees in Nigeria (OCHA 2022).

International Crisis Group’s (ICG) interviews with internally displaced persons lead them to comment that:

Many displaced people say they have not heard from their spouses or children since 2018. They often do not know whether their family members are dead or have sought refuge in the forest or elsewhere. The uncertainty is a source of enduring trauma.

ICG further note that “Cameroonian authorities have rejected several UN and NGO requests to establish internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps where vulnerable people could be better cared for, because they are worried that such camps will undermine the official narrative that life in the Anglophone regions is returning to normal”. (International Crisis Group 2022).

In 2021, Amnesty International reported on a significant period of forced displacement in the North West Region: “Between 22 and 26 February 2021, at least 4,200 people were displaced from seven villages in Nwa, following attacks by Fulani vigilante groups in which at least eight people were killed. According to the CHRDA, the Fulani herders ‘have carried out over a dozen raids against the natives in the villages of Nwa in less than a month’”. Amnesty confirmed the incident by comparing satellite images. Related incidents were further verified by the Atrocities Database, which records 96 buildings being burned by Fulani militia of contested origin (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022k).

The events in Nwa are reflective of the Ngarbuh massacre, which has been among the most widely reported incidents (UN News 2020). During the Ngarbuh massacre in 2020, 23 civilians, including 15 children, were

reportedly killed by a Fulani militia working with state soldiers. Shortly after the crimes in Ngarbuh, the Cameroon state established a military base close to the site of the massacre, which, according to local reports, resulted in several hundreds of residents fleeing the area for fear that they would be targeted by state violence again (Cameroon Concord News 2020; The Guardian Post 2023).

Accordingly, we can see how certain anglophone populations have sustained recurrent injuries, which has led so many to flee in search of safety.

9. Sexual violence

Over the course of the conflict, many reports of sexual violence committed by soldiers have surfaced. HRW in particular have followed up several cases in depth, including a mass rape of at least 20 women by state soldiers that occurred in Ebam in 2020 (HRW 2021a).

In their report, HRW found that the attack went unreported for a year, partly due to stigma and fear of reprisal.

According to witnesses HRW interviewed:

[O]ver 50 soldiers entered Ebam, in the South-West region, at about 3 a.m. on March 1, 2020. They broke into almost all the 75 homes in the village, looting money and other items, and dragging men out. Some soldiers rounded up men in the village center, while others sexually assaulted the women, including four with disabilities, mostly in their homes.

The account continues: “[A]t the end of the three-hour attack, soldiers took at least 36 men to a military base . . . where the soldiers beat the men severely and repeatedly, amounting to torture.” At least one man was killed.

HRW further states that “[s]oldiers who raped women . . . implied in their verbal abuse that they were carrying out the rapes in part as a form of punishment for any presumed affiliation with armed separatist fighters.” Language such as this indicates that rape was used by state security forces as a weapon of war.

In a separate incident in June 2021, a 53-year-old rape survivor informed HRW that she did not report the rape committed by state soldiers to the authorities for fear of retaliation (HRW 2021c), leading HRW to note that “[u]nderreporting by survivors . . . suggests that incidents of sexual violence by soldiers is probably much higher than the documented cases.”

10. Attacks on humanitarian and healthcare institutions

The Cameroonian government has repeatedly accused civil society organisations and international bodies engaging them of undermining the state’s security and has hindered the organisations’ operations.

After the Ngarbuh massacre, HRW published a detailed report of the incident (HRW 2020a). Subsequently, Atanga Nji, a notable Cameroon state official, accused NGOs, including HRW and Amnesty International, of “fuelling terrorism, destabilizing Cameroon, and producing fake reports” (HRW 2020b).

In December 2020, Atanga Nji also announced a ban on Médecins Sans Frontières, accusing them of having treated armed separatists. In early August 2021, MSF withdrew from Cameroon altogether (International Crisis Group 2022, p. 5).

Moreover, on the 26th August 2021, Atanga Nji decreed that all foreign associations must send representatives to submit information about their relationship to civil society in Cameroon. Lord Boateng

in a House of Lords debate referred to the decree as “designed to suppress and hold back the activities of civil society organisations” (UK Parliament 2021).

Like Médecins Sans Frontières, local healthcare facilities have also been affected by the government’s suspicion against their patients. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2022) states: “Targeted attacks on health facilities and humanitarian workers have restricted the delivery of vital aid. Approximately 30 percent of health facilities in the Anglophone region are unable to operate.”

Selected attacks on healthcare facilities by state forces since 2021 include:

- a. 01/03/2022: in Kumbo, the Life Abundance Primary Healthcare Centre was set on fire, presumably by members of the security forces (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022d).
- b. 09/06/2022: in Belo, security forces committed an arson and looting attack on numerous buildings, including homes and shops, which also destroyed the local healthcare centre (CHRDA 2022c; HRW 2022a).
- c. 10/09/2022: security forces entered the Banso Baptist Hospital in Kumbo and removed two men, believed to be the separatist General Fireman and his assistant, before killing them outside the building. Allegedly, the separatists had warned the hospital of the risk of treating them before the incident. The hospital director was later threatened by pro-government users online (Cameroon News Agency 2022c).

11. Government underplaying the severity of the conflict

Multiple commentators have noted a tendency for the Cameroon state to deny the severity of the conflict in the anglophone regions of Cameroon.

International Crisis Group (2022) reports the official government narrative to be “that life in the Anglophone regions is returning to normal”. Likewise from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2022): “The government continues to deny the severity of the crisis and has failed to address the root causes of the conflict or provide a political means for resolving it”.

It is in this context that the mistreatment of returned asylum seekers as documented by HRW (2022c) can be understood. To recap, reasons given for the detention and maltreatment of returned asylum seekers by the state include asylum seekers making the country look bad by fleeing it. As one of HRW’s interviewees claims, the state “said that they are the people that have gone out and spoiled the name of the country . . . so they have to pay for it dearly”.

In seeking to deny the severity of the human rights abuses in the anglophone regions of Cameroon, compounded by the tendency for the Cameroonian state to describe critical commentators as terrorists and criminals, the state is poised to react aggressively towards those who report on the human rights abuses and those who attempt to claim asylum abroad.

12. Breakdown of the Swiss peace negotiations

In September this year (2022), President Paul Biya withdrew from the Swiss Peace Seeking Process after three years of limited and stalled engagement (Mimi Mefo Info 2022d; Pan African Visions 2022).

Our research observations of the Swiss peace process indicate that although at first separatist factions stalled progress, in recent years it has been the Cameroon state that has consistently refused to meaningfully engage in the peace talks and denied Swiss humanitarian workers who expressed criticism of the government visas to enter the country.

According to a report by the journalist and blogger Mimi Mefo (who herself fled Cameroon after being detained for reporting on the conflict) “President Paul Biya reportedly told the President of Swiss confederation . . . that the current military option ‘will do’” (Mimi Mefo Info 2022d).

Shortly after withdrawing from the Swiss process, in October 2022 Canada announced its role in taking over the peacebuilding process. On January 20th 2023, an announcement was publicised confirming that the government of Cameroon and several separatist factions had reached an “agreement to enter a process to reach a comprehensive, peaceful and political resolution of the conflict.” (Government of Canada 2023). Three days later, the Minister of Communications pushed back, stating: “The Government of the Republic of Cameroon informs national and international community that it has not entrusted any foreign country or external entity with any role of mediator or facilitator to settle the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions.” (The Globe and Mail 2023).

It is unclear what led to this shift and what it indicates about the government’s willingness to continue the Canada-mediated talks. It has been speculated that the seemingly incongruent behaviour is the result of opposing camps within the government; one, including the Prime Minister, that is inclined towards political solutions of the Anglophone Crisis and another that is committed to the current military approach.

Part 2) Non-state actors: Reported crimes.

This section outlines the crimes of non-state actors. Most of the abuses detailed in this section are attributed to suspected separatist fighters and forces. However, there is limited reliable information about which armed group committed any given abuse. In addition to countless separatist militias, there are also rumours of armed gangs imitating separatist groups for personal gain and of fighters hired by the government to commit false-flag attacks and tarnish the reputation of separatists.

Reported crimes attributed to separatist fighters detailed in this report include:

- Tactics of kidnapping and extortion
- Arson and looting
- Killing state and elite targets, and killing civilians, especially those accused of violating separatist imposed boycotts and lockdowns
- Targeting of schools, schoolchildren, and teachers
- Imposing extended lockdowns
- Committing acts of sexual violence
- Extending operations into the francophone West Region

The final section touches on reports of vigilante justice, which are reported acts of violence attributed to local communities in an attempt to assert or restore order.

13. Kidnapping and extortion

Since the armed conflict began in 2017, reportedly secessionist militias have frequently kidnapped. After compiling media reports, HRW (2019) estimated that, between October 2018 and March 2019, at least 350 people were kidnapped and ransomed by separatist militias, many of whom were school children.

Prior to 2021, primary targets of kidnappings were pupils attempting to attend school, teachers and other educators, state employees, foreign workers, and local businesspeople (BBC 2018, 2019). The aim of kidnapping by separatist militias seems to be to enforce the implementation of school boycotts and

lockdowns, and to collect contributions towards the war efforts – described by the fighters as a form of “taxation for the cause” (see Willis et al. 2020)

It is widely believed that kidnapping has become more common since 2019, supposedly due to dwindling remittances from separatists in the diaspora, leading to a more arbitrary or opportunistic selection of victims. Additionally, there are rumours about “fake” fighters (i.e., criminals who masquerade as armed separatist fighters with the primary goal of extorting civilians), who kidnap exclusively for ransom as a form of income without political aspirations. Some commentators have described this as the emergence of a war economy (Nwati 2021; The New Humanitarian 2022; Willis et al. 2023).

One part of our research, which involved interviewing civilians in the anglophone regions, found that people of relative socioeconomic advantage were most likely to be targeted, kidnapped, and made to pay ransom by the Amba forces (Willis et al. 2020; Willis et al. 2023). Residents with links to the diaspora were especially prone to being targeted.

Our review of human rights reporting post-2021 indicates that this pattern of kidnappings has continued. We suspect that kidnapping is vastly underreported, as it has become a frequent, somewhat normalised occurrence. Even with the underreporting, it is the most common type of abuse reportedly committed by separatist fighters that we encountered.

Selected examples of kidnapping by separatist fighters since 2021:

- a. 21/1/2021: in Nkewn (Bamenda), 3 civilians were abducted from a construction site for failing to produce a construction permit from a separatist leader (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- b. 03/2/2021: in Bamenda, 3 members of the Bamenda II Council were abducted and accused of violating the laws of Ambazonia (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- c. 27/2/2021: in Bali, a medical doctor was kidnapped and threatened with murder before being released on 300,000 CFA (ca. 460 €) in ransom (HRW 2021d)
- d. 25/6/2021: four humanitarian workers were kidnapped in the North West region and held overnight before being released (U.S. Department of State 2021)
- e. 29/08/2021: in Mamfe, Bishop Julius Agbortoko kidnapped for ransom (BBC 2021b; Catholic News Agency 2021)
- f. 13/01/2022: in Tiko, nine workers of the Cameroon Development Corporation were kidnapped, including six women. They were released on 25/01/2022 after ransom had been paid (HRW 2022d).
- g. 16/01/2022: in Bamenda, a lawyer was kidnapped from his home, taken to a separatist camp, and released 4 hours later after paying 2.3 million CFA (ca. 3,500 €) in ransom (HRW 2022d).
- h. 03/04/2022: in Bamenda, Senator Elizabeth Regina Mudi (member of the ruling party CPDM) and her driver were kidnapped by a separatist group known as the Ambazonia Defence Forces (BBC 2022a; CHRDA 2022c). They reportedly had tried negotiating the release of imprisoned separatist leaders in exchange for Mudi. She was freed on 30/05/2022 during a military operation that killed “dozens” of separatist fighters, according to military spokesperson Cyrille Serge Atonfack Guemo (Journal du Cameroun 2022).
- i. 07/04/2022: in Bachou-Ntai, 33 seminary students were kidnapped for ransom. They were released the following day (HRW 2022d).
- j. 16/05/2022: in Idenau, 30 residents were abducted and one girl in her early teens was reportedly raped by members of a separatist group known as Ten Cobo (HRW 2022d).
- k. 29/05/2022: in Babanki, 54-year-old lawyer Valentine Velieh Yenshia was abducted from his farm. He was kept in a container without food for 3 days and released after 1.1 million CFA (ca. 1,680 €) in ransom was paid (HRW 2022d).
- l. 08/06/2022, a businessman, Adolf Lomunga, was kidnapped. The ransom demand was 10 million CFA (ca. 15,235 €) (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022h).

- m. 02/08/2022: in Buabua, 6 people were kidnapped for ransom. One of them, Chongwain Joseph, might have been targeted under the assumption that he is a teacher while actually working as a farmer (Mimi Mefo Info 2022b).
- n. 19/08/2022: in Kumbo, 60-year-old store owner Nshadze Roland was kidnapped and tortured by separatist fighters for selling beverages produced by Les Brasseries du Cameroun, which have been banned by separatist groups. After his release, he had to be hospitalised (Mimi Mefo Info 2022a).
- o. 27/08/2022: in Etoko, a farmer known as Madam Monica was kidnapped. She was released 10 days later, on 06/09/2022, after paying 3 million CFA (ca. 4,570 €) in ransom.
- p. 16/9/2022: in Nchang, 8 or 9 clergy members (accounts differ) were abducted from St. Mary's Catholic Church, which was destroyed in the same incident. Their ransom was set at \$50,000 (USD) (Catholic News Service 2022; CHRDA 2022a).
- q. 26/09/2022: in Kumbo and Vekovi respectively, two staff members of the Kumbo Bansa Baptist Hospital and a Reverend Father were abducted by members of a separatist group known as the Unity Warriors. The kidnapping is connected to the killing of separatist General Fireman and his assistant by state forces at Bansa Baptist Hospital on 10/09/2022 (Cameroon News Agency 2022e; Mimi Mefo Info 2022g).
- r. 03/11/2022: in Batibo, 9 healthcare workers were kidnapped from a government hospital (Cameroon Intelligence Report 2022a).

The examples show that kidnapping victims come from various socioeconomic backgrounds and professions. Sometimes, a motive for the kidnapping is known or apparent; at other times, it might be the result of an incidental encounter.

The amount of ransom varies widely and is often reduced through negotiation with the victims and/or their families.

14. Looting and arson

Although looting and arson are more commonly associated with state forces, armed separatist groups have reportedly committed such attacks as well, especially on schools. To avoid repetition, incidents of arson involving schools are listed in Section 16, which details school targets.

Selected examples of looting and arson since 2021 include:

- a. 06/04/2022: in Mbonghong, houses belonging to members of the Mbororo ethnic minority were burned down, reportedly by members of an armed separatist group known as the Ambazonia Defence Forces (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022a)
- b. 01/6/2022: in Pia, the market was looted and several vehicles burned. Shots were fired and several people injured (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022b). This case is notable as it is one of the few instances of separatist fighters crossing over into the francophone West region.
- c. 08/06/2022: in Mamfe, the Mamfe District Hospital was set on fire, alongside a building close by, reportedly by members of an armed separatist group known as the Ambazonia Defence Forces (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022h).
- d. 01/07/2022: in Nzindong, also in the West region, a food truck was set on fire, leading to potatoes worth several hundred thousand CFA being burned (Cameroon News Agency 2022b).
- e. 14/09/2022: in Jakiri, a government checkpoint was set on fire by members of an armed separatist group known as the Bui Unity Warriors. No injuries or deaths were reported (Cameroon News Agency 2022d).

- f. 16/9/2022: in Nchang, St. Mary's Catholic Church was destroyed (CHRDA 2022a).
- g. 18/10/2022: in Wum, the house of the Mayor was set on fire by members of an armed separatist group known as the Ambazonia Restoration Forces (Cameroon Intelligence Report 2022b).

15. Killings

Human rights organisations, Cameroonian media, and international media have reported on armed separatists killing Cameroonian soldiers. In addition, there are credible reports of cases in which separatist fighters have murdered civilians, particularly targeting those whom they suspect of colluding with the government, breaking secessionist-backed strikes or school shut-downs, or criticising secessionist policies or actions.

Victims of reported killings by separatist fighters since 2021 include military personnel, police officers, a politician, chiefs, (former) teachers, and a healthcare worker.

Selected examples of killings of members of the security forces since 2021 include:

- a. 25/05/2021: in Lassin Noni, 5 soldiers were killed by members of an armed separatist group known as the Marine of Bambilang (Cameroon News Agency 2021).
- b. 14/7/2021: in Babadjou, separatist fighters dressed in army uniforms and on motorbikes killed two security officers at a security post (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- c. 18/7/2021: in Bali, 5 police officers were killed by an IED placed near a police vehicle at a security checkpoint, followed by separatists opening fire (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- d. 10/06/2022: in Matuke, a gendarme was ambushed and killed on his way to Pendamboko (Mimi Mefo Info 2022h).⁴
- e. 07/07/2022: in Mbiame, a separatist attack on a military brigade, led by General No Pity, killed one soldier (Mimi Mefo Info 2022e).

Selected examples of killings of civilians since 2021 include:

- a. 13/2/2021: in Essoh Attah, 3 traditional chiefs (Chief Benedict Fomin, Chief Simon Forzizong, and Chief Fualeasuohwere) and another civilian were killed; the Cameroonian government alleged the perpetrators were members of an armed separatist group known as the Red Dragons (HRW 2021d; U.S. Department of State 2021; Voice of America 2021).
- b. 12/6/2021: in Kumbo, 6 civilians were killed from the explosion of an IED (HRW 2021d).
- c. 06/7/2021: in Baforkum, the local Fon (chief) was abducted. His body was found in a nearby stream on 08/07/2021 (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- d. 23/7/2021: in Ekondo-Titi, former fighter John Eyallo killed, presumably for having joined a DDR camp (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- e. 12/01/2022: in Bamenda, Senator Henry Kemende (of the oppositional SDF) was shot in his car in Bamenda (Agence France-Presse 2022; Deutsche Welle 2022).
- f. 28/04/2022: in Mamfe, vehicles were set on fire at "moto park" and at least 3 men allegedly killed, presumably because the bus station was operating during a separatist-imposed lockdown (HRW 2022d).

⁴ According to Mimi Mefo Info 2022h, the Divisional Officer later blamed the civilian population for the killing, saying it was their responsibility to alert the government of the locations of fighters.

- g. 29/05/2022: in Obonyi II, 24 civilians were killed and at least 60 injured in a shooting that involved separatist fighters under the command of General Eta (BBC 2022b; CHRDA 2022c; The Guardian Nigeria 2022).
- h. 30/05/2022: in Jakiri, the body of a retired teacher and CPDM member, Lukong Francis, was found with signs of torture 10 days after he had been kidnapped (HRW 2022d).
- i. 25/6/2022: in Ballin and Bakinjaw, at least 30 civilians were reportedly killed, and 50 houses burned. The Presbyterian Church of Cameroon originally alleged inter-ethnic fights. Bareta News wrote of retaliation against villagers for hosting gendarmes and BIR soldiers, which was later confirmed by the Databank of Atrocities (baretanews.com 2022b; Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022n).
- j. 10/02/2023: unidentified men attacked workers of the Cameroon Development Corporation, leading to 6 deaths and 52 injuries. Presumably, the attack was carried out by separatist fighters in an attempt to enforce a lock down surrounding National Youth Day on the 11th of February (HRW 2022d).
- k. 21/02/2023: a young woman was found decapitated in Bali-Nyonga, North West region. She was allegedly killed by separatist fighters for trying to lure one of them into a trap to be killed by state forces (Mimi Mefo Info 2023b).
- l. 25/02/2023: three IEDs were set off beside the track of the 28th Mount Cameroon Race of Hope, a sporting event taking place in Buea, injuring several athletes and bystanders and killing one woman who had attended the event with their children (CHRDA 2/25/2023; Pan African Visions 2023).

16. School targets

A notable tactic used by separatist fighters since the beginning of the conflict has been attacking teachers and schools, usually for violating the separatist-imposed government school boycott that sometimes temporarily extends to private schools (schools run independently of the state which students pay a fee to attend).

The school boycott was initially imposed in an attempt to make the regions ungovernable and gain international attention to the Anglophone Problem in Cameroon, as well as to protest the employment of francophone teachers without adequate English skills and the gradual assimilation of the anglophone curriculum to the francophone one.

Amnesty International (2018b) collected data which suggests that between February 2017 and May 2018, 42 schools in the anglophone regions were attacked by extreme separatists. The CHRDA reported that such attacks have become a common means to enforce the education boycott (CHRDA 2022b).

A review of recent human rights reports shows that schools continue to be prime targets of separatist violence. Several cases involving teachers are included in the lists of examples in Section 13, addressing kidnapping and extortion, and Section 15, concerning killings. Both reported cases and local interlocutors indicate that being employed as a teacher is a strong risk factor for separatist violence. The following list contains other noteworthy examples not included in the report so far.

Selected examples of attacks on schools, students and teachers by armed separatist fighters since 2021:

- a. 09/1/2021: in Eyumojock, the principal of a high school was killed (HRW 2021d).
- b. 13/01/2021: in Buea, 15 students were stopped on their way to Government High School, held at gunpoint and forced to undress by separatist fighters, including members of the groups known as SOCADEF and the Fako Mountain Lions (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022m).

- c. 01/7/2021: in Kumba, the 52-year-old physics teacher Fuh Max Dang was shot in his home (HRW 2021d).
- d. 15/07/2021: in Bali, part of the Government School Bali Town was burned, reportedly by members of an armed separatist group known as the Buffalos of Bali Nyonga (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022g).
- e. 10/11/2021: in Buea, 11 students aged 14 to 18 were stopped on their way to school, made to take off their uniforms and beaten, their books were destroyed, and one boy was shot in the leg (HRW 2021d).
- f. 10/11/2021: in Buea, 11 students were wounded by an IED that was thrown onto a lecture hall at the University of Buea (HRW 2021d; Reuters Media 2021).
- g. 07/02/2022: in Buea, a classroom of the Molyko primary school was set on fire. Another arson attack on the same school occurred on 05/04/2022 (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022f; HRW 2022d).
- h. 19/01/2022: in Weh, five teachers (two women, three men) were abducted from the Government Highschool for not obeying the separatist-imposed school boycott. Two students were injured in the process. The teachers were released on 24/01/2022 after ransom had been paid (HRW 2022d).
- i. 11/02/2022: in Okoyong, a dorm of the all-girls school Queen of the Rosary College was set on fire during the night, presumably to intimidate students not to march on Youth Day (the next morning). The perpetrators are assumed to be members of an armed separatist group known as the Ambazonia Restoration Forces (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022j; HRW 2022d).
- j. 07/04/2022: in Bachuo-Ntai, 33 secondary school students were kidnapped for ransom, and then released the following day (HRW 2022d).
- k. 24/05/2022: in Mbve, “[o]ne student was killed, another one injured by an IED near St Theresa’s Nursery and Primary School”, presumably by separatist fighters under the command of General Talk And Do (CHRDA 2022c).
- l. 7/09/2022 and 08/90/2022: in Fundong, structure of the Government Bilingual High School Fundong was set on fire and “over a dozen school children were kidnapped on their way to school and taken to an unknown destination”. Their kidnappers uploaded a video, reiterating that going to school is forbidden until 04/10/2022 (CHRDA 2022b). Buea stands out as a frequent location of attacks on schools, the reasons for which would benefit from further research.

It is worth noting that the schools primarily targeted by separatist fighters are state schools. Private schools run by church groups, community-run schools, and emergency school provisions provided by the UN have been permitted to operate by Amba separatists under certain conditions (for further discussion, see Willis et al. 2020).

Less reported on is the state targeting of community schools, church-run schools, and schools run by the UN (see Willis et al. 2020). The CHRDA report that on 29/08/2022, the Senior Divisional Officer for Boyo signed a prefectural order prohibiting the existence of 27 community and clandestine schools, including mission schools owned by the church (CHRDA 2022b).

Cameroonian state forces have further been responsible for the deaths of several school children, included in Section 2 on unlawful state killings.

In conclusion, schools have become a battleground targeted by both separatist groups and state actors, which leaves students in the anglophone regions with very limited access to education.

17. Extended lockdowns

Another strategy of the separatist forces has been to impose lockdowns in the anglophone regions, known locally as “Ghost Town”. The lockdowns require that during specified periods, residents should not move about in public places and must not go to work or school. People caught contravening lockdowns in areas where separatist fighters have a strong hold risk being forced to pay a fine and, in some instances, targeted with violence (for an analysis, see Willis et al. 2023). Forms of violence attributed to separatist forces include forced imprisonment, torture, limb amputations, killings, and arson attacks (see Willis et al. 2020).

In addition to the regular Ghost Town, enforced every Monday, there are reports of extended lockdowns being imposed on local communities.

ICG reports that in 2021, separatists imposed a lockdown from 16th January to 7th February to protests and disrupt the African Nations Championship which was to include tournaments in Buea, South West region (International Crisis Group 2022).

According to CHRDA, armed separatist groups tried to hinder school resumption, which was supposed to happen on the 5th of September 2021, with a lockdown from the 5th until the 19th September 2021. In this context, on 7th September 2021, a video was shared widely online which shows civilians in Buea being told that if they violated the 2-week lockdown they would be killed (CHRDA 2022b).

In the course of our research in 2021 and 2022, we have had first-hand experience of these extended lockdowns, which makes running activities in the conflict’s anglophone regions difficult and at times perilous. For instance, an extended lockdown was ordered during our research with youths in Bamenda. The extended lockdown on this occasion was ordered in response to the military having killed several alleged separatist fighters and displaying the bodies of the deceased in public. On another occasion, rumours of a month-long lockdown required our researchers to leave the area early.

These extended lockdowns have also been a source of local tension, leading to intra-community conflicts. An example of this is a several-week-long incident in Oku and its surrounding village in April 2022. In a long, complex, tit-for-tat situation, residents in several villages protested kidnappings and other abuses by local separatist fighters. Fighters were temporarily captured, some civilian hostages were freed, and some stolen bikes returned. But fighters also committed new kidnappings, killed 2 protestors, and injured 9. There are 2 female villagers still reported to be missing.

18. Sexual violence

Instances of sexual violence by separatist fighters have been reported. Reports tend to detail the targeting of single victim, in contrast to the mass rapes reportedly committed by state soldiers. We are not aware of separatist fighters using rape as a weapon of war, though there have been reports of several spectacular acts of violence committed against women suspected of colluding with the government (for more information see Willis et al. 2019).

Examples of sexual violence since 2021 include:

- a. 21/01/2021: in Bamenda, a young woman reports having been robbed and raped by a group of armed men in Nkwen (U.S. Department of State 2021).
- b. 16/05/2022: in Idenau, 30 residents were abducted, and one girl in her early teens was raped (HRW 2022d).

Although reports of rape by separatist fighters are relatively few, as with incidents committed by state soldiers, underreporting for fear of stigma and retaliation is likely.

19. Extension into francophone areas

In recent years there have been reports of Amba separatist fighters increasing their military power and extending activities into the Francophone regions. In particular, separatists have reportedly increased their use of explosive devices, which are weapons capable of causing greater destruction than previous strategies used.

Another worrying emerging trend is Amba fighters expanding their reach by targeting locations beyond the anglophone regions and moving into the francophone West region.

- 01/06/2022: in Pia in the West region, the market was looted, several vehicles burned, shots were fired, and several people injured, but no deaths reported (Cameroon: Database of Atrocities 2022b).
- 01/07/2022: in Nzindong, an arson case was reported, regarding a fire that destroyed a food truck (Cameroon News Agency 2022b).
- 07/06/2022: in Njitapon, separatist fighters attacked a government military base, according to a CHRDA (2022c) report. During the attack, five gendarme officers were killed, including the lieutenant commander of the base, two others were injured and narrowly escaped from the scene of the incident. The armed men, assumed to be separatist fighters under the command of General No Pity, proceeded to burn down the building, including the bodies of the deceased and a military Hilux parked in front of the building.

20. Vigilante justice

Separatist fighters are not the only non-state actors to have reportedly committed abuses in the context of the Anglophone Conflict. During our research with civilians, we were informed about an area in the South-West Region that had become known as a “death zone” for separatist fighters due to civilians implementing vigilante justice against suspected fighters and handing them over to the military.

- 24/04/2022: in Nguti, South-West region, according to a Baretanews report, 3 men were beaten by local civilians and handed over to BIR for allegedly being separatist fighters (baretanews.com 2022c).
- A separatist fighter we were scheduled to interview in 2021 was killed by a vigilante mob before we had a chance to conduct the interview.
- Likewise, the previously mentioned tit-for-tat incidents between Oku villagers and separatist fighters that occurred in April 2022 can be seen as a form of community justice.

Incidents such as these indicate that there is an environment of heightened suspicion in the anglophone regions. Persons deemed to be suspicious (or likely simply unknown persons) are thus liable, once suspected as a separatist fighter, to being subjected to community justice or handed over to the state security forces. Considering the long list of reported abuses by state forces against young men in particular, we have to assume that handing suspects over to the police or the military does not increase their chance of a fair trial.

Concluding summary and recommendations

An updated review of the human rights abuses that have been committed in the conflicted anglophone regions of Cameroon shows that civilians continue to be exposed to extreme forms of violence. Rather than abating, local reports indicate that the violence is becoming ever more severe. The escalation of violence sits uncomfortably with reduced political will, nationally and internationally, to address the conflict in anglophone Cameroon.

This report has documented an assortment of extreme violence that civilians are exposed to in anglophone Cameroon. This includes exposure to unlawful killings, sexual violence, arbitrary detention incommunicado, torture, extortion, and more.

The breakdown of the Swiss peacekeeping process reveals a deep-seated problem at the heart of resolving the conflict in anglophone Cameroon: the long-running lack of political will to address these issues. Our research to date has revealed the historic and ongoing complicity of several powerful international states in the conflict, which includes the UK, France, Germany, the US, China, and others (see Willis et al. 2020). Despite incurring a moral responsibility that attaches to entering into military and trade agreements with governments which grievously harm minority populations, and to channelling funds (whether directly or indirectly) into military operations and state activities, international states which continue so to partner with such authoritarian regimes enable the perpetuation of violence against civilian populations. These governments are complicit in the continuing conflict and abuses.

During the reporting period, the Swiss peace talks terminated. The withdrawal of the Swiss government from the peace process in Cameroon followed several years of stalled progress, during which a lack of political will nationally and internationally to resolve the conflict became evident. While there were promising developments with the Canadian government taking over the peacebuilding process, in recent months, similar patterns have emerged. Again, there is a notable lack of political will to engage in peace talks, both within Cameroon as well as among the international community more broadly.

Recurring difficulties with peace processes leads us to reinstate the following recommendation we made in our previous report (Willis et al. 2020):

- For nation states and other international parties to act multilaterally and place concerted pressure on the Cameroon government to end the violence, whether through trade sanctions, aid cuts, or other means.

Multilateral action, alongside an active peacebuilding process, is the only viable way for progress to be made.

In prevailing political conditions, in which the conflict in anglophone Cameroon continues to be widely dismissed and ignored, the work of civil society organisations to document human rights abuses is crucial. This report is indebted to such efforts. Even when peace and justice appear unattainable in the short term, collective efforts will ensure that one day these goals are achieved.

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