



# WITH OR AGAINST US

PEOPLE OF THE NORTH-WEST REGION OF CAMEROON CAUGHT BETWEEN THE ARMY, ARMED SEPARATISTS AND MILITIAS

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**Cover photo:** A separatist fighter of the Ambazonian Defence Forces photographed in Borrero, Cameroon, on 13 February 2019

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# CONTENTS

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>MAP</b>	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
<b>3. BACKGROUND: FROM PROTESTS TO ARMED VIOLENCE</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 FROM GRIEVANCES TO WEAPONS	11
3.1.1 THE ROOTS OF THE CRISIS	11
3.1.2 ESCALATION TO ARMED VIOLENCE	12
ARMED SEPARATIST GROUPS	13
SEPARATISTS' INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS	14
REINFORCEMENT OF ARMED FORCES	15
3.1.3 POPULATION KILLED BY ALL FIGHTING SIDES	16
3.2 IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION, THE MBORORO FULANI CAUGHT IN THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS	17
3.2.1 THE MBORORO FULANI	17
3.2.2 LONG-TERM LAND DISPUTES AS FUEL FOR ARMED VIOLENCE	18
3.2.3 THE MBORORO FULANI AND ARMED SEPARATISTS AGAINST EACH OTHER	19
3.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK	21
3.3.1 WITH REGARDS TO THE VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY ARMED GROUPS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES AND MILITIAS IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGIONS	21
3.3.2 WITH REGARD TO THE AUTHORITIES' RESPONSE TO THE ARMED VIOLENCE IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGION	22
<b>4. CRIMES AGAINST THE POPULATION IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 CRIMES COMMITTED BY ARMED SEPARATISTS	24
4.1.1 A CLIMATE OF HOSTILITY AGAINST MBORORO FULANI	25
4.1.2 MURDERS	26
4.1.3 ABDUCTIONS	29
4.1.4 DESTRUCTION OF HOMES	30
4.2 CRIMES COMMITTED BY MILITIAS	32
4.2.1 CRIMES COMMITTED IN MENCHUM DIVISION	32

**CAMEROON. WITH OR AGAINST US**  
PEOPLE OF THE NORTH-WEST REGION CAUGHT BETWEEN THE ARMY, ARMED SEPARATISTS AND MILITIAS

4.2.2 CRIMES COMMITTED IN DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION	34
4.3 HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE CAMEROONIAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES	35
4.3.1 UNLAWFUL KILLINGS AND DESTRUCTION OF HOMES	35
4.3.2 RAPES	38
<b>5. AUTHORITIES' RESPONSE</b>	<b>41</b>
5.1 JUSTICE – OR LACK THEREOF	41
5.1.1 PROCEDURES AGAINST ALLEGED SEPARATISTS	41
5.1.2 PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MEMBERS OF DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES AND MILITIAS	43
5.2 SILENCING OF CRITICS	44
5.2.1 ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, ACTIVISTS AND LAWYERS	44
5.2.2 ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA	46
5.2.3 REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES DENIED ACCESS TO CAMEROON	47
<b>6. ARMS TRANSFERS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS</b>	<b>49</b>
6.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK	49
6.2 MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN CAMEROON AND PARTNERS	50
6.2.1 RISK OF WEAPONS BEING USED TO COMMIT OR FACILITATE SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS	50
6.2.2 PRESENTATION OF THE MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN CAMEROON AND PARTNERS	52
<b>7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>56</b>
TO ALL STATE FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS	57
TO THE CAMEROONIAN AUTHORITIES	57
TO THE UNITED NATIONS	58
TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS	58
TO STATES PROVIDING WEAPONS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO CAMEROON	59

# GLOSSARY

WORD	DESCRIPTION
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
BIR	Rapid Intervention Battalion
CAMASEJ	Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists
CAT	UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHRC	Cameroon Human Rights Commission
CHRDA	Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
GPIGN	<i>Groupement polyvalent d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale</i>
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IED	improvised explosive devices
MBOSCUDA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
SCACUF	Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **“The military is everywhere and Ambas are everywhere”**

Interview with “YG”, 18 November 2022, Bafoussam.

This report documents crimes under domestic law and human rights violations committed by members of the defence and security forces, armed separatists and militias since 2020 in the Anglophone North-West region of Cameroon, and analyses the authorities’ response regarding the need for justice and for the protection of actors that denounce atrocities committed against the population.

The harsh repression by the authorities of the 2016-17 protests calling for an end to the marginalization of the Anglophone minority, followed by the self-proclaimed independence of “Ambazonia” state by separatist leaders has turned into a situation of armed violence in the North-West and South-West Anglophone regions, with the population caught between its various actors.

Despite some losses and dissent within and between their groups, armed separatists (comprised of several geographically identified groups) are still very active, including outside the Anglophone regions. They are strengthening their arsenal of weapons and continuing to attack state officials, and anyone suspected of supporting the central government, or not adhering to their cause. Cameroonian defence and security forces have also strengthened their presence in the Anglophone regions and are conducting operations against separatists and persons suspected of supporting them.

In the North-West specifically, long-standing conflicts between Mbororo Fulani herders and farmers are fuelling armed violence. The Mbororo Fulani populations have been quickly targeted by armed separatists, in part because they are perceived as supporting the authorities in power. As the situation deteriorated, militias mainly composed of Mbororo Fulani, supported or tolerated by the authorities, have committed abuses against the population.

To document this situation, Amnesty International delegates conducted two visits in Cameroon in four different regions, including the North-West, between November 2022 and March 2023. They met in person and talked by phone with more than 100 victims of crimes under domestic law and human rights violations committed in the North-West region in the context of the ongoing armed violence; twelve representatives of national and international NGOs; 10 journalists; eight commissioners of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC). However, requests for meeting with various government ministers did not receive any answer.

This report documents several cases of serious crimes committed by armed separatists against the population in the North-West region, in particular against the Mbororo Fulani, with discriminatory and inflammatory speech targeting this population. Amnesty International has documented several cases of killings in different villages in Donga-Mantung division, the destruction of property and abductions.

It also presents cases of killings and the destruction of homes perpetrated by Mbororo Fulani militias in several villages in Menchum and Donga-Mantung divisions.

The report also documents serious human rights violations committed by the defence and security forces in Bui division, including killings and the destruction of property. Amnesty International has also collected testimonies from women victims of rape and other sexual violence by members of the defence and security forces.

The political and judicial authorities have responded to this situation with further human rights violations. Separatist political leaders and members of civil society, including journalists, were tried and sentenced by military courts for terrorism-related offences, even though military courts should not in any circumstances whatsoever have jurisdiction over civilians according to international and regional human rights norms. People accused of being armed separatists or their supporters have at times been arbitrarily arrested and detained. Meanwhile, very little information has been made available on genuine investigations into the crimes committed by armed separatists against the population, leaving many victims of these crimes waiting for justice.

The government has at times announced investigations and prosecutions of certain human rights violations committed by the armed forces, but apart from the opening of the trial more than two years ago on the Ngarbuh massacre – during which 21 persons, including 13 children, were killed by members of the army forces and militias in 2020 – no further information has been made available on how the proceedings have evolved, raising concerns about de facto impunity in these cases.

In addition, instead of protecting the rights to freedom of expression and to seek information guaranteed by international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Cameroon, the authorities are attempting to silence human rights defenders, activists, lawyers and the media who speak out against atrocities committed in the context of armed violence in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. This report documents cases of judicial proceedings, arbitrary detentions and threats orchestrated by the authorities against those who dare to denounce human rights violations committed by the defence and security forces. It also exposes the many threats made by separatists against those who denounce their crimes.

The Cameroonian authorities have also failed to cooperate effectively with international and regional human rights institutions, which have repeatedly asked to be allowed to visit the country to carry out fact-finding missions, but to no avail.

In this context, Cameroon's international partners, including Belgium, Croatia, France, Israel, Russia, Serbia, the United Kingdom and the USA have continued to cooperate with the country militarily, including through the supply of arms and military equipment. Amnesty International underlines the risk that the military equipment provided by Cameroon's partners could be used by army forces, militias, or armed separatists to commit crimes in the Anglophone regions.

Therefore, among other recommendations, Amnesty International calls on the Cameroonian authorities to:

- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of crimes under domestic law and human rights violations committed by all armed forces in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, including into the state's responsibility for crimes committed by the militias, and prosecute and sentence those responsible in fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty;
- Ensure military tribunals can only have jurisdiction over offences of a purely military nature committed by military personnel;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all persons arbitrarily detained;
- Ensure that arrests and detentions are conducted in compliance with international human rights standards and domestic law, and that all security forces are trained on and understand these norms;
- Ensure that detainees are promptly brought before an ordinary court that upholds international fair trial standards, are informed of the charges against them, and have knowledge of and access to legal procedures allowing them to challenge the legality of their detention;
- Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;

- Take all appropriate measures to protect journalists, human rights defenders and activists who receive threats for having documented or denounced crimes and human rights violations in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions.

Amnesty International also recommends that international partners:

- Condemn crimes and human rights violations committed by Cameroonian security forces, militias and armed separatists, and publicly call on the Government of Cameroon to urgently initiate thorough, independent, impartial investigations into allegations of human rights violations and crimes committed in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions;
- Carry out rigorous, regular risk assessments, unit vetting and post-delivery monitoring, to verify all recipients of arms and related military assistance are operating fully in line with international human rights law;
- Where there is credible evidence that units in receipt of arms or military assistance have committed or facilitated serious human rights violations of international human rights law or humanitarian law, and there are no sufficient measures in place to improve compliance with international human rights law or humanitarian law, immediately cease the provision of all forms of military assistance.



# 2. METHODOLOGY

This report on crimes and human rights violations in the context of the armed violence in the North-West region of Cameroon is the result of research carried out from 2021 to 2023. It covers events from 2016 to May 2023, but mainly focuses on atrocities committed since 2020.

Although both the North-West and South-West Anglophone regions are affected by armed violence, Amnesty International decided to focus on the North-West region, to allow more detailed analysis of the specific dynamics of the armed violence in the region. Indeed, in this region, the long-standing land crisis, often but not always involving the Mbororo herders, has become part of, and fuelled, the armed violence involving armed separatists, the armed forces, as well as Mbororo Fulani militias.

The situation in the North-West and South-West regions does not qualify as “armed conflict” under international humanitarian law. This means that the atrocities detailed in this report are analysed under the framework of international human rights law. In this report, we will refer to “armed violence”, “attacks”, “armed groups” and “militias”, all to be understood in the context of extreme violence in a non-conflict situation.

Amnesty International delegates conducted a first research visit to Cameroon between 13 and 28 November 2022. They went to Yaoundé (Centre region), Douala (Littoral region), Bafoussam (West region), and met with victims of crimes and human rights violations committed in the North-West region in the context of ongoing armed violence.

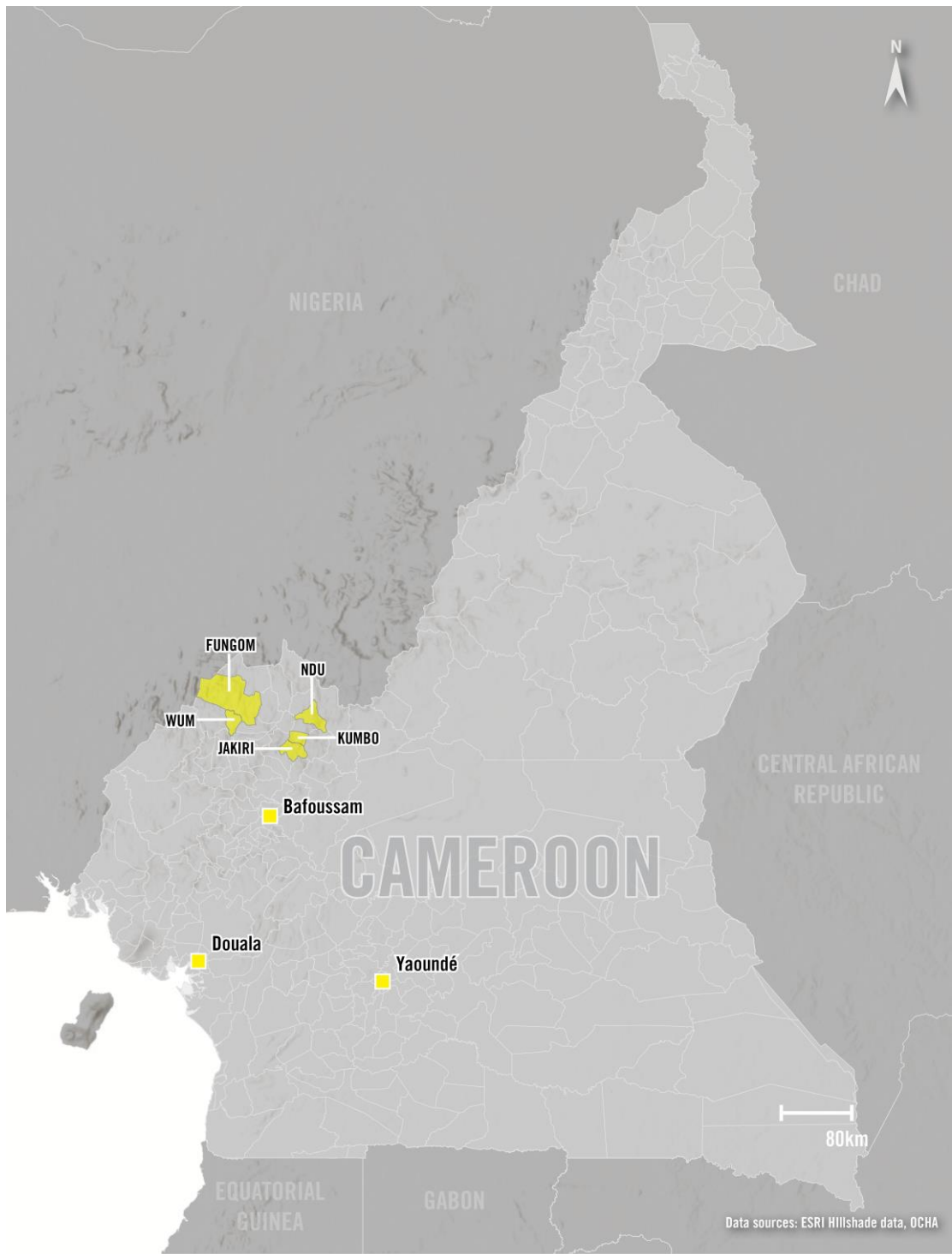
The delegates also met with twelve representatives of national and international NGOs; one journalist; eight members of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), including its vice-president; and nine representatives of the European Union delegation, Canadian, German, USA and United Kingdom embassies. Amnesty International requested meetings with the Ministers of Justice, Territorial Administration and Defence but received no reply.

A second visit was carried out by Amnesty International between March and April 2023 in 15 towns or villages in five subdivisions in the North-West region: Wum, Jakiri, Kumbo, Ndu and Esu.

In total, this report is based on interviews with more than 170 people, including at least 50 women. Interviews with victims were conducted in English, pidgin English, Fulfude, Limbum and Lamso. In accordance with Amnesty International’s policy, the anonymity of some interviewees has been protected at their request, or after the organization’s assessment of the potential risks to these individuals.

Hundreds of articles from news websites and academic research, as well as press releases and statements from the authorities, were also consulted to support the research.

On 5 June 2023, Amnesty International sent by email a letter outlining the main findings of this report and offering the right to reply to the Office of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice of Cameroon. The Minister of Justice’s office was unwilling to give an official email address to Amnesty International. The organization sent a similar letter to the Minister of Defence. To date, Amnesty International has not received any response from these authorities.



 ↑ Places visited by Amnesty International delegates- Evidence Lab of Amnesty International.

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# 3. BACKGROUND: FROM PROTESTS TO ARMED VIOLENCE

**“People are using this crisis for revenge”**

A member of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (Mboscuda).

## 3.1 FROM GRIEVANCES TO WEAPONS

### 3.1.1 THE ROOTS OF THE CRISIS

In late 2016, protesters in Cameroon’s Anglophone regions (the North-West and South-West) took to the streets to denounce what they saw as the growing marginalisation of Anglophone linguistic, cultural and educational traditions and systems in various areas, and the failure to improve Anglophone representation in politics. Some demonstrators also called for greater autonomy or secession for the Anglophone regions. The demonstrations (in large part peaceful) and strikes were initially led by lawyers, teachers and students, and eventually involved a wider section of the population. The authorities responded with violence.

Security forces were responsible for the killing of at least 10 peaceful protesters between October 2016 and February 2017.<sup>1</sup> On 13 November 2016, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) denounced “the disproportionate and deathly use of force and violence to dispel peaceful and unarmed lawyers, teachers, students, civilians and protesters in Bamenda, Buea and Kumba; the raping of students in Buea; the arbitrary arrests, detention and merciless beatings orchestrated by the police, gendarmerie, military and the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) following strikes and protests that have been going on since October 2016”.

Hundreds of people were arrested between October 2016 and early 2017, including the “Nera ten” separatist leaders,<sup>2</sup> protest organizers, protest participants and journalists. They included journalists Mancho

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, A turn for the worse: violence and human rights violations in Anglophone Cameroon (AFR 17/8481/2018); 12 June 2018, [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/#:~:text=Search-Cameroon%3A%20turn%20for%20the%20worse%3A%20violence%20and%20human,rights%20violations%20in%20Anglophone%20Cameroon&text=Since%20late%202016%2C%20Cameroon's%20Anglophone,become%20a%20human%20rights%20crisis.](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/#:~:text=Search-Cameroon%3A%20turn%20for%20the%20worse%3A%20violence%20and%20human,rights%20violations%20in%20Anglophone%20Cameroon&text=Since%20late%202016%2C%20Cameroon's%20Anglophone,become%20a%20human%20rights%20crisis.)

<sup>2</sup> Among them Julius Ayuk Tabe, the first “President of the Interim Government of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia”.

Bibixy Tse and Tsi Conrad, and high school vice-principal Penn Terence Khan, who were sentenced by military courts for terrorism-related offences. The ten separatist leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment, Mancho Bibixy Tse to 15 years' imprisonment, Penn Terence Khan to 12 years' imprisonment and Tsi Conrad to 15 years' imprisonment. In opinions issued on 6 October 2022,<sup>3</sup> September 2019,<sup>4</sup> and May 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the detention of the "Nera 10", Mancho Bibixy and Tsi Conrad were arbitrary, and called for their immediate release.

Various civil society organizations were also banned,<sup>5</sup> and the internet and phone lines were cut. According to the NGO Access Now, the first internet shutdown lasted 94 days, starting on 17 January 2017, and the second lasted from October 2017 to March 2018.<sup>6</sup> Anglophone activist groups responded with civil disobedience tactics, including school boycotts and "ghost town" protests.

Amnesty International recalls that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, both ratified by Cameroon.

It also recalls that Article 14 of the ICCPR ratified by Cameroon states that "everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law".<sup>7</sup> The Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa clearly state that "military courts should not in any circumstances whatsoever have jurisdiction over civilians".<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1.2 ESCALATION TO ARMED VIOLENCE

The crisis escalated in late 2017, after separatist leaders united to form the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF), led by chairman Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, and declared the independence of the "Federal Republic of Ambazonia" on 1 October 2017. This announcement was quickly followed by attacks on security forces, especially gendarmes and police, with at least 44 of them killed between September 2017 and May 2018 in both the North-West and South-West regions.<sup>9</sup>

Since 2017, clashes between the Cameroonian military and armed separatists have left both Anglophone regions embroiled in armed violence. Armed violence is now a common occurrence, with peaks around symbolic events such as elections, the start of the school year, Cameroon's national day, the anniversary of "Ambazonia's"<sup>10</sup> declaration of independence, and sporting events. Such events lead to particularly deadly episodes.<sup>11</sup>

The violence has led to the displacement of 628,000 people to other regions of the country, and of 87,000 people to neighbouring Nigeria,<sup>12</sup> representing 20% of the total population of the two Anglophone regions.<sup>13</sup>

The situation is now locked in what some consider as a stalemate. "The Ambazonians'<sup>14</sup> military capacity and weapons are growing, but they can't completely dislodge the military. Similarly, the army can't reach the Ambazonians in bush areas where they are too well hidden", a diplomat told Amnesty International.<sup>15</sup> As one interviewee declared to Amnesty International delegates: "You can't say, 'this is the military area, this is the Ambazonians' area'. The military is everywhere and the Ambazonians are everywhere".<sup>16</sup> The same road

<sup>3</sup> UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), Opinion No. 59/2022 concerning Julius Ayuk Tabe, Wilfred Fombang Tassang, Ngala Nfor Nfor, Blaise Sevidzem Berinyuy, Elias Ebai Eyambe, Fidelis Ndeh-Che, Egbe Ntui Ogork, Cornelius Njikimbi Kwanga, Henry Tata Kimeng and Cheh Augustine Awasum (Cameroon and Nigeria), <https://shorturl.at/aezHL>

<sup>4</sup> UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), Opinion no 46/2019 on Mancho Bibixy Tse, [www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session85/A\\_HRC\\_WGAD\\_2019\\_46.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session85/A_HRC_WGAD_2019_46.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, "Cameroon: Arrests and civil society bans risk inflaming tensions in English-speaking region", 20 January 2017, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/cameroon-arrests-and-civil-society-bans-risk-inflaming-tensions-in-english-speaking-regions/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/cameroon-arrests-and-civil-society-bans-risk-inflaming-tensions-in-english-speaking-regions/)

<sup>6</sup> Access Now, "Access Now files new legal intervention in Cameroon against shutdowns", 2 August 2018, [www.accessnow.org/access-now-files-supporting-intervention-in-renewed-legal-challenge-to-internet-shutdown-in-cameroon/](http://www.accessnow.org/access-now-files-supporting-intervention-in-renewed-legal-challenge-to-internet-shutdown-in-cameroon/)

<sup>7</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 14.

<sup>8</sup> Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, L.(c)

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, *A turn for the worse: violence and human rights violations in Anglophone Cameroon* (previously cited).

<sup>10</sup> The term 'Ambazonia' is often used by the separatists and their supporters to refer to the claimed territory, which corresponds to the North-West and South-West regions.

<sup>11</sup> VOA, "Scores Killed in Cameroon's Battles with Separatists Ahead of Senate Elections", 21 February 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/scores-killed-in-cameroon-s-battles-with-separatists-ahead-of-senate-elections-/6973130.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/scores-killed-in-cameroon-s-battles-with-separatists-ahead-of-senate-elections-/6973130.html)

<sup>12</sup> OCHA, "Cameroon: North-West and South-West, Situation report n° 52, March 2023".

<sup>13</sup> National Institute of Statistics, "Enquête complémentaire à la quatrième enquête camerounaise auprès des ménages", 2020.

<sup>14</sup> "Ambazonians" is the name the separatists for the independence of "Ambazonia" have given themselves. This name is often used by other actors or observers to refer to them, as is the abbreviation "Ambas".

<sup>15</sup> Meeting with diplomat, 25 November 2022, Yaoundé.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with "YG", 18 November 2022, Bafoussam.

can be under army control at some checkpoints and under separatist control at others, as the delegates observed.

The overall death toll resulting from armed violence is difficult to estimate in the absence of governmental data or communications, and due to the difficulty to corroborate data shared by separatist groups.<sup>17</sup> Some NGOs have estimated death tolls of up to “over 6,000”, but without sources to support these estimates.<sup>18</sup> Unofficial counting of military losses has been conducted by one social media activist who estimated that 1,434 soldiers had been killed as of 26 June 2023 in the armed violence.<sup>19</sup>

## ARMED SEPARATIST GROUPS

Analysis of the evolution of the armed violence has shown that some of the armed separatist groups, despite their internal divisions and frequent attacks by the army against them, have maintained their capacity to conduct armed attacks, even beyond the two Anglophone regions.

Indeed, the armed separatists operate mainly in the two Anglophone regions, but attacks and incidents attributed to them have spread to the West and Littoral regions. These include an attack on the Galim Gendarmerie and Public Security Brigade on the night of 7-8 March 2020, in which two gendarmes, two policemen and four people were killed in the village of Galim (Bamboutos division, West region).<sup>20</sup> The government reported that the attackers were “heavily armed, estimated at around fifty individuals”.<sup>21</sup> A group also claimed responsibility for the attack on the *Groupement polyvalent d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale* (GPIGN) in Njitapon (West region) on 8 June 2022, in which nine soldiers were killed.<sup>22</sup> Other attacks against armed forces and people in the West regions occurred in Matazem (Bamboutos division) on 8 January 2021,<sup>23</sup> in Babadjou (Bamboutos division) on 28 June 2021,<sup>24</sup> and in Fondonera (Nou division) in July 2022.<sup>25</sup> On 1 May 2023, armed separatists killed at least six people, including members of the defence and security forces, in Matouké (Littoral region) according to media reports citing authorities,<sup>26</sup> and separatist social networks.

The armed separatists have organized themselves into several groups, mostly on a geographical basis, which is reflected in their names (Bui Unity Warriors, Mountain Fako Lions, Lebialem Red Dragons, Marine Forces of Bambalang, Buffalos of Bali Nyonga and so on). Their hierarchy is often structured around an appointed “general”. Some of these groups have reached a significant level of organization and armament (see following section), as they can consist of dozens of heavily armed fighters<sup>27</sup> and are capable of carrying out deadly guerrilla-style attacks against military positions.

These groups have been characterized by patterns of divisions and reunification. Fighting between them has been reported on several occasions, and allegations of infiltration within the groups by military or pro-authority individuals have led to purges and murders.<sup>28</sup> These divisions mirror those of the separatist political leadership. Initially, the separatist political movement was represented by a so-called “Interim Government” (IG) led by Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, who is in Kondengui prison in Yaoundé after being sentenced to life imprisonment (see section 4.1.1).

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<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group alluded to 6,000 dead in 2019, and also 6,000 in 2022.

<sup>19</sup> N'Zui Manto, Twitter post, 18 May 2023, <https://twitter.com/MantoZui/status/1659126506415616000>

<sup>20</sup> CRTV, “NW/SW: 8 killed in separatist attack in Galim”, 8 March 2020, [www.crtv.cm/2020/03/nw-sw-8-killed-in-separatist-attack-in-galim/](http://www.crtv.cm/2020/03/nw-sw-8-killed-in-separatist-attack-in-galim/)

<sup>21</sup> Cameroon Tribune, « Attaque terroriste de Galim et attentat à Bamenda : le gouvernement condamne des actes criminels », 9 mars 2020, [www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30955/fr.html/attaque-terroriste-de-galim-attentat-bamenda-le-gouvernement-condamne](http://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30955/fr.html/attaque-terroriste-de-galim-attentat-bamenda-le-gouvernement-condamne)

<sup>22</sup> VOA, “Cameroon Deploys Troops after Deadly Separatist Attack on Military Post”, 9 June 2022, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-deploys-troops-after-deadly-separatist-attack-on-military-post-6610040.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-deploys-troops-after-deadly-separatist-attack-on-military-post-6610040.html)

<sup>23</sup> Cameroon Tribune, « Attaque de Matazem : la compassion du chef de l'État », 20 January 2021, [www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/38051/en.html/attaques-de-matazem-la-compassion-du-chef-de-letat](http://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/38051/en.html/attaques-de-matazem-la-compassion-du-chef-de-letat)

<sup>24</sup> Cameroon News Agency, « Attaque au village Pia dans la Menoua », [www.facebook.com/CAMEROONNEWSAGENCY/posts/pfbid0362SEdYSKoyXudBrvQBKWN17sb9H19bv1yXeGLF5mzLanch8bK45vpoBNW9LsyE45I](http://www.facebook.com/CAMEROONNEWSAGENCY/posts/pfbid0362SEdYSKoyXudBrvQBKWN17sb9H19bv1yXeGLF5mzLanch8bK45vpoBNW9LsyE45I)

<sup>25</sup> Equinox TV, 8 July 2022, [www.facebook.com/equinoxe.television/videos/1418488271997364/](http://www.facebook.com/equinoxe.television/videos/1418488271997364/)

<sup>26</sup> VOA, “Cameroon Separatists Stage Attack Near French-Speaking City of Douala”, 2 May 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-separatists-stage-attack-near-french-speaking-city-of-douala/7075202.html?fbclid=IwAR1KRxJLE5-Btn03kSyR7kljKwPuILCn8lu-OTVvbMaCQ170gtvlaAZgII](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-separatists-stage-attack-near-french-speaking-city-of-douala/7075202.html?fbclid=IwAR1KRxJLE5-Btn03kSyR7kljKwPuILCn8lu-OTVvbMaCQ170gtvlaAZgII)

<sup>27</sup> For example, in videos seen by Amnesty International, the “Marines of Bambalang”, led by Clément Mbashie, alias “General No Pity”, appear to have at least 75 heavily armed fighters on motorbikes.

<sup>28</sup> VOA, “Cameroon’s rival separatist groups clash, kill fighters”, 16 February 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-s-rival-separatist-groups-clash-kill-fighters-/6444121.html>

While in detention in 2019, he declared the dissolution of the cabinet of his successor, the interim president Samuel Ikome Sako, leading to the existence of several contenders for the leadership of the separatist movement.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these divisions, the army has also killed some particularly active and high-profile “warlords”, like “Field Marshall”, leader of the “Red Dragons of Lebiale”, on 12 July 2022, and “General Ivo” in 2018.



BIR military exposes the corpse of Olivier Lekeaka aka “Field Marshall” in the streets of Kumba (South-West), on 15 July 2022. © Private.

## SEPARATISTS’ INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS

Separatist groups have considerably improved their weapon arsenal. During a visit to Bamenda (North-West) on 22 September 2021, the Minister of Defence stated that these groups were “obviously equipped with increasingly sophisticated equipment and benefiting, this is an established fact, from human and external material support”.<sup>30</sup> He also stated that “this new paradigm of the security situation, which is already in the process of consolidation in this Region, as in that of the South-West, warrants a change of approach in the action of the Defense and Security Forces”.

Armed separatists are also increasingly using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).<sup>31</sup> In September 2021, the media, echoing government information, reported that in the same month, “separatist rebels killed 15 Cameroonian soldiers and several civilians in two bomb attacks” in Kumbo and Bamessing (North-West).<sup>32</sup> On 7 December 2022, separatist leader Daniel Capo claimed responsibility for the killing of eight soldiers “on the Jakiri-Kumbo road” on social media, with two vehicles directly hit by RPG.<sup>33</sup>

The number of non-military casualties attributable to IEDs is difficult to estimate. On 25 February 2023, the day of the Mount Cameroon race, several IEDs detonated along the racetrack, leaving over 19 people injured, including three children.<sup>34</sup> Separatists claimed responsibility.<sup>35</sup> In Momo division (North-West) in

<sup>29</sup> The Africa Report, “Cameroon: Who makes up the Ambazonian government and diaspora?”, 23 September 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/235415/cameroon-who-makes-up-the-ambazonian-government-and-diaspora/>

<sup>30</sup> Cameroon-info.net, “Cameroon – Anglophone Crisis: Defence Minister Pays Emergency Visit To Bamenda, Announces Change In Military Approach Against Separatist Fighters”, 23 September 2021, [www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroon-anglophone-crisis-defence-minister-pays-emergency-visit-to-bamenda-announces-change-in-military-404589.html](http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroon-anglophone-crisis-defence-minister-pays-emergency-visit-to-bamenda-announces-change-in-military-404589.html)

<sup>31</sup> VOA, “Cameroon Decries Beheading of Government Troops by Suspected Separatists”, 2 July 2021, [www.voanews.com/a/africa\\_cameroon-decries-beheading-government-troops-suspected-separatists/6207756.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-decries-beheading-government-troops-suspected-separatists/6207756.html)

<sup>32</sup> Reuters, “Cameroon separatists kill 15 soldiers in attacks using explosives”, 21 September 2021, [www.reuters.com/world/africa/cameroon-separatists-kill-15-soldiers-attacks-using-explosives-2021-09-20/](http://www.reuters.com/world/africa/cameroon-separatists-kill-15-soldiers-attacks-using-explosives-2021-09-20/)

<sup>33</sup> Ambazonia Communication Network (ACN), Facebook post, 7 December 2022, [www.facebook.com/acntelelevision/videos/696761705128536/](https://www.facebook.com/acntelelevision/videos/696761705128536/)

<sup>34</sup> VOA, “19 People Injured in Blast at Cameroon Sports Event”, 25 February 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/people-injured-in-blast-at-cameroon-sports-event-/6979066.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/people-injured-in-blast-at-cameroon-sports-event-/6979066.html)

<sup>35</sup> Capo Daniel statement on his YouTube account, 25 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lytsfd23vl4>

November 2002, two children were seriously injured when a suspected IED they were playing with exploded. One of the children had to have his hand amputated.<sup>36</sup> About 20 IED incidents were reported in February in both the North-West and South-West, with most of them registered in the North-West, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).<sup>37</sup>

With regard to the origin of the weapons used by the armed separatists, Amnesty International highlights the different types of weapons identified in propaganda videos in chapter 7 of this report; these show a significant number have been taken from government supplies, following attacks on the defence and security forces.

Moreover, the army announced in 2021 that armed separatists had, for the first time, used anti-tank rockets smuggled from Nigeria to attack army convoys.<sup>38</sup> These allegations are backed up by several arrests and convictions in the United States of America (USA), some of which have exposed the illegal trafficking of arms to separatist fighters by members of the diaspora. For example, on 21 March 2023, a man was sentenced in the USA to 63 months in prison. According to a statement by the Department of Justice,<sup>39</sup> “the convicted person and his co-conspirators contributed funds for the purchase of firearms, ammunition, reloading materials and other equipment for shipping overseas to separatists fighting against the Government of Cameroon”.

Separatists have also been active in online fundraising on social media. One of them offered the opportunity to fund “Operation 200 AKs”, to “equip our soldiers by committing today to the purchase of an AK47”.<sup>40</sup> The online presentation explains that “all donations go directly to the purchase of the AGovC / ADF”.



 Visual from the “200 AKs” fundraising campaign on Facebook.

## REINFORCEMENT OF ARMED FORCES

Since the beginning of the armed violence, the Cameroonian authorities have increased the military presence in the Anglophone regions. State media announced the creation of a fifth military region on 21 February 2018, covering the West and North-West regions, with headquarters in Bamenda (North-West). These two regions were previously covered by the second military region in Douala, Littoral region.

On 8 September 2022, a “logistical base for Rapid Intervention Bataillon field operations” was inaugurated in Wum (Menchum division, North-West region). On this occasion, the BIR general coordinator stated: “For those who had doubts and were saying that the BIR was going to leave Wum – the BIR is here to stay, for a long time.”

The Anglophone Crisis Monitoring Project, an independent initiative to document human rights violations and crimes in the Anglophone regions, based on open sources, also showed how the airport of Bamenda –

<sup>36</sup> OCHA, Situation report, 30 December 2022, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/cameroon/>

<sup>37</sup> OCHA, “Cameroon: North-West and South-West, Situation report n° 51; February 2023”, <https://shorturl.at/uzl25>

<sup>38</sup> VOA, “Cameroon: Rebels Use Smuggled Anti-Tank Rockets to Kill 28 People”, 23 September 2021, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-rebels-use-smuggled-anti-tank-rockets-to-kill-28-people-/6242727.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-rebels-use-smuggled-anti-tank-rockets-to-kill-28-people-/6242727.html)

<sup>39</sup> Department of Justice, “Maryland Resident Sentenced to Over Five Years in Federal Prison for Illegally Transporting Firearms with Obliterated Serial Numbers and Smuggling Firearms to Nigeria”, 21 March 2023, [www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/maryland-resident-sentenced-over-five-years-federal-prison-illegally-transporting](http://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/maryland-resident-sentenced-over-five-years-federal-prison-illegally-transporting)

<sup>40</sup> Operation 200 AKs, <https://ttof.net/donations/aks/>

home to a BIR base – “has seen major security investment since the crisis began”. According to satellite imagery, “a new helicopter facility has been added, complete with two helipads to the south of the airport apron. The buildings of the BIR complex have been reroofed, and some small new buildings added to that facility”. The defence and security forces, whose numbers remain opaque, have also reportedly undertaken significant recruitment in recent years.

The lack of transparency in defence spending prevents a proper assessment of the budgetary effort devoted to state military and security operations in the Anglophone regions in recent years. Indeed, part of the governmental funding of the defence and security sector comes from direct interventions by the National Hydrocarbons Corporation (SNH). “These are emergency payments made by SNH on behalf of the government, mainly to meet exceptional sovereignty and security expenses”, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

According to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative’s 2020 report on Cameroon,<sup>41</sup> direct interventions by the National Hydrocarbons Corporation in 2020 funded twelve structures, including the BIR with 112.8 billion CFA francs (approximately 170 million euros), the Ministry of Defence with 32.7 billion CFA francs (approximately 50 million euros) the General Delegation for National Security (GDNS) with 5.1 billion CFA francs (approximately 7.9 million euros) and the Directorate General for External Research (DGRE) with 1.1 billion CFA francs (approximately 1.6 million euros).



 ↑ *The BIR camp in Wum, inaugurated on 8 September 2022 © Private.*

### 3.1.3 POPULATION KILLED BY ALL FIGHTING SIDES

In a context of prolonged armed violence, the people of the North-West and South-West regions have found themselves caught between the Cameroonian army, armed separatists (whose distinction from criminal groups has become increasingly blurred) and militias, mainly composed of Mbororo Fulani people (see section 4.2.3).

The army and Mbororo Fulani militias have committed unlawful killings during operations, as sometimes acknowledged by the Cameroonian authorities. For example, on 7 June 2022, the Ministry of Defence stated that the Cameroonian army had killed nine unarmed people in the town of Missong (Fungom subdivision, Menchum division) on the evening of 1 June 2022, “in an inappropriate reaction, inadequate to the circumstances and clearly disproportionate to the refusal of the hostile villagers to cooperate”.<sup>42</sup> They have also often destroyed houses in collective retaliation against communities who are said to support or tolerate the armed separatists, or to be unwilling to help the authorities.

Armed separatists have also murdered civil servants, workers in state-controlled companies, people accused of being “black legs” (traitors), and people who have not complied with their orders, such as “ghost towns”, school closures and other restrictions on movement. Several women were beheaded: Florence

<sup>41</sup> <https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Rapport-ITIE-Cameroun-2020-Final.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Radio-press release”, 7 June 2022.



Ayafor, a 46-year-old woman who worked at Bamenda Central Prison, was abducted on her way to Bamenda in September 2020 and later raped, killed and dismembered by suspected armed separatists. The video of the crime circulated on social media; national human rights organizations denounced the crime,<sup>43</sup> and the Ministry of Defence announced the presentation of two suspects to the media in July 2020.<sup>44</sup> Another woman was found beheaded on a road in Bali Nyonga on 20 February 2023, according to pictures shared on social media, and reports from media. The victim was reportedly killed because armed separatists accused her of being an informer for the authorities. Five employees of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) – known as the country’s largest employer – who were returning from work were killed on 10 February 2023 by “unidentified gunmen” near Tiko (South-West), and 44 others were wounded.<sup>45</sup> A separatist leader claimed responsibility for the attack in a video posted on Facebook, in which he said: “Cameroon will not continue to exploit Ambazonia resources”.<sup>46</sup>

Armed separatists have also frequently targeted teachers, students and schools, accusing them of being agents of centrally imposed education. According to a statement issued by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC) on 9 September 2022,<sup>47</sup> alleged armed separatists abducted 346 secondary school students since the 2018/2019 school year in the North-West, and killed five since 2020. Fifty-one secondary school teachers and administrative staff in the same region were also abducted during the 2021/2022 academic year (308 in total since 2018/2019), among whom 22 were killed in 2021 and 2022, and 120 in total since 2018-2019.

489 secondary schools have been attacked in the North-West since 2018. Out of the 6,515 schools expected to open during the 2022-2023 academic year in the North-West and South-West, only 3,013 were operational as of January 2023, with insecurity as the primary reason for this, according to OCHA.

## 3.2 IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION, THE MBORORO FULANI CAUGHT IN THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS

### 3.2.1 THE MBORORO FULANI

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights’ Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities states that “the Mbororo are found in Central and West Africa such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Central African Republic. Some of them are nomadic pastoralists while others practice mixed farming. The Mbororo are subdivided into three main groups: the Jafun, the Woodabe and the Aku.”<sup>48</sup> In the absence of official data, the Mbororo population in Cameroon is estimated to less than two million, including approximately 80,000 in the North-West region.<sup>49</sup>

In this report, the terms “Fulani”, “Mbororo”, “Aku”, “herders” and “graziers” are used interchangeably by some interviewees and witnesses to refer generally to Fulani in the North-West region. Because the different names used can be confusing, Amnesty International has chosen to use the term “Mbororo Fulani” in this report, after seeking the views of some members of this community and community-based associations on how they define themselves.

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<sup>43</sup> Nouveaux Droits de l’Homme, “Cameroun, crise anglophone, la cruauté gagne du terrain”, 21 February 2019, <http://ndhcam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Communique-aff-Florence-Ayafor.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ministère de la Défense du Cameroun, Facebook post, 14 July 2020, [https://www.facebook.com/453680038150694/posts/presentation-des-premiers-suspects-de-lassassinat-de-dame-florence-ayafor-au-min/1493901724128515/?locale=pt\\_BR](https://www.facebook.com/453680038150694/posts/presentation-des-premiers-suspects-de-lassassinat-de-dame-florence-ayafor-au-min/1493901724128515/?locale=pt_BR)

<sup>45</sup> Cameroon Development Corporation, Press release, <https://cdc-cameroon.net/new2014/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/press-release.jpg>

<sup>46</sup> Capo Daniel, Facebook post, 12 February 2023, [www.facebook.com/CapoDanielDDC/videos/944586570237753/](http://www.facebook.com/CapoDanielDDC/videos/944586570237753/)

<sup>47</sup> Statement by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission to mark the international day to protect education from attack, 9 September 2022.

<sup>48</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Report of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Pius W. Akumbu and Esther P. Chie, “Multilingualism among the Mbororo of the North-West Region of Cameroon: An overview”, 1 September 2022, HAL open science, <https://hal.science/hal-03691745/document#:~:text=The%20Mbororo%20are%20known%20by,They%20are%20predominantly%20Muslim.>

The Mbororo Fulani have been recognized as a marginalized Indigenous people by several institutions of Cameroon. For example, the CHRC stated on 9 August 2022 that “the indigenous people in Cameroon continue to encounter difficulties that tend to marginalize them”,<sup>50</sup> such as the “community exclusion of the Mbororo, characterized by expulsions from the land where they carry out their agro-pastoral activities”.<sup>51</sup>

However, despite being recognized as an Indigenous people, the Mbororo has not been granted any specific rights nor other type of protection in the country. In its 2022 review of Cameroon, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination “[regretted] the lack of information on the progress in finalizing the studies on national and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, which have been under preparation since 2013”. It also expressed concerns about “the lack of information on the preparation and adoption of the bill on the rights of indigenous peoples.”<sup>52</sup> As of June 2023, no information was available regarding developments on this process.

The State should pay special attention to them, since Articles 21 and 22 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the African Charter) guarantee to all peoples the right to “freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources”, and “the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity (...) The preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 states that “the State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law”.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2.2 LONG-TERM LAND DISPUTES AS FUEL FOR ARMED VIOLENCE

The North-West region has a long history of land conflicts, not only involving the Mbororo Fulani. However, they are often at the centre of disputes in a context of frequent intervention by the authorities in favour of one or other of the parties, which has helped to fuel resentment and a sense of injustice.

Academic researchers have attributed these long-standing land conflicts to several causes, including “the conquering of space by Fulani herders, uncoordinated grazing practices, and farmers’ constant search for but tenuous access to fertile farmlands [which] are increasingly putting both partners at loggerheads”.<sup>54</sup>

Historian Jabiru Mohammadou Adamou, from Yaoundé University, explains that “in the early 20th century, (more precisely 1916) when they arrived in the North-West Region, [the Fulani] were warmly received by their hosts. This was thanks to the economic input seen in the cattle they introduced in the region and the heavy taxes paid to the government. With time, the quest for grazing land in an environment of increasing population of farmers put the Fulani on daily conflicts with their neighbouring farmers. The Fulani were henceforth regarded as ‘undesirable strangers’ and the local farming population clamoured for their expulsion”.<sup>55</sup>

This situation has led to several incidents, including intercommunal killings, in several areas in recent decades, including Wum in 1981, and Mbengwi subdivision (Momo division) in July 2015.<sup>56</sup> A study released in 2014 showed that an overwhelming majority (75%) of the 840 households surveyed in 14 communities of the North-West region had been involved in at least one “conflict situation” over the past three years.<sup>57</sup> Other research focused on Tubah subdivision (Mezam division), noted a “tremendous

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<sup>50</sup> Cameroon Human Rights Commission, Statement by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission to mark the international day of the world’s Indigenous people, 9 August 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Cameroon Human Rights Commission, “Statement to mark the international day of the world’s indigenous peoples”, 9 August 2022.

<sup>52</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, *Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon*, Distr.: General 26 May 2022,

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FCMR%2FCO%2F22-23&Lang=fr](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FCMR%2FCO%2F22-23&Lang=fr)

<sup>53</sup> Republic of Cameroon, Law n° 96/06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972,

[www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en](http://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en)

<sup>54</sup> Patience Munge Sone, “Conflict over land ownership: The case of farmers and cattle graziers in the North West region of Cameroon”, [www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/view/78702](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/view/78702)

<sup>55</sup> Jabiru Muhammadou Amadou, “From Nomads to Nationals, From Nationals to Undesirable Elements: The Case of the Mbororo/Fulani in North West Cameroon 1916-2008 A Historical Investigation”, in *International Journal of Latest Engineering and Management Research (IJLEMR)*, Volume 03 - Issue 06, p.10-19, June 2018.

<sup>56</sup> *Report on the farmer-grazer conflict, Mbengwi Sub-Division*, For presentation to the S.D.O., Momo Division and the Governor, North West Region, Cameroon, 23 September 2015, [http://capacityfordevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/21092015\\_Report-to-Governor\\_r2.pdf](http://capacityfordevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/21092015_Report-to-Governor_r2.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> *In search of common ground for farmer-grazer conflicts in the North-West region of Cameroon*, August 2014, <https://shorturl.at/aeKrX>

increase in the deaths of cattle beginning from 2011-2015, all this orchestrated by the fact that there are too many mouths to feed which brings about competition for the available land (...).<sup>58</sup>

This long trend of conflict over land in the region, while not the root cause of the crisis that began in the two Anglophone regions in 2016, has helped to fuel it. After the outbreak of armed violence, localities with a history of frequent land conflicts have been particularly affected by armed violence involving both armed separatists and militias composed of Mbororo Fulani. Many of the people interviewed by Amnesty International on cases of armed violence mentioned pre-existing land conflicts.

A member of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (Mboscuda) told Amnesty International: "The war differs from division to division, from subdivision to subdivision. In these areas where the Mbororo are being killed at a high rate, if you look at the history you will see that there have been previous conflicts between farmers and herders. People are using the crisis for revenge."<sup>59</sup>

A member of Laimaru, a "protective organization for indigenous and minority groups",<sup>60</sup> told Amnesty International:

**"Old conflicts between farmers and herders are resurfacing with the conflict. People who felt aggrieved by judicial and other decisions are now taking their revenge by relying on the Amba boys to take justice into their own hands, since there is no law today."<sup>61</sup>**

### 3.2.3 THE MBORORO FULANI AND ARMED SEPARATISTS AGAINST EACH OTHER

#### THE MBORORO FULANI TARGETED BY ARMED SEPARATISTS

The outbreak of armed violence in the Anglophone regions quickly made the Mbororo Fulani community a target for crimes committed by armed separatists in the North-West region.

This is firstly for geographical reasons, because the Mbororo Fulani and the armed separatists live in the same areas. "The Fulani live on the outskirts of the towns. The Ambazonians, when they took up arms, also went to the outskirts. So, the Fulani were the people they encountered the most and therefore, in their eyes, the most likely to denounce them," a person told Amnesty International.<sup>62</sup> "Armed groups benefit from the fact that the Mbororo populations are scattered over the hills [where they also operate] to cause so many atrocities [to them]", the senior divisional officer for Donga-Mantung division told state broadcaster CRTV, according to a media report.<sup>63</sup> Interlocutors also underline that "Mbororo property [cattle] is vulnerable, making them prime targets for separatist groups looking for food or money to fund themselves".<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, the Mbororo Fulani have often been perceived by separatist groups as politically hostile to their struggle, including because, unlike most of the populations they live alongside, they have historically voted in favour of the main ruling party.<sup>65</sup> This is in addition to the numerous land conflicts discussed in the above section, which have also contributed to tensions between Mbororo Fulani and communities to which the armed separatists belong.

The Mbororo Fulani met by Amnesty International all explained that some members of their communities were initially targeted by the armed separatists, either for forced recruitment or for abduction and extortion,

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<sup>58</sup> Sop Sop Maturin Désiré, Abossolo Samuel Aimé, Nuebissi Simo Joseph Landry, Mbarga Manga J.M.V, Batha Romain Armand Soleil, "Land use conflicts in North West region: The case opposing the Mbororo pastoralist and the indigenous crop cultivators in Tubah Sub division", January 2015, World Wide Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, <https://shorturl.at/gEWY9>

<sup>59</sup> Interview with "YG", 18 November 2022, Bafoussam.

<sup>60</sup> <https://laimaru.org/fr/>

<sup>61</sup> Interview in person with "SB", November 2022, Yaoundé.

<sup>62</sup> Interview in person with "SB", November 2022, Yaoundé.

<sup>63</sup> VOA, "Cameroon Says Separatists Attack Border Mbororo Ethnic Community", 9 April 2022, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-says-separatists-attack-border-mbororo-ethnic-community/6522238.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-says-separatists-attack-border-mbororo-ethnic-community/6522238.html)

<sup>64</sup> Interview in person with "SB", November 2022, Yaoundé.

<sup>65</sup> Studies of Fulani voting behavior in the North-West during the 1990s has shown that that the majority of them voted for the ruling Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement party (CPDM).

and that it was impossible to remain neutral in such a context, leading them to collaborate with the armed forces in some areas.<sup>66</sup>

The same trend was reported by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), a regional human rights organization,<sup>67</sup> and the CHRC stated in 2021 that “since the beginning of the current socio-political unrest in the North-West and South-West regions, there have been open and recurrent conflicts between the Mbororos and other neighbouring communities. The Mbororos are victims of kidnappings for ransom, theft of livestock, burning of homes, forced displacement, torture and killing by secessionist terrorists who accuse them of not supporting their struggle”.<sup>68</sup>

## ABOUT THE MILITIAS

As the armed violence escalated, and under different circumstances, humanitarian actors, separatist groups, national NGOs and academics have all reported the existence of “Fulani armed groups” on the side of the authorities. The support or tolerance of these militias by the authorities was highlighted by accounts of the Ngarbuh massacre, testimonies given to Amnesty International by victims of these militias (see section 5.1), members of Mbororo Fulani communities, and reports from national human rights organizations and media. However, information on their creation, composition, armament, dependence and hierarchical links with the defence and security forces and authorities remain scarce and imprecise.

In January 2020, OCHA reported “a new dynamic”,<sup>69</sup> with “violence between the Fulani (Mbororo), local communities and non-state armed groups”, resulting in “house burning, civilian casualties and displacement of civilians”. In the same month, the state-run Cameroon Tribune newspaper reported the existence of “vigilante groups”<sup>70</sup> when the governor of the North-West Region presented “Presidential gifts” to the region’s seven senior divisional officers, intended for “the vigilante groups in their various jurisdictions for the security of the population”.<sup>71</sup> According to the article, the gifts included “42 motorcycles, megaphones, vests, first-aid kits, solar torches, protective coats, metal detectors”, with no mention of the supply of weapons.

One month later, on 14 February 2020, army forces accompanied by militiamen<sup>72</sup> killed 21 people in Ngarbuh (Ntumbaw village, Ndu subdivision, Donga-Mantung division).<sup>73</sup> This crime was confirmed by the report of the Commission of Inquiry set up by the Cameroonian authorities under international pressure,<sup>74</sup> which states<sup>75</sup> that the commander of a reconnaissance mission who left his base in Ntumbaw on 13 February “decided to recruit 17 members of a local vigilante group”.

According to a 2021 IFRI report, based in part on testimonies gathered in the North-West, “the Fulani militias provide intelligence and manpower to the security forces”, and some Mbororo Fulani militias have recruited fighters in Nigeria.<sup>76</sup>

In a 2021 report by CHRDA called “The Fulani Problem in the North-West of Cameroon”,<sup>77</sup> the NGO wrote that “during the escalation phase of the crisis in 2018, the government – being aware of the local conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and native communities (people whom the government views as pro-separatists) –

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<sup>66</sup> Interviews in person and by voice call in Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam and in the North-West region with members of the Mbororo Fulani community.

<sup>67</sup> Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, *The Fulani problem in the North-West region of Cameroon*, [www.chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/THE-FULANI-PROBLEM-IN-THE-NWR-AS-2-Beri-1.pdf](http://www.chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/THE-FULANI-PROBLEM-IN-THE-NWR-AS-2-Beri-1.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> Cameroon Human Rights Commission, Statement of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous people, 9 August 2021.

<sup>69</sup> OCHA, Situation Report No. 15, 31 January 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-north-west-and-south-west-crisis-situation-report-no-15-31-january-2020>

<sup>70</sup> Cameroon Tribune, “Vigilante groups in their different jurisdictions for the security and safety of the population”, 10 January 2020, [www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30281/en.html/north-west-head-of-state-empowers-vigilante](http://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30281/en.html/north-west-head-of-state-empowers-vigilante)

<sup>71</sup> Cameroon Tribune, “Vigilante groups in their different jurisdictions for the security and safety of the population”, 10 January 2020, [www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30281/en.html/north-west-head-of-state-empowers-vigilante](http://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/30281/en.html/north-west-head-of-state-empowers-vigilante)

<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Cameroon: Civilians massacred in separatist area”, [www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area)

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Cameroon: Civilians massacred in separatist area”, [www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area)

<sup>74</sup> Placed under the authority of the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence in charge of the National Gendarmerie and chaired by a military judicial and legal officer, the Commission of Inquiry was composed of army and national Gendarmerie officers.

<sup>75</sup> *Communique*, 21 April 2020.

<sup>76</sup> IFRI, « Les Peuls Mbororo dans le conflit anglophone : des luttes foncières locales au conflit régional », Note n° 33, 2021, <https://shorturl.at/oEMNP>

<sup>77</sup> Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, “The Fulani problem in the North-West of Cameroon”, <https://www.chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/THE-FULANI-PROBLEM-IN-THE-NWR-AS-2-Beri-1.pdf>

exploited the loyalty and allegiance of the Mbororo by recruiting them into local vigilante groups, promising them some favourable solutions to their long-standing conflict with the natives”. However, this allegation is not backed up with sources.

A Mbororo Fulani community member confirmed that “in some areas, the government formed vigilantes. Everybody knows that there are vigilantes. But it is not official. There are also natives<sup>78</sup> in the vigilante groups. But when a small incident happens, the Ambas only mention the Mbororo, not the natives.”<sup>79</sup>

Amnesty International interviewed a man from Kimbi, Boyo subdivision, who said that a militia had been formed to protect against attacks by armed separatists, and that the local authorities had been informed:

**“We made groups before the Ambas attacked here because they had already attacked other places. We went to the local authorities of Fonfuka and asked them the permission to create a group of youths to protect ourselves from separatist fighters. We went several times before he accepted, but we did not get anything like weapons or money. We were about 25 in the group.”<sup>80</sup>**

The central government has never acknowledged the existence of government-sponsored militias, nor the existence of regular cooperation between these militias and the defence and security forces. However, the divisional officer for Donga-Mantung told CRTV (State TV) that the government asked the Mbororo Fulani to create militias to collaborate with government troops in protecting goods and people, according to a report from a media.<sup>81</sup>

## 3.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.3.1 WITH REGARDS TO THE VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY ARMED GROUPS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES AND MILITIAS IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGIONS

The situation analysed in this report does not qualify as “armed conflict” and therefore international humanitarian law does not apply.<sup>82</sup> However, at all times, the State of Cameroon has the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, as defined under international human rights law and domestic law.

**“Every person has the right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to human treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment”**

Preamble of the Cameroon Constitution of January 1996.

Cameroonian authorities shall respect and protect the right to life. The right to life is protected, among others, by Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) ratified by Cameroon in 1984,<sup>83</sup> which provides that “every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”; and Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights<sup>84</sup> (ACHPR) ratified by Cameroon in 1989, which states that “human beings are inviolable.

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<sup>78</sup> Term sometimes used to refer to other communities considered to have historical precedence in the region.

<sup>79</sup> Interview in person with “Y”, 18 November 2022, Bafoussam.

<sup>80</sup> Interview in person with “AY”, November 2022, Douala.

<sup>81</sup> VOA, “Cameroon says separatists attack border Mbororo ethnic community”, 9 April 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-says-separatists-attack-border-mbororo-ethnic-community/6522238.html?fbclid=IwAR23Yt6RjS3G2UhKHbYyT8mELQvj790U93zlgS-4qQXXfNwz6SclKZ8h0>

<sup>82</sup> Under international humanitarian law, non-international armed conflicts are protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a State party to the Geneva Conventions. The armed confrontation must reach a minimum level of intensity and the parties involved in the conflict must demonstrate a minimum level of organization. As of June 2023, the ICRC, as well as Amnesty International, considers that the situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon cannot be characterized as a non-international armed conflict.

<sup>83</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966.

<sup>84</sup> African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.”

The 1996 Constitution<sup>85</sup> of Cameroon endorses “the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and all duly ratified International Conventions relating thereto (...)”. The Constitution therefore states several principles, among which the “right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to human treatment in all circumstances”.

This means that, under national and international law, Cameroonian defence and security forces are prohibited from killing or executing anyone in the North-West and South-West regions. Lethal force can only be used as a mean of last resort, when strictly necessary to protect themselves or others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury. It also means that Cameroonian authorities should take all possible measures to protect the population, and prevent other actors, such as armed groups, criminal groups or militias, from killing people.

The State shall also provide protection from torture and other ill-treatment as guaranteed under article 4 of the ACHPR, under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment<sup>86</sup> (CAT), ratified by Cameroon in 1984 and under international customary law. It must also ensure respect of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners<sup>87</sup> (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

Cameroonian authorities must also protect women from violence and discriminations according to the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>88</sup> (CEDAW), as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa<sup>89</sup> (Maputo Protocol) (respectively ratified in 1994 and 2012) and the ACHPR Guidelines on combating sexual violence and its consequences in Africa.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.3.2 WITH REGARD TO THE AUTHORITIES’ RESPONSE TO THE ARMED VIOLENCE IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGION

The authorities have an obligation to investigate allegations of crimes and human rights violations, such as murders by armed groups or unlawful killings by the army, and to prosecute and punish those responsible for such violations in fair trials and before independent, impartial and competent tribunals. Victims of these crimes and violations have a right to truth, justice and reparations.

These rights and obligations are guaranteed under articles 7 and 26 of the African Charter, articles 2 and 14 of the ICCPR and other provisions of international law, including the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law,<sup>91</sup> the Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa,<sup>92</sup> as well as the Constitution of Cameroon.<sup>93</sup>

**“States must ensure that no one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention, and that arrest, detention or imprisonment shall only be carried out strictly in accordance with the provisions of the law and by competent officials or persons authorized for that purpose, pursuant to a warrant, on reasonable suspicion or for probable cause.”<sup>94</sup>**

Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa.

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<sup>85</sup> Republic of Cameroon, Law n° 96/06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972, [www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en](http://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en)

<sup>86</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984.

<sup>87</sup> The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

<sup>88</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979.

<sup>89</sup> Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

<sup>90</sup> ACHPR Guidelines on combatting sexual violence and its consequences in Africa, adopted on 5 November 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, adopted on 16 December 2005.

<sup>92</sup> Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa.

<sup>93</sup> Republic of Cameroon, Law n° 96/06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972, [www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en](http://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6285-loi-n-96-06-du-18-01-1996-revision-constitution-1972-en)

<sup>94</sup> Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, M.1(b).

Under Cameroonian law, notably under the 2016 Penal Code,<sup>95</sup> one can be prosecuted for “murder” (section 275), “capital murder” (section 276), “assault occasioning death” (section 278), “false arrest” (section 291), “rape” (section 296), “torture” (section 277-3), “depravation by band” (section 236), “possession and carriage of arms” (section 237), “invasion of residence” (section 299), “simple threats” (section 301), “conditional threats” (section 302), “contempt of race or religion” (section 241), and other relevant crimes for the purpose of this report.

In addition, Cameroonian authorities must respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association for everyone, including human rights defenders and journalists reporting on the violence. These rights and obligations are guaranteed under Article 19(2) of the ICCPR and Article 9 of the African Charter. The Constitution of Cameroon also guarantees “the freedom of communication, of expression, of the press”.

The authorities must respect these rights by, for example, allowing peaceful protests, enabling people to talk freely, and allowing the media and human rights defenders to monitor the situation. Moreover, the authorities should refrain from targeting people who peacefully exercise those rights and protect them from violence, threats and harassment by non-state actors.

Authorities thus shall respect and protect the right to liberty and security of every individual and must refrain from arresting and detaining a person solely because they express a political opinion or participate in a protest against the authorities. Article 9(1) of the ICCPR reads: “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law.” Similarly, Article 6 of the African Charter provides: “Every individual shall have the right to liberty and to the security of his person. No one may be deprived of his freedom except for reasons and conditions previously laid down by law. In particular, no one may be arbitrarily arrested and detained.”

States also have responsibility to implement and respect all the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>96</sup> Articles 2, 9, 12, 14 and 15 in particular refer to the role of states. Article 9 (3,a) states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, inter alia, to complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, by petition or other appropriate means, to competent domestic judicial, administrative or legislative authorities or any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the state, which should render their decision on the complaint without undue delay”. Cameroonian authorities also have the obligation to protect human rights defenders against violence, threats and harassment.

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<sup>95</sup> Republic of Cameroon, Law n° 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the penal code, [www.assnat.cm/gestionLoisLegislatures/libraries/files\\_upload/uploads/Lois/Penal%20code%20eng%20original.pdf](http://www.assnat.cm/gestionLoisLegislatures/libraries/files_upload/uploads/Lois/Penal%20code%20eng%20original.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998.

# 4. CRIMES AGAINST THE POPULATION IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION

**“Every day they raped us one after the other.”**

Monica,<sup>97</sup> kidnapped and raped by soldiers in 2021.

## 4.1 CRIMES COMMITTED BY ARMED SEPARATISTS

As highlighted in section 4.1.3, armed separatists have been responsible for numerous crimes against the population in the Anglophone region, ranging from murders, abductions, torture and the destruction of homes. They have targeted people suspected of collaborating with the defence and security forces, and people accused of not complying with orders they have tried to impose in the areas they want to control. These include teachers and students attending public schools closed by the separatists, civil servants, government officials, traditional leaders (called “Fon”) and members and supporters of the ruling party. Others have been targeted because of their social status or visible resources.

This chapter describes cases of crimes committed by armed separatists in the North-West region from 2020, in particular those committed against Mbororo Fulani communities. This does not mean that the Mbororo Fulani have been victims in greater numbers than other communities. However, the discriminatory and inflammatory speech directed against them, and the contextual elements developed in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, indicate that they may have been targeted as an ethnic group.

According to figures from the Justice and Dignity Campaign initiative,<sup>98</sup> which monitors crimes specifically against the Mbororo Fulani, and in the absence of official figures, 30 “Mbororo herders” were killed by “Amba Boys” in Menchum division between 2018 and 2020; 35 in Ndu subdivision (Donga-Mantung division), between 2018 and 2020; and more than 50 in Nwa subdivision (Donga-Mantung division)

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<sup>97</sup> Name changed for security reasons.

<sup>98</sup> [www.facebook.com/JusticenDignity/about](https://www.facebook.com/JusticenDignity/about)



between October 2018 and March 2021.<sup>99</sup> All these lists are indicative, non-exhaustive and include the killing of children.

Most crimes documented below by Amnesty International were committed in Donga-Mantung division, but all divisions in the North-West region are affected by crimes committed against Mbororo Fulani. For example, OCHA reported that on 5 March 2021 in Boyo division, “armed men launched an attack on Fulani herdsmen as their cattle allegedly destroyed crops in the cultivated land in the lower Menchum valley. This attack led to the death of at least ten Fulani herdsmen while a 17-year-old girl was injured by a stray bullet. On 7 March, armed men attacked the Fulani’s community, reportedly as a reprisal for burning a woman alive in her house in Beneng village in the same division. Six members of the Fulani community were allegedly killed during this confrontation.”<sup>100</sup>

There are indications that the armed separatists have also perpetrated other types of crimes, in addition to those documented in this chapter. The CHRC reported in a statement issued on 21 August 2022 that they are responsible for “the rape of several women”, “the forced recruitment of children” and “forced labour with people having to pay to have access to their plantations”.<sup>101</sup>

## 4.1.1 A CLIMATE OF HOSTILITY AGAINST MBORORO FULANI

The Mbororo Fulani as a community have been targeted by discriminatory and inflammatory speech from spokesperson, members and supporters of separatist groups, according to video, audio and written documents collected and reviewed by Amnesty International. As seen in the sections below, Mbororo Fulani victims have also frequently reported racist and xenophobic speech during attacks against them by armed separatists.

It should be noted that before and during the outbreak of the armed violence in the two Anglophone regions, other ethnic minorities in Cameroon have been targets of discriminatory speech at local or national levels, making the situation of the Mbororo Fulani specific because of the scale of the violence they have suffered in the North-West, but not unique.<sup>102</sup>

Discriminatory speech targeting the Mbororo Fulani escalated after the Ngarbuh killings on 14 February 2020, when it became clear that the Cameroonian army was accompanied by members of a “vigilante committee”,<sup>103</sup> mostly Fulani.

In the days following the Ngarbuh killings, a programme aired online on “ABC Amba TV” on 19 February 2020, hosted by Chris Anu, “Secretary for Communications & IT, Federal Republic of Ambazonia”, featured a participant expressing xenophobic ideas and threats of mass killings against the Mbororo Fulani:

**“These people [Mbororo] are immigrants and it seems their time is over (...) The earlier they will leave, the better (...) or they will pay the price like any other ‘La République’<sup>104</sup> citizen in the Southern Cameroons (...) All of them if they don’t want to leave, they will die.”<sup>105</sup>**

Chris Anu responded to the intervention by saying: “We will leave that on the people on the ground. They will decide what they want to do with that situation.”

In the same programme, another participant was given the floor to respond to a question about alleged attacks by Mbororo Fulani militias against people they accuse of supporting or tolerating the armed separatists: “You cannot go, pick the race of Mbororo people and kill them. That is where the difficulty is. But we are working on some things though.”

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<sup>99</sup> [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=7519140781461494&set=pcb.7519168524792053](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=7519140781461494&set=pcb.7519168524792053)

<sup>100</sup> OCHA, “Cameroon: North-West and South-West, Situation report n° 29, as of 31 March 2021”.

<sup>101</sup> Statement by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission to mark the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, 21 August 2022.

<sup>102</sup> Centre for Human Rights and Democracy and in Africa, “CHRDA condemns hate speeches by Chief Ewome John Eko of Bwassa Village against the people of the North-West Region”, 16 December 2020, <https://www.chrda.org/chrda-condemns-hate-speeches-by-chief-ewome-john-eko-of-bwassa-village-against-the-people-of-the-north-west-region/>

<sup>103</sup> Term used in the communiqué of the Presidency on the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry.

<sup>104</sup> A term often used by separatists to refer to the Republic of Cameroon, as opposed to the two Anglophone regions of the North-West and South-West, which claim to be part of the “Ambazonia” State.

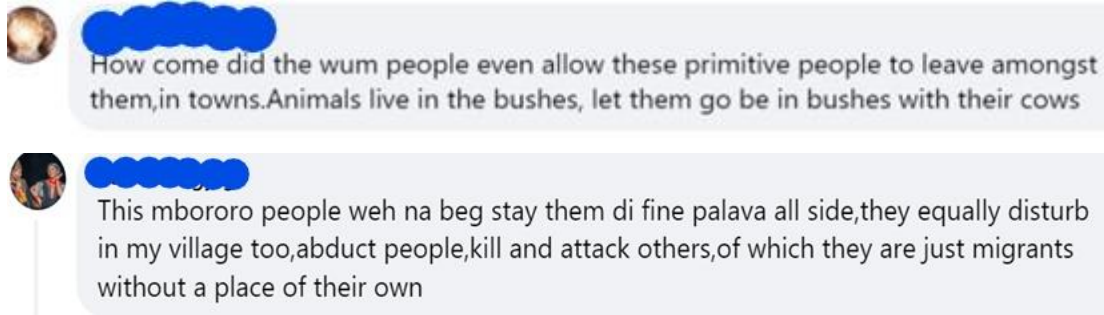
<sup>105</sup> Broadcast on 19 February 2020 on “ABC Amba TV” Facebook page.

In another interview, shared by “ABC Ambazonia” on Facebook and reported by the Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute in 2022,<sup>106</sup> Chris Anu commented on an Amnesty International report<sup>107</sup> that highlighted crimes committed both against Mbororo Fulani and by Mbororo Fulani militias. Chris Anu asked:

**“What is wrong with an Ambazonian killing a Mbororo who is an aggressor? He moved into Ambazonia from another country, into our territory. And you [they] attack our people and you [they] kill them, burn their homes, and destroy their farmlands. If we are able to kill them all, we will kill them all, and there will be no regret.”**

Ayaba Cho Lucas – head of the Ambazonia Governing Council – made the announcement on 26 January 2020 in an audio recording shared on social media, of the implementation of “a special ghost town on the Fulani people, Mbororo people. Because... they betray we plenty (...) Mbororo people ghost town will start from the first of February to the end of the month”. He also said: “Let me also send this message of caution to the Mbororo community: we are aware through our intelligence sources that the government of Cameroon has been instrumentalising some parts of the Mbororo community to attack other Ambazonians. This cannot be tolerated; this is also unacceptable.”

Amnesty International also reviewed several social media threads in which discriminatory speech against the Mbororo Fulani was shared by internet users in response to publications reporting alleged abuses by Mbororo Fulani militias. The organization publishes below some screenshots of xenophobic, violent and discriminatory language.



## 4.1.2 MURDERS

### **MURDER OF THREE PEOPLE AND DESTRUCTION OF HOMES IN MBOKOP-TANYI VILLAGE, NDU SUBDIVISION, DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION, MARCH 2022**

Armed separatists attacked a Mbororo Fulani compound in the village of Mbokop-Tanyi on the night of 28-29 March 2022, killing a woman and her two children, aged seven and six months respectively, and destroying houses, according to testimonies from victims and witnesses collected by Amnesty International, as well as footage of the aftermath of the attack.<sup>108</sup>

Amnesty International delegates met “SBA”, the husband and father of the three victims, an Islamic teacher who was in hospital at the time of the attack. Since then, he has been staying with one of his brothers in the West region because his house was destroyed, and he has no money to repair it. He also reported that he never had “any problem either with Amba Boys or anyone in the village” before the attack, and that the armed separatists had never come to his compound before. He told the organization:

**“One of my brothers called me at 8:00 the next morning to tell me that the Amba Boys had burned down my house, with two of my children and my wife inside. They shot my wife and when she was down, they**

<sup>106</sup> Michaela Pelican, Kim Schumann, Sina Plücker, David Drew, *Mbororo under Attack: Extreme Speech and Violence in the Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon*, October 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Amnesty International, “Cameroon: Witnesses testimony and satellite images reveal the scale of devastation in Anglophone regions”, 28 July 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions/>

<sup>108</sup> On file with Amnesty International.

burned her along with my two children, aged seven years and six months, who were sleeping in the house. Three of my eldest sons, who escaped through the back door when the armed men arrived, said that the armed men were many and that they couldn't count them because they were afraid and also because it was late and dark."<sup>109</sup>


A neighbour of the victims told the organization:

"It was about 11:00. I was sleeping and suddenly I heard gunshots. I hid in the house for a while and later heard a group of people passing by, speaking Limbum language. When I went out to see what was happening, I discovered that "SBA"'s compound was on fire. I then alerted other neighbours to help put out the fire, but by then I couldn't find any of the family members. We struggled to extinguish the fire. It was not until the next morning that we went back to assess the damage, and when we searched the burned house, we discovered that two children and their mother, the wife of "SBA", had died in the fire."<sup>110</sup>

Another neighbour who witnessed the attack told Amnesty International the perpetrators were "well-armed men with guns who were discussing in Limbum, dressed in civilian clothes".<sup>111</sup>

The attack was reported to the sub-divisional officer of Ndu who visited the scene the next day with members of the defence and security forces to assess the damage, gave a sum of money to the victims, and told the family that an investigation had been launched to track down the perpetrators, according to the testimonies gathered by the organization.



 <sup>↑</sup> Screenshot of the house burned down with a mother and her two children inside © Private.

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<sup>109</sup> Interview in person with "SBA", 19 April 2023, Ndu.

<sup>110</sup> Interview in person with "SB", 18 April 2023, Ndu.

<sup>111</sup> Interview in person with "AK", 18 April 2023, Ndu.

## **MURDER OF TWO PEOPLE IN NJIRON QUARTER, NTUMBAW VILLAGE, NDU SUBDIVISION, DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION, MARCH 2022**

Armed separatists killed Hassan Lafia and Buba Babo, according to Amnesty International interviews with relatives of the victims and community leaders. These killings were also reported by national human rights organizations.<sup>112</sup>

A brother of Hassan Lafia told Amnesty International that on 7 April 2022 in the morning, his brother left the house with three other people, including Buba Babo, to check on their cattle at the bush in Nyanki. According to the two people who escaped the attack, on their way to the bush they saw a group of armed separatists and ran to hide in the bush. The separatists followed them and started shooting in their direction, hitting Hassan Lafia and Buba Babo, who died instantly. Immediately after killing them, they reportedly said: “We have already warned you Mbororo not to come to our land again”. The attackers came on foot, speaking Limbum and pidgin English, wearing black T-shirts, some with army fatigues, others with civilian clothes and pieces of red cloth tied over their heads, and well-armed with guns.<sup>113</sup>

Hassan Lafia’s brother added that before the attack, the armed separatists had chased all the Mbororo Fulani away from the Nyanki bush, telling them that it was their land and that they should leave, because “the Mbororo people are foreigners and don’t have a village, talk less of owning land”. His deceased brother had also been requested by the armed separatists to support them by giving them two guns, and several of his cattle were taken away. The wife of Buba Babo also told Amnesty International that her husband “once came back from the bush and informed me they had been driven away from their grazing land at Nyanki bush by Amba Boys, and asked not to return there again, meanwhile some of their cattle were equally taken away”.<sup>114</sup>

Relatives of the people killed reported the attack to the authorities and gendarmes came with soldiers to investigate and search the armed separatists who committed the act. It is unclear whether an investigation was formally opened but to this date no one has been arrested or charged for these crimes.

A leader of the Mbororo Fulani community in Ntawbaw told Amnesty International:

**“The attack was just one of so many that the Amba Boys in Ntawbaw village have carried out against the graziers over accusations that the graziers do not support them in the struggle, that we live on their land, that the Mbororo man is a stranger and has no land anywhere”.**<sup>115</sup>

According to him, “following the eviction of the graziers from Nyanki bush, most of our grazing land has been taken and is now being used for farming by separatists’ family members. We can’t go back to these places for fear of the unknown”.<sup>116</sup>

This situation has prompted the subdivisional officer of Ndu to issue a statement, saying that whoever is occupying the land must leave immediately, or else “shall be charged of conspiracy with terrorists (...)”.<sup>117</sup>

## **MURDERS COMMITTED IN NWA SUBDIVISION, DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION**

In a press release published on 27 July 2021,<sup>118</sup> Amnesty International documented how four members of a family, aged between 15 and 80, were shot to death by armed separatists who also destroyed and looted 30 homes, including the mosque, in Mbui village, Mbem town, Nwa subdivision, on 16 February 2020. Three other persons were injured, including two elderly women who were shot in the forehead, legs, and thighs with rifles.

In an address<sup>119</sup> presented to the senior divisional officer at Donga-Mantung during a “working session” on 17 March 2021, “the ten Ardos<sup>120</sup> of the Nwa Subdivision and the Mbororo elites” assessed the damage

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<sup>112</sup> Conscience Africaine, “The systematic targeting of Fulani herdsmen in Ndonga-Mantung division of North-West region of Cameroon by alleged armed separatists”, 7 April 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Interview in person with “SS”, Ndu, 16 April 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Interview in person with “AA”, Ndu, 16 April 2023.

<sup>115</sup> Interview in person with “AAA”, Ndu town, 16 April 2023.

<sup>116</sup> Interview in person with “AAA”, Ndu town, 16 April 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Sub-Divisional Officer Ndu, “Sub-prefectoral order n° 05/2022 placing an injunction on the parcel of national land hosting the pasture of Ardo Adamu Ali of Shukop-Ntumbaw Ndu Subdivision”, 28 February 2022, on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>118</sup> Amnesty International, “Cameroon: Witness testimony and satellite images reveal the scale of devastation in Anglophone regions” , 28 July 2021, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions-2/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions-2/)

<sup>119</sup> “An address presented by Alhadji Nuhu Saidou on behalf of the ten Ardos of Nwa subdivision (...)”, on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>120</sup> The term “Ardo” refers to an authority in Fulani society.

suffered by the Mbororo Fulani in this subdivision by the armed separatists. According to them, 69 people had been killed in the subdivision at the time, 27 of them in the Ntim, Nyang and Ntong areas. Seven of them were locked in a house and burned alive. Some 107 Mbororo Fulani were wounded, 1,765 were displaced in Nigeria and 300 in other regions of Cameroon. In addition, 460 homes were burned down, some 901 cows were killed or stolen, and “millions of dollars were taken from the Mbororo as ransom”.

### 4.1.3 ABDUCTIONS

The case described below is one of a number of abductions documented by Amnesty International in the North-West, both against members of the Mbororo Fulani community and against other inhabitants of the region. In May, several dozen women were abducted by armed separatists in Mezam division for denouncing the taxes imposed by the separatists in their area, according to a video that went viral on social media, national human rights organizations,<sup>121</sup> media reports<sup>122</sup> and claims on separatist online networks.

#### **ABDUCTION, TORTURE AND DESTRUCTION OF THE HOME OF AMADOU KARIMU IN SANTA SUBDIVISION, MEZAM DIVISION**

Armed separatists destroyed the home of Amadou Karimu in Renne neighbourhood, Baba 2 village, Santa subdivision on 27 March 2022, after he had been abducted and tortured in 2018 in exchange for money, according to Amnesty International’s interview with the victim in Bafoussam,<sup>123</sup> West region, and pictures of the destroyed compound.<sup>124</sup>

According to his testimony, Amadu Karimu was a member of the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) political party and was allegedly close to government officials as a recently elected leader of the local Mbororo Fulani community.

This is what the separatists – whose local group’s leader grew up with Amadou Karimu – accused him of when they abducted him from his compound on 11 October 2018, armed with AK47 rifles. They took him blindfolded to a camp in the forest for one day. There he was stripped and beaten on his back and feet with a machete. The abductors then threatened to burn him alive with petrol and to cut off his hand with a machete. The perpetrators later demanded XOF 3.5 million to release him, before accepting XOF 500,000 from Karimu’s relatives and abandoning him next to his compound the same day, as he was unable to walk due to the torture he suffered.

He was then taken to the Bamenda regional hospital, where he spent 12 days receiving medical treatment. A medical report shared with Amnesty International by the victim dated 12 October 2018,<sup>125</sup> describes “ill-looking and expressive pain, bruises and abrasions on the back and the buttocks, lacerations on right sole”, as it can be seen in the images below.

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<sup>121</sup> REDHAC, “Socio-political crisis: kidnapping of fifty women in the Northwest region of Cameroon”, 22 May 2023.


<sup>122</sup> France24, “Thirty women abducted by Cameroon’s English-speaking separatists freed”, 27 May 2023, [https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230527-thirty-women-abducted-by-cameroon-s-english-speaking-separatists-freed?utm\\_term=FRANCE24&utm\\_campaign=twitter&utm\\_source=nonli&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230527-thirty-women-abducted-by-cameroon-s-english-speaking-separatists-freed?utm_term=FRANCE24&utm_campaign=twitter&utm_source=nonli&utm_medium=social)

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Amadou Karimu (name changed for security reasons), 20 November 2022, Bafoussam.

<sup>124</sup> On file with Amnesty International.

<sup>125</sup> On file with Amnesty International.



 ↑ On the left, a picture showing Karimu's wounds after being attacked. On the right, a picture of him taken in November 2022 by Amnesty International's delegates © Amnesty International

## 4.1.4 DESTRUCTION OF HOMES

### BURNING OF HOMES IN ORTI-MBAWNGONG VILLAGE, NDU SUBDIVISION, DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION, APRIL 2022

On 6 April 2022, armed separatists attacked a Mbororo Fulani community in a place known as Alhaji Jaliki's compound,<sup>126</sup> in the village of Orti-Mbawngong. They wounded one man with an automatic weapon and looted dozens of houses before burning them, according to seven testimonies given to Amnesty International by victims and direct witnesses (including two women), and videos of the attack analysed by the organization.<sup>127</sup>

Witnesses identified the perpetrators as at least 40 armed men speaking in Limbum and pidgin English, some wearing masks and some not. The attackers were said to have come from a neighbouring village, and the victims Amnesty International spoke to were able to identify some of them. Another damaging consequence of the attack was the loss of all the children's birth certificates and other important documents. The witnesses also reported that they never had any problem with the armed separatists or anyone else in the area, "apart from the fact that the people of this community keep insulting us that 'Mbororo don't' have villages and are strangers on our land". The attack was reported to the administrative authority with no information to date.

One of the witnesses told the organization how the armed separatists burned down the compound while preventing the men in the mosque from going to their homes to save their belongings:

**"We were in the mosque praying at about 15:30 when we heard gunshots outside and when we came out, we saw a group of Amba boys with guns shooting indiscriminately at our compound and burning our houses. When we tried to go outside, they insisted that we must stay inside the mosque and that anyone who broke the rule would be shot. One of the men who insisted was shot (see below), and we simply hid inside the mosque until they had finished and left our compound, before we discovered that all the houses had been burned to ashes, except for the mosque we were in. Our family, who were in our different houses, were all forced out of the houses before the houses were burned."**<sup>128</sup>


<sup>126</sup> Name of the deceased chief of the community.

<sup>127</sup> Interviews in person, 15 April 2023, Orti-Mbawngong. Videos on file with Amnesty International.

<sup>128</sup> Interview in person with "DY", 15 April 2023, Orti-Mbawngong.

The victim who was shot told Amnesty International: “They shot me three times and one of the bullets hit my left side arm. One of my brothers took me to Nkambe district Hospital and I spent a few weeks there before I was discharged, and the doctors put an iron in my hand which has not been removed to this day”. His medical record, dated 27 April 2022 and seen by Amnesty International, states that he was “shot with guns three weeks ago” and had an “open fracture of the left hand”.<sup>129</sup>



 ↑ “USJ” was shot and wounded by the armed separatists when he tried to retrieve some of his belongings as the camp was being destroyed. © Amnesty International

Amnesty International has analysed five videos of the attack on the camp, filmed by the perpetrators and later shared on social networks, that show several armed men with automatic weapons, some of whom firing in the air, and houses in flames.

In one of the videos, the man holding the camera says in pidgin English: “Wind Damage is live in Jalike compound. They have run. We have dealt with the military, and they ran. We shot and they ran. Wind damage with Black Jesus and Come and see. We have come and they have run away. The military that came to guard have run. Wind damage, Come and See and Black Jesus, it’s us three. They have run. We are here waiting for them. We will burn everything.”

The deputy defence chief of the Ambazonia Defence Forces, quoted in a media report,<sup>130</sup> said after the attack that armed separatists organized the attack against “the house of Mbororo who has been using his compound as a point where Cameroon military plan attacks”. One of the victims of the attack interviewed by Amnesty International denied the presence of the military in the compound.<sup>131</sup> Whether military had even been present in the compound or not, Amnesty International recalls that armed separatists are not allowed to conduct such attacks, which constitute crimes against the population.

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<sup>129</sup> Medical report on file with Amnesty International

<sup>130</sup> VOA, “Cameroon Says Separatists Attack Border Mbororo Ethnic Community”, 9 April 2022, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-says-separatists-attack-border-mbororo-ethnic-community/6522238.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-says-separatists-attack-border-mbororo-ethnic-community/6522238.html)

<sup>131</sup> Interview in person with “AN”, 15 April 2023, Mbongong



Screenshot of one of the videos filmed by armed separatists showing Jaliki's compound in flames. © Private.

## 4.2 CRIMES COMMITTED BY MILITIAS

Militias composed mostly of armed Mbororo Fulani committed numerous crimes against the population in the North-West region, including murders and the burning of homes, which led to displacements of people.

Amnesty International has collected testimonies from victims and witnesses of some of these crimes committed in the last three years in the North-West region. Some of the cases below show some degree of support by the defence and security forces during attacks by armed Mbororo Fulani against the population.

### 4.2.1 CRIMES COMMITTED IN MENCHUM DIVISION

#### **MURDERS AND DESTRUCTION OF HOMES IN MUNKEP, GAYAMA, AND MUNKPA VILLAGES, FUNGOM SUBDIVISION, MENCHUM DIVISION, 2022-2023**

Armed men described as Fulani killed six people and destroyed property in the villages of Munkep, on 12 January 2023, according to testimonies from displaced persons interviewed by Amnesty International, and reports from human rights organizations<sup>132</sup> and media reports.<sup>133</sup> This follows several months of clashes and killings between Fulani herdsmen, reportedly from Nigeria, and armed separatists over land disputes in the area of the villages of Gayama, Munkpa and Munkep, exacerbated by the situation of armed violence in the region. Among the six people who were killed on 12 January was the traditional chief of the village of Munkep.

Based on reports from family members of the victims and other displaced persons from the attacked villages, a local civil society activist told Amnesty International<sup>134</sup> that the cycles of violence began when the Fon of Gayama collected money from Fulani herders from Nigeria to rent land for their cattle to graze in the village. But their cattle allegedly destroyed crops and villagers, and armed separatists decided to attack them, leading to several cycles of retaliation, including multiple murders on both sides.

<sup>132</sup> Conscience Africaine, "Gruesome murder of about 6 unarmed villagers and destruction of dwellings at Fungom subdivision, North-West region Cameroon, by alleged Fulani armed militias", 15 January 2023.

<sup>133</sup> Actu Cameroun, "Nord-Ouest: au moins 12 morts dans des affrontements intercommunautaires à Esu", <https://actu cameroun.com/2023/01/19/nord-ouest-au-moins-12-morts-dans-des-affrontements-intercommunautaires-a-esu/>; Anadolu Agency, "Le Cameroun déploie des troupes à la frontières avec le Nigéria", 19 January 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/le-cameroun-d%C3%A9ploie-des-troupes-%C3%A0-la-fronti%C3%A8re-avec-le-nigeria/2791658>

<sup>134</sup> Interview in person with "KC", 1 April 2023, Esu.



Amnesty International met another person who said he was forced to leave Gayama due to persistent threats from “Nigerian Fulani armed men”:

“As the Anglophone crisis escalated, especially in 2022, some groups of armed separatists from Esu and Wum settled around the area, especially in Gayama, Munkep and Munka villages, so as not to be easily attacked by the defence forces, especially since the area is virtually inaccessible due to the lack of motorable road. So, when the armed separatists settled in these areas, they started exploiting the money of traders passing through the areas as well as the Fulani herdsmen grazing in the vicinity, another factor that led to the attack on 12 January”.<sup>135</sup>

## **MURDERS IN GHEIDZE (FORMERLY CALLED UPPER WAINDO), WUM SUBDIVISION, MENCHUM DIVISION, OCTOBER 2021**

Groups of armed people described as Fulani, Haoussa and Aku, accompanied by Cameroonian soldiers, killed at least five villagers and destroyed at least 13 homes in the village of Gheidze on 18 October 2021, according to four people interviewed by Amnesty International.

A witness told the organization that the violence against the population of Gheidze was triggered by the killing of a military officer, known to be a Muslim, by suspected armed separatists in a neighbouring village in the morning. According to the witness, the groups of attackers consisted of about 45 members of the Fulani and Haoussa communities and about 15 soldiers, some in uniform and others in military T-shirts. The Fulani and Haoussa individuals were armed with cutlasses, sticks, spears and knives, while the soldiers had guns.

When the group arrived in the village, the soldiers started shooting in the air and the others started burning houses, saying that anyone who came out would be killed.

“GD” told Amnesty International that members of this group beat her husband, Mve John, and poured petrol on him before setting him on fire, simply because he asked them what was wrong when they arrived.<sup>136</sup> Her husband, who was disabled and could not walk, died instantly. His body was dumped about 100m from his shop. His shop was then looted and burned down. She said that she was not among those invited by the *Compagnie de Gendarmerie* of Wum to give statements.

Another victim, “THB”, told Amnesty International that her husband was stabbed to death by the armed mob with cutlasses and knives before they burned down their house.<sup>137</sup> Another person, told the organization that the people he described as “Haoussa, Fulani and Aku” who committed the crimes were armed with cutlasses, knives and sticks, and that the soldiers guarding them were armed with guns.<sup>138</sup>

A traditional leader told Amnesty International that he filed a formal complaint with the *Compagnie de Gendarmerie* of Wum, and that was later summoned by the commander of the company, along with other victims, for questioning or to take their statements about what happened.<sup>139</sup> However, according to his testimony, he has not heard from the administration since.

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<sup>135</sup> Interview in person with “ZMM”, 1 April 2023, Esu.

<sup>136</sup> Interview in person with “GN”, 30 March 2023, Wum.

<sup>137</sup> Interview in person with “THB”, 30 March 2023, Wum.

<sup>138</sup> Interview in person with “PNKL”, 30 March 2023, Wum.

<sup>139</sup> Interview in person with “AJP”, 30 March 2023, Wum.



 Homes destroyed in Gheidze © Private.

## 4.2.2 CRIMES COMMITTED IN DONGA-MANTUNG DIVISION

Nwa subdivision, located along Cameroon's border with Nigeria, has been particularly hard hit by violence, according to satellite images gathered by Amnesty International, as well as Cameroonian media and other reports.

According to OCHA, "hostilities were reported in Nwa subdivision in the North-West region. Between 22 and 26 February 2021, an estimated 4,200 individuals were displaced from Tong, Sih, Bom, Nyack, Nfeh, Kwack, and Yang villages in Nwa subdivision due to attacks from Fulani vigilante groups. These attacks led to the death of at least eight people. There have also been reports of fighting between non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the Fulani vigilante groups within these communities."<sup>140</sup> Another report from the agency later wrote that these attacks were "in retaliation to the multiple cases of NSAG harassment, stealing of cows and extortion of money from the Mbororos".

On 28 July 2021, Amnesty International issued a press release showing satellite imagery proving that some villages in Nwa subdivision had been destroyed or burned in February 2021.<sup>141</sup> The images include the villages of Sih, Ntong and Ntim. In October 2021, the Cameroon Anglophone crisis database of atrocities also released a report on attacks in Nwa subdivision that occurred in February and early March, proving destruction in other villages in the area.<sup>142</sup>

A person from Koshin, another village in Nwa subdivision, also told Amnesty International by phone about fighting in 2020: "On 7 February 2020, there were clashes there between the Fulanis and the non-state armed groups. The Fulanis burned down almost the entire village while searching for the groups. On 11 June 2020, state security forces also arrived in search of the groups and continued to destroy the village. The Fulanis killed seven people and the state security forces killed one civilian. Hundreds of houses have been burned, leaving the inhabitants, who have so far sought refuge in agricultural structures in the bush, homeless. There are now around 3,000 people in the bush. The village is completely deserted."<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> OCHA, "Cameroon: North-West and South-West, Situation report n° 28, as of 28 February 2021".

<sup>141</sup> Amnesty International, *Cameroon: Witness testimony and satellite images reveal the scale of devastation in Anglophone regions*, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions/)

<sup>142</sup> Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities, "Burnings in Nwa subdivision, Cameroon", 21 October 2022, <https://borealisdata.ca/file.xhtml?fileId=411401&version=1.0>

<sup>143</sup> Interview by voice call with "Franck" (name changed for security reasons), 23 April 2021.



Images showing some of the destruction caused by clashes in the village of Koshin in 2020 © Private.

## 4.3 HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE CAMEROONIAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES

The Cameroonian defence and security forces have been responsible for numerous human rights violations, including unlawful killings, rapes, tortures, destructions, arbitrary detentions. These violations continued after the Ngarbuh massacre on 14 February 2020, during which 21 people, including 13 children,<sup>144</sup> were killed by the military and members of militias, and which had prompted international outrage and a response from the UN Secretary-General.<sup>145</sup>

The cases presented in this section are some of those documented by Amnesty International, committed mostly by the army. Many other violations, including cases of torture and other ill-treatment, have also been documented by international<sup>146</sup> and national<sup>147</sup> human rights organizations.

### 4.3.1 UNLAWFUL KILLINGS AND DESTRUCTION OF HOMES

#### DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY IN MBVEH, KUMBO CITY, KUMBO CENTRAL SUBDIVISION, BUI DIVISION, MARCH 2023

Members of the Cameroonian army destroyed homes and shops in the Ta Mbveh market in the city of Kumbo on 29 March 2023, according to six victims and witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International,<sup>148</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Cameroon: 2 Years On, Massacre Victims Await Justice", 14 February 2022, [www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/14/cameroon-2-years-massacre-victims-await-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/14/cameroon-2-years-massacre-victims-await-justice)

<sup>145</sup> United Nations, "Secretary-General Expresses Concern over Reported Killing of Civilians, including Children, in Cameroon's North-West Region", 17 February 2020, <https://press.un.org/en/2020/sgsm19978.doc.htm>

<sup>146</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Cameroon: Routine Torture, Incommunicado Detention", 6 May 2019, [www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/cameroon-routine-torture-incommunicado-detention](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/cameroon-routine-torture-incommunicado-detention)

<sup>147</sup> CHRDA, "Cameroon: Authorities must hold a military leader in the Southwest Region accountable for torture", 22 November 2022, <https://www.chrda.org/cameroon-authorities-must-hold-a-military-leader-in-the-southwest-region-accountable-for-torture/>

<sup>148</sup> Interviews in person with six victims and witnesses, 6 April 2023, Kumbo. All names changed for security reasons.

video and pictures<sup>149</sup> showing the destruction (see below), satellite images analysed by the organization (see below), and media reports.<sup>150</sup>

Amnesty International interviewed a trader in Mbveh who told the organization how the military burned down his shop and took his money on 29 March:

**"I was in my shop in Ta-Mbveh when I suddenly heard gunshots outside. I immediately locked my shop and lay on the floor waiting for the shooting to stop. A few minutes later, a group of soldiers broke into my shop. They searched it and took away XAF 1,240,000 (almost €1,800). One of the soldiers said in French that they should shoot me, but another said that they should wait so that I could show them where the body of an armed separatist who had been killed in the area was hidden, although I didn't know anything about it. We started following drops of blood on the ground along the road. I told them my children were in the shop and they took me to a neighbor's house instead. They said if I came out, they would shoot me, and by then some soldiers had set fire to my shop and it was already burning."**<sup>151</sup>

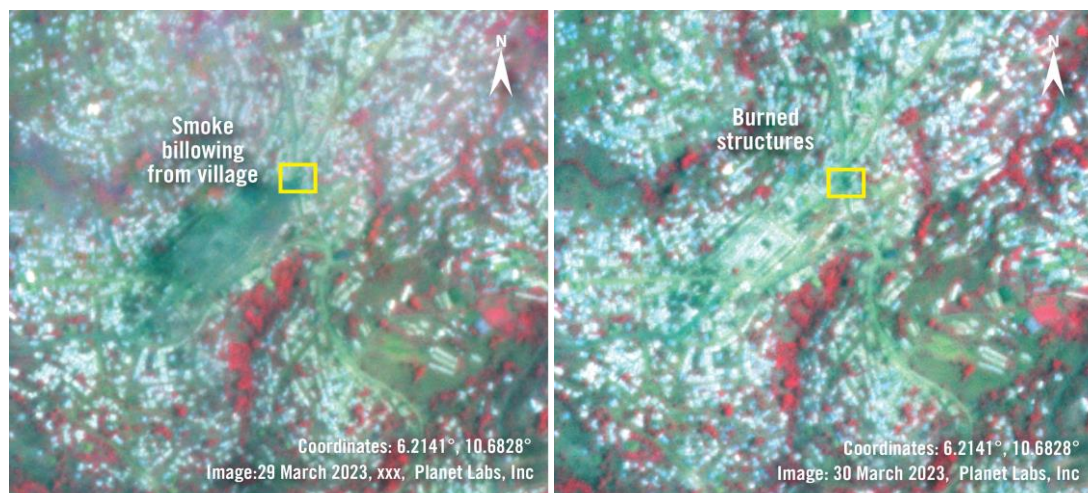
The person told Amnesty International that he filed a complaint with the senior divisional officer of Kumbo and that the latter asked him if he could recognize the face of any of the soldiers, which he could not. According to him, no administrative or judicial authorities have visited the site since then.

Amnesty International interviewed another trader whose shop was burned down by the military:

**"At around 7:00, I opened my shop and started putting some of my goods outside. My neighbours told me that soldiers were in Mbveh Park. Later, I heard gunshots around my house and shop, so I ran away. Before I ran, I saw many soldiers around our shops, although I can't say how many because I was too scared to count them. Some were masked and some were not. Around 9:00 the soldiers started burning our shops. When I came back, all the shops were burned to ashes, including those of my neighbours, and we tried to prevent the fire from spreading to other neighbours. Five houses, and a long commercial building with many shops, were completely burned to ashes."**<sup>152</sup>

A third victim, told the organization that a group of soldiers entered his shop and stole sacks of rice, peanut oil, flour and sugar, then set his shop on fire before doing the same to his neighbours' shops.<sup>153</sup>

The military reportedly carried out this attack in retaliation after being attacked by armed separatists in the Kumbo area a few hours earlier.



 ↑ *Satellite imagery analysed by Amnesty International shows smoke rising from Kumbo at 9:20 UTC on 29 March 2023, and apparent burnt structures the next day, 30 March 2023.*

<sup>149</sup> On file with Amnesty International.

<sup>150</sup> Mimi Mefo Info, "Military raze shops in Kumbo after deadly Separatist attack", 29 March 2023, <https://mimimefoinfos.com/military-raze-shops-in-kumbo-after-deadly-separatist-attack/>

<sup>151</sup> Interview in person with "DSN", 6 April 2023, Kumbo

<sup>152</sup> Interview in person with "AB", 6 April 2023, Kumbo.

<sup>153</sup> Interview in person with "YJW", 6 April 2023, Kumbo.



 ↑ Pictures showing some of the destruction of Mbveh market © Private.

### **KILLINGS AND DESTRUCTION OF HOUSES IN YER, JAKIRI SUBDIVISION, BUI DIVISION, DECEMBER 2022**

Members of the Cameroonian army killed three people and destroyed at least 10 houses in Yer village, Jakiri subdivision, Bui division, on 17 December 2022, according to the testimonies of three displaced persons interviewed by Amnesty International in Jakiri, corroborated by images and videos analysed by the organization, and media reports.<sup>154</sup> All names have been changed due to the risk of reprisals.

The military attack reportedly followed an attack against the army by armed separatists a few days earlier near the village of Yer. One person displaced from Yer village told Amnesty International:

**"I was still asleep when I suddenly heard a loud noise from the villagers and when I came out, I saw some of my neighbours' houses in flames. I immediately ran back inside, grabbed my mobile phone and one of my bags, and when I came out there were about 11 soldiers outside my door, all in military uniforms. They asked me in French: "Where are the Amba boys you keep in the village?" I told them I didn't understand French, and another soldier asked the same question in pidgin English. I told them I didn't know, and one of them immediately pushed me down and told some of the soldiers to burn my house. The soldier who was holding a five-litre gallon of petrol then poured it on my house and set it on fire. When I started screaming, they said: "Stop the noise or we will kill you!" I remained calm and a few minutes after my house was burned down, I left the village on foot for Jakiri, where I am currently seeking refuge."<sup>155</sup>**

Another person, who had lived in Yer since 2010 and had been displaced to Jakiri since the military attack, told the organization that when the soldiers came to the village, they asked the villagers to show them the separatist hideout in Yer, as the separatists were "all over the place", according to the army forces. When the villagers responded that they didn't know, the soldiers burned down the houses. According to her description of the events, the soldiers spoke French and others pidgin English, and they were all wearing military uniforms. She left Yer on 27 December (10 days after the attack).<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Interviews in person conducted on 6 April 2023, Jakiri. All names changed for security reasons.

<sup>155</sup> Interview in person with "BL", 6 April 2023, Jakiri.

<sup>156</sup> Interview in person with "BL", 6 April 2023, Jakiri.

According to another person, “it has become systematic in the community for soldiers to retaliate or pour their angers on civilians each time they are attacked by armed separatists”.<sup>157</sup>

All three people Amnesty International spoke to said that three people were killed during the military raid on 17 December, although they could not identify them, nor could they identify those whose homes were burned because they had to leave their village in a hurry and have not returned since.

The Cameroonian authorities denied military involvement in the burning, saying that “frustrated [separatist] fighters escaped from their camp in Yer and set fire to the houses of people the separatists accuse of collaborating with government troops,” according to a media report.<sup>158</sup>



  Picture showing destruction in the village of Yer. © Private.

## 4.3.2 RAPES

Members of the defence and security forces raped several women in the North-West region, according to testimonies of victims displaced in Bafoussam and Douala interviewed by Amnesty International delegates.<sup>159</sup> The delegates met in person with 15 women armed victims of rape. Most had no identity

<sup>157</sup> Interview in person with “BL”, 6 April 2023, Jakiri.

<sup>158</sup> VOA, “Cameroon Military Denies Involvement in House Burnings in Northwest Region”, 23 December 2022, [www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-military-denies-involvement-in-house-burnings-in-northwest-region/6888928.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-military-denies-involvement-in-house-burnings-in-northwest-region/6888928.html)

<sup>159</sup> Interviews of four victims on 16 November 2022, Bafoussam, and interviews of 12 victims on 23 November 2022, Bonabéri (Douala).

documents or medical reports to corroborate their testimony, having left their homes in a hurry and fearing arrest by the army or armed separatists in possession of documents that could be interpreted as belonging to one camp or the other.

Other human rights organizations have documented rapes in both the North-West and South-West regions.<sup>160</sup>

## MONICA: KIDNAPPED AND RAPED BY SOLDIERS FOR 10 WEEKS



Picture of Monica and her twins.

On 3 September 2021, Monica, born on 7 June 2001, and her one-year and ten-month-old daughter were abducted by military and gendarmes from their home in the village of Ngie, Momo division, after they killed her husband. She was then held for several weeks in an army camp and raped with other young women, some of whom allegedly died as a result of the rape. On 26 May 2022, she gave birth to twins resulting from the rape. A medical report from the Bamenda Regional Hospital dated 16 December 2021, provided to Amnesty International by the victim, indicates that she was pregnant, had chlamydia and received initial psychological support.

**“At first the military never bothered us. They started bothering us when the Amba Boys attacked them on the road and killed one of their men on 3 September 2021. The same day they came to the village and started committing atrocities. When I saw them, I quickly grabbed my daughter, and we went into the house. We closed the door, but they broke it down with their legs. They started to search the house and asked my husband to lie down. He did. I was sitting on the chair with my daughter in my arms. They asked me to leave the child on the chair. I put the child on the chair. They wanted to rape me. They did. A military man raped me there. My husband tried to defend us and they shot him three times in the head, stomach and chest. We stayed in the house for 45 minutes to an hour.**

**Then they took me and my daughter. They put us in a vehicle and set fire to the house. They took us to their base. There were six other women, some of whom I knew. The youngest was 12. The military said things like it had been a long time since they had touched women, and now they had a chance. We were there for two months and two weeks. Every day they raped us one after the other. The parents of the other girls came with money to plead with them, but they refused, saying they had no one in custody here. We were in one room. Sometimes they allowed us to go outside. Three girls died during this time, including the 12-year-old girl who was raped to death.**

<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Cameroon; Survivors of military assault await justice”, 26 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/cameroon-survivors-military-assault-await-justice>

**One of the soldiers did not support what the others were doing. We saw that he was different. We started begging him to help us get out of here (...) He called the military camp in Bamenda to complain, and the commander in Bamenda called the village and told them to release all the civilians in custody. So, we were released.”**

Amnesty International met several women in Bonaberi, in the city of Douala, who also reported being raped by the military. Annie was living in Wum with her grandparents when the military arrived “one day in April 2021”.

**“Late at night we were eating in the room when we heard gunshots behind the door. The military - the BIR - kicked the door so hard with their legs that it broke. My grandmother was leaning on the bed, and I was eating with my grandfather. They asked us to show everything we have in the room, like knives. We said we only have cutlasses that we use in the bush and axes. They started brutalizing us, beating my grandparents with sticks, shouting that we should show them everything we have in the house. My grandmother cried and said we have nothing, and we are not bad people. They hit my grandfather on the neck, he fell down, and they shot my grandmother. I was crying, I was screaming, they told me to shut up or they would shoot me. I was terrified. I stood and waited, and a military man came and asked me to take off my dress. They tied me up, then they brutalized me, beat me. The other one came and raped me. There were two of them, one did the deed. When they had finished, they left. I was bleeding. I stood there for two hours.”<sup>161</sup>**

Amnesty International also consulted a complaint<sup>162</sup> lodged by a law office to the Bamenda military court, accusing the BIR of torturing and raping their clients (all women) held incommunicado at the BIR base at Bamenda airport in June 2022. According to the document, the victims were “subjected to severe psychological and physical torture, in particular [one of them] was physically tortured and electrocuted several times, and at night the officers raped her”.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Interview in person with Annie (name changed for security reasons), 23 November 2022, Bonabéri.

<sup>162</sup> Complaint sent on 7 July 2022 by a law office to “the Commissioner for government” of the military tribunal in Bamenda.

<sup>163</sup> Complaint sent on 7 July 2022 by a law office to “the Commissioner for government” of the military tribunal in Bamenda.



# 5. AUTHORITIES' RESPONSE

**“The place was bad – the smell, the food... They did not allow people to come and give you food. I did not have a wheelchair; I had to crawl.”**

Bruno Vibarfe, who has a permanent disability, was arbitrarily detained for three months on suspicion of “financing of terrorist acts”.

Cameroonian authorities have an obligation to investigate allegations of crimes and human rights violations committed in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions, and to prosecute and punish those responsible for such violations in fair trials and before independent, impartial and competent tribunals. Victims of these crimes and violations have a right to justice and reparation.

But, with regard to crimes committed by alleged separatists, proceedings (when they exist) have often been marred with gross irregularities. With regard to human rights violations committed by members of the defence and security forces and militias, the government has made several commitments to investigate and prosecute allegations, but no action has been taken, or the slowness of the proceedings suggests deliberate obstruction by the authorities, as in the case of the Ngarbuh massacre trial.

In addition, those who have denounced or reported on human rights violations and crimes committed in the Anglophone regions have been threatened and sometimes arbitrarily detained and tortured by all parties, which has contributed to the silencing of critical voices.

## 5.1 JUSTICE – OR LACK THEREOF

### 5.1.1 PROCEDURES AGAINST ALLEGED SEPARATISTS

Regarding the crimes committed by armed separatists documented in this report in most of the cases documented by Amnesty International, the people interviewed told us that they have reported the crimes to the authorities but have never heard back from them regarding the opening of an investigation. To the best of Amnesty International's knowledge, and in the absence of any response from the authorities to the request for information sent by the organization on this subject, to this date, none of the crimes documented in chapter 5 of this report are the subject of judicial investigations or trials.

However, Amnesty International has documented several cases of people arbitrarily arrested and detained on the mere suspicion of collaborating with armed separatists. One lawyer told Amnesty International that “most of the charges related to the Anglophone crisis are trumped-up charges”.<sup>164</sup>

Céline was arrested in Donga-Mantung division on 13 September 2019 and thereafter transferred to be detained in Bamenda central prison. According to her lawyers, she was charged with “prejudice against secession” and failure to report the activities of armed separatists, for allegedly being the girlfriend of an armed separatist and cooking for armed separatists. She was taken to Bamenda from Ndu town and brought before a military court. She was then transferred back to Bamenda prison, where she remained detained for two years without a trial. Finally, her lawyers challenged the legality of her detention, arguing that it was past legal time limits. The military tribunal released Céline unconditionally on 14 September 2021, after the charges were dropped.

Richard<sup>165</sup> spent two weeks in incommunicado detention in the military camp at Bamenda airport, after being arrested in the city of Bamenda on 2 August 2020 and charged with “involvement in secession” and “illegally carrying and possessing firearms”, “theft, with carrying of a firearm”. In a December 2021 judgment by the Bamenda military tribunal consulted by Amnesty International, the court acquitted him of these charges.

### THE CASE OF BRUNO VIBARFE



←  Bruno Vibarfe in court on 21 July 2021. © Private.

Bruno Vibarfe, a businessman with a permanent disability, was targeted by the armed separatists who shot at his home in Kumbo (North-West), forcing him to move to the West region. There, he was arrested and detained for more than three months on mere suspicion of “financing of terrorist acts”, before being found not guilty on 21 July 2021 for “non-established facts”, according to a Yaoundé military court judgement<sup>166</sup> seen by Amnesty International. Amnesty International delegates interviewed him in Bafoussam on 19 November 2002.<sup>167</sup>

**“One morning, I received a call from the commander of the gendarmerie. I left Fumban and drove to Bafoussam in the evening to see him. I was told that I was importing fuel from Nigeria, that I was bringing weapons and giving them to the ‘Ambas’. They told me I was to be taken to Yaoundé, to the Military Security (SEMIL), with Colonel Mbengwi. I was there for four days. I was treated very badly. The place was bad - the smell, the food... They did not allow people to come and give you food. I did not have a wheelchair; I had to crawl. I was only able to see my lawyer when I was transferred to the State Defense Secretariat (Secretariat d’État à la Défense, SED), where I was held for three months and a week. I was then transferred to the military court for trial. There were three adjournments before they gave the verdict that I was not guilty.”**

<sup>164</sup> Interview by voice call, 18 April 2023.

<sup>165</sup> Name changed for security reasons.

<sup>166</sup> Military court of Yaoundé, ref n° 134/EP/GC/TMY

<sup>167</sup> Interview in person with Bruno Vibarfe, 19 November 2022, Bafoussam.

Amnesty International recalls that military courts should never try civilians. The Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa clearly state that “military courts should not in any circumstances whatsoever have jurisdiction over civilians”.<sup>168</sup> They should only deal with cases against members of the military and on purely disciplinary matters.

Amnesty International also recalls that arrested individuals must be promptly informed of the reasons of their arrest, must have the right to be represented by a lawyer and to challenge the lawfulness of their detention, must be promptly brought before a judge, and must be tried within a reasonable delay, among other due process requirements. Fair trial rights are guaranteed under article 14 of the ICCPR, article 7 of the ACHPR, and other international law standards.

## 5.1.2 PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MEMBERS OF DEFENCE AND SECURITY FORCES AND MILITIAS

To the best of Amnesty International’s knowledge, the cases of killings and destruction committed by members of defence and security forces and the militias documented in this report have not been investigated by the authorities. Most of the people interviewed said that they have not reported the crimes to the authorities and that they have not filed a complaint because they were afraid of reprisals. Amnesty International asked the Cameroonian authorities if investigations have been opened on these cases, but they did not answer.

However, between 2021 and 2022, the authorities announced the opening of at least five investigations into alleged unlawful killings and torture committed by members of the army forces in separate incidents that resulted in the deaths of at least 25 people in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions.

On 19 October 2022, the Ministry of Defence announced the opening of an investigation by local administrative and judicial authorities, following the deaths of two people in the village of Nylbat-Andek, Andek subdivision, Momo division, after three members of the Airbone Troops Battalion of Koutouba “in violation of instructions, attacked some inhabitants on which one of the soldiers unfortunately opened fire”.<sup>169</sup>

On 21 September 2022, the Ministry of Defence announced the opening of investigations by local administrative and judicial authorities, following the arrest of soldiers who were seen in a video “molesting” an alleged separatist fighter arrested during a military operation in the locality of Ndjotin, Bui division, North-West region.<sup>170</sup>

On 7 June 2022, the Ministry of Defence announced the opening of an investigation by local administrative and judicial authorities regarding the killing of nine persons in the locality of Missong by soldiers. According to the press release, “in an inappropriate reaction, unsuited to the circumstances and grossly disproportionate to the hostile villagers’ refusal to cooperate, and fearing the worst for themselves and their missing comrade, the soldiers, in a hasty reaction of self-protection, and in defiance of the sacrosanct principle of precaution, used their weapons”, resulting in the death of four women, four men and an 18-month-old baby.<sup>171</sup>

On 14 October 2021, the Ministry of Defence announced the opening of investigations by local administrative and defence and security forces, following the death of a 5-year-old girl in Buea city, South-West region, after “in an inappropriate reaction, unsuited to the circumstances and clearly disproportionate to the irreverent behaviour of the driver, one of the gendarmes, in defiance of the sacrosanct principle of precaution, fire[d] warning shots in order to immobilize the vehicle”.<sup>172</sup>

On 14 February 2021, the divisional officer in Ndu subdivision wrote to defence and security forces officers to report “images of inhumane torture” against a man by elements of their respective forces on 11 February, “acts which the element had the audacity to film and publish on social media”. The Divisional Officer requested the immediate launch of “disciplinary and legal measures against the perpetrators”.<sup>173</sup> The following day, the Ministry of Defence announced the arrest of two gendarmes, two soldiers and two

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<sup>168</sup> Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, L.(c)

<sup>169</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Press release*, Ref: 00627/ CP/MINDEF/019; 21 September 2022.

<sup>170</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Press release*, Ref: 00685/ CP/MINDEF/019; 19 October 2022.

<sup>171</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Radio-Press release*, Ref: 00427/ CP/MINDEF/019; 19 October 2022.

<sup>172</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Press release*, Ref: 00810/ CP/MINDEF/019, 14 October 2021.

<sup>173</sup> Subdivisional office Ndu, *Radio-Fax message*, Ref n° E27/05.

policemen identified following the violence committed against the victim, a man “suspected of being a local criminal and terrorist”.<sup>174</sup>

Despite the announcements of these investigations on alleged crimes committed by members of defence and security forces, there is no public information on the evolution of these proceedings. Amnesty International asked the authorities whether members of the defence and security forces had been prosecuted or sentenced in these cases, but they did not answer.

This situation raises concerns around impunity, when also considering that the trial on the Ngarbuh massacre (during which 21 people including 13 children were killed by members of defence and security forces and militias on 14 February 2020), is still ongoing, two and a half years after opening.<sup>175</sup>

Amnesty International reminds the Cameroonian authorities of their obligation to investigate all allegations of human rights violations by the defence and security forces and militias, including murders, rapes, acts of torture and the burning of homes, and to prosecute and judge those responsible in fair trials before competent criminal courts.

## 5.2 SILENCING OF CRITICS

People who have denounced or reported human rights violations and crimes committed in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions have been threatened and sometimes arbitrarily detained and tortured by all parties.

Regional and international human rights mechanism have also been denied access to Cameroon, preventing them from assessing the human rights situation in the Anglophone regions and thus from contributing to the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes against the population.

Cameroonian authorities must guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and to seek information, in accordance with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and article 9 the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. They must also protect human rights defenders and all others subjected to threats and attacks for exercising their freedom of expression.

### 5.2.1 ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, ACTIVISTS AND LAWYERS

#### HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders working for prominent organizations and cyber-activists have been targeted with death threats and intimidation for exposing human rights violations and crimes committed by the defence and security forces, militias and armed separatists in the Anglophone regions, as Amnesty International documented in a document published in July 2022.<sup>176</sup>

Cases include “N’Zui Manto”, a cyber-activist who was forced to leave Cameroon because of his denunciation of living conditions in the country, and was later forced to leave his country of residence in May 2022, after the Cameroonian authorities located him there, following information shared by the local police that raised fears of forced repatriation. “N’Zui Manto” told Amnesty International he started receiving death threats on social media at the beginning of 2019, after publishing information about the Cameroonian army’s losses in Anglophone regions. On 28 May 2022, he received a message from a fake Facebook profile saying: “One day you will come across me. I will kill you like nothing.”

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<sup>174</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Communiqué de presse*, 15 February 2021,

<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Cameroon: Step Toward Justice for Massacre”, 14 December 2020, [www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/cameroon-step-toward-justice-massacre-0](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/cameroon-step-toward-justice-massacre-0)

<sup>176</sup> Amnesty International, “Cameroon: End threats against activists who exposed violations and abuses in Anglophone regions”, 7 July 2022, <https://shorturl.at/fvKQY>

While still outside Cameroon, he has continued to receive threats. On 5 March 2023, he posted on his Facebook page a screenshot of a WhatsApp group chat in which unidentified people were discussing the possibility of kidnapping him, “before looking at what to do with him”.

In February 2022, the police sent a letter to the director of a national human rights organization informing him that the police would be attending a press conference planned by the organization to launch an annual report on human rights in Cameroon.<sup>177</sup> The press conference was held under the surveillance of people whom the director identified as intelligence agents, who deliberately announced their presence to him, threatened him during and after the conference, and then continued to do so on a regular basis.



Akem Kelvin Nkwain, a human rights officer at CHRDA, told Amnesty International that he had received several death threats from alleged armed separatists.<sup>178</sup> The first threat came on 24 May 2022, shortly after Nkwain wrote on Twitter about a child killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) allegedly planted by separatist fighters in Kumbo, North-West Cameroon. On 16 June 2022, he received calls and messages featuring photos of a captured policeman, dead persons, bullets, guns, armed group members and an image of himself being marked for killing. One of the messages read: “We declare you and your whole entire family as traitors and enemies to the Ambazonian fighters. Until we reach your house, let that money bring you back to life when you get shot and kill.”

### THE CASE OF THE ACTIVIST ABDUL KARIM ALI

Peace activist Abdul Karim Ali has been in arbitrary detention since August 2022, after he recorded a video on 9 July 2022, in which he accused a Cameroonian military of torturing people. Two of his friends are also detained simply because of their links to him, and all three have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, according to Amnesty International research based on testimonies from his lawyers, court documents and pictures.<sup>179</sup>

On 11 August 2022, Abdul Karim Ali was arbitrarily arrested without a warrant and taken into detention in the city of Bamenda, where he was held for 84 days – four of which were incommunicado – at a military police station (gendarmerie) in inhumane conditions, including deprivation of food and water for several days, having to use a single bucket both as a toilet and for bathing. While no formal reason was given for his detention, he was interrogated repeatedly about a video he made on 9 July 2022 denouncing a Cameroonian military chief known as “Moja Moja”, for reportedly torturing people.



  Picture of Yenkong Sulemanu's feet after allegedly being tortured at SED. © Private

Two of Abdul Karim's friends and his brother were also later detained by the gendarmerie, with reference to vague allegations of being his drivers. While his brother was released after payment of a large sum of money, his friends Rabio Enuah and Yenkong Sulemanu remain in arbitrary detention and have been questioned about their failure to report Abdul Karim Ali to the police.

In November 2022, the three men were transferred to the SED. On 2 February 2023, they were remanded to custody at the Kondengui Central Prison, Yaoundé, on accusations of “hostility against the fatherland”, “failure to report”, “secession”, and “rebellion”.

<sup>177</sup> Interview by voice call with the director of the organization (name withheld for security reasons), 22 March 2023.

<sup>178</sup> Interviews by voice call between January and April 2023.

<sup>179</sup> Amnesty International, “Cameroon: Activist held arbitrarily for 200 days: Abdul Karim Ali”, 27 February 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr17/6343/2023/en/>

## THE CASE OF LAWYER NICODEMUS AMUNGWA TANYI

Nicodemus Amungwa Tanyi, member of the Cameroon and Nigerian Bar Associations and resident of Buea, has been repeatedly assaulted and threatened by members of the defence and security forces in connection with his defence of certain clients.

On 27 July 2019, the lawyer was beaten by two *gendarmarie* officers in Yaoundé, where he was working on the trial of the “Nera 10” separatist leaders (see section 4.1.1). According to his written testimony, which he confirmed orally to Amnesty International,<sup>180</sup> two gendarmes knocked him down with their motorbike, then accused him of being a thief, and beat and choked him until he was unconscious. He was then hospitalized for several weeks and signed off work for 30 days. His laptop, money, important documents and case files, mobile phone had all been taken by the assailants. He reported the assault to the state prosecutor military on 4 September 2019 and on 3 January 2020.<sup>181</sup> His case was heard on court on 8 September 2021 and since then, there have been several adjournments.

On 31 May 2021, members of the national *gendarmarie* arrested and detained Nicodemus Amungwa Tanyi at the SED in Yaoundé. He was arrested at the *Groupement Territorial de la Gendarmerie* while representing his client, on the grounds that content and information relating to the Anglophone crisis had been found on his telephone after an arbitrary search by a gendarme officer. On the same day, he was transferred to the *Service Central des Recherches Judiciaires* (SRCJ) of the SED, where he was detained for 10 days. At his second appearance before the prosecutor of the Yaoundé Military Court on 9 June 2021 – where he was charged with secession and attempted corruption of *gendarmarie* officers – he was released on bail.

As of the date of publication of this report, the lawyer was still waiting to know whether he would be charged for trial or discharged on the two charges of attempted corruption and secession.

During a visit on 1 February 2023 to his arbitrarily detained clients, Abdul Karim Ali, Yenkong Sulemanu and Rabio Inuah at the SRCJ, gendarmes threatened the lawyer and prevented him from communicating with his clients after the latter told him that they had suffered torture and other ill-treatment at the hands of the gendarmes.

## 5.2.2 ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

The Cameroonian authorities and armed separatist groups have deliberately silenced or attempted to silence journalists involved in media coverage of the Anglophone crisis, in violation of the right to freedom of expression.

The repression of media reporting on crimes in the two Anglophone regions is part of a wider context of attacks against the media, as illustrated by the killings of journalists Martinez Zogo<sup>182</sup> and Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé<sup>183</sup> in January and February 2023. Several months before, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) had ranked Cameroon as “the second-worst jailer in the region [continent], with five journalists arbitrarily detained under an opaque judicial system that includes the use of military tribunals to prosecute journalists, who are civilians under international law”.<sup>184</sup>

Anye Nde Nsoh was killed in Bamenda (North-West) on 7 May 2023 by suspected armed separatists. In a video statement posted on social media, separatist leader Capo Daniel said the journalist was killed “by Ambazonian forces in a mistaken identity situation”.<sup>185</sup> The government announced on 11 May that “investigations have been launched to find the perpetrators of this crime so that they can be brought to justice”.<sup>186</sup> The journalist was the regional bureau chief of Advocate newspaper and worked with several radios, according to the Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ).<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Interviews in person in Yaoundé and by voice call, November 2022 to April 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Letter to the State prosecutor military, *Report of my deathly assault by two gendarmes*, 3 January 2020.

<sup>182</sup> Amnesty International, “Cameroon: Martinez Zogo’s death must not go unpunished”, 23 January 2023, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/cameroon-la-mort-de-martinez-zogo-ne-doit-pas-rester-impunie/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/cameroon-la-mort-de-martinez-zogo-ne-doit-pas-rester-impunie/)

<sup>183</sup> ONU Info, “Cameroon: l’ONU préoccupée après l’assassinat d’un 2e journaliste en deux semaines”, <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2023/02/1132047>

<sup>184</sup> Committee to protect journalists, *Number of jailed journalists spikes to new global record*, 14 December 2022, <https://cpj.org/reports/2022/12/number-of-jailed-journalists-spikes-to-new-global-record/#:~:text=The%20Committee%20to%20Protect%20Journalists,in%20a%20deteriorating%20media%20landscape.>

<sup>185</sup> Capo Daniel, You Tube video, 8 May 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eubjH0b2J9c>

<sup>186</sup> Communiqué du gouvernement n° 000014, 11 May 2023

<sup>187</sup> CAMASEJ, “Brutal killing of journalist Anye Nde Nsoh”, 8 May 2023.

Almost four years after journalist Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe “Wazizi” died in custody on 17 August 2019, the results of the investigation that was reportedly<sup>188</sup> launched and sent to the Head of State have thus far not been made public. Apart from the French ambassador’s statement,<sup>189</sup> there has been no confirmation that an investigation was actually launched and, if so, that it was effective, thorough and impartial.

The Cameroonian authorities waited ten months before admitting that he had died in custody as a result of “severe sepsis” after being transferred to the military hospital in Yaoundé, according to the authorities,<sup>190</sup> while media reported that he died as a result of acts of torture he was reportedly subjected to by military officials while in detention. He was particularly known for reporting on cases of human rights violations in the Anglophone regions.

Several journalists have been threatened or pressured while reporting on the armed violence, contributing to self-censorship and silence on many crimes committed by all parties, as the following testimonies collected by Amnesty International show. All names have been withheld for security reasons.

**“In 2020, I hosted a programme on current affairs on the continent, and most of the time I talked about the Anglophone crisis, without supporting either the authorities or the separatists. During the programme, I sometimes received anonymous insults and threats. And at one point I was afraid to travel to the North-West and South-West regions. I couldn’t visit my family. One of the messages said: “Keep talking, we are waiting for you in Bamenda”.”<sup>191</sup>**

**“You cannot work freely. If the journalist uses the word ‘separatist’ in his programme or article, the armed groups will come looking for him to find out why he is treating them this way when they claim to be the regular army in the area. If the journalist does not use the word ‘separatist’ when referring to armed groups, he will be summoned to the Military Security and may be arrested. For my own safety, I have preferred to leave the Anglophone regions or to be very careful in dealing with issues related to this crisis.”<sup>192</sup>**

**“I have been kicked, slapped, and threatened with arrest multiple times. I was even arrested and detained at the military tribunal during the trial of Anglophone detainees, in Yaoundé, and my equipment was seized. Journalists also run the risk of running into drugged armed separatist fighters who think you are not telling their story the way they want. Or that you are black leg for government. The story is the same for government troops who readily think journalists are collaborators of the separatists. The constant threat to our lives is palpable, forcing some journalists to avoid reporting on the conflict altogether. Instead, they focus on non-controversial issues. Self-censorship has become the norm to ensure the safety of journalists, but this also means that many critical stories in the Anglophone regions go unreported.”<sup>193</sup>**

## **5.2.3 REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES DENIED ACCESS TO CAMEROON**

The Cameroonian authorities have failed to cooperate effectively with international and regional human rights institutions which have repeatedly asked to be allowed to visit the country to carry out fact-finding missions, but to no avail.

Cameroon issued a standing invitation to the UN Special Procedures in 2014 but has not received a visit from any the last 10 years, despite multiple and repeated requests from them to conduct country visits. On 24 January 2017, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention submitted a written request to the

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<sup>188</sup> Following a meeting with the President of the Republic on 5 June 2020, the French ambassador, Christophe Guilhou, told the media that the President had told him “that he was going to launch an enquiry to find out all the causes and circumstances” of the journalist’s death.

<sup>189</sup> Following a meeting with the President of the Republic on 5 June 2020, the French ambassador, Christophe Guilhou, told the media that the President had told him “that he was going to launch an enquiry to find out all the causes and circumstances” of the journalist’s death.

<sup>190</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Press release”, 22 June 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Interview by voice call with a journalist (name withheld for security reasons), 24 March 2023.

<sup>192</sup> Interview by voice call with a journalist (name withheld for security reasons), 3 May 2023.

<sup>193</sup> Interview by voice call with a journalist (name withheld for security reasons), 3 May 2023.

Government for a country visit.<sup>194</sup> However, as of April 2023, the Working Group had not received any answer from the government.<sup>195</sup> At the time of writing, Cameroon has 10 requests pending for country visits.<sup>196</sup>

On at least four occasions since 2018,<sup>197</sup> the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has asked the Cameroonian authorities to authorize a fact-finding mission to the country to enable the Commission to verify allegations of violations. The Cameroonian authorities have refused to authorize such a mission so far.

Fact-finding missions and visits in Anglophone regions by international and regional human rights institutions are all the more necessary given the lack of information provided by the authorities on the human rights situation in the Anglophone regions, the difficulties for NGOs of accessing the regions and of speaking out about the crimes and violations committed in the context of the armed violence, and the low level of activity of the National Human Rights Commission with regard to human rights violations committed by the defence and security forces in the North-West and South-West regions.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Human Rights Council, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 46/2019 concerning Mancho Bibixy Tse, adopted at its eighty-fifth session, 12–16 August 2019.

<sup>195</sup> Answer from the Working Group received by email on 17 February 2023, following a request for information from Amnesty International.

<sup>196</sup> <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/forthcomingcountryvisits.aspx?lang=en> (accessed 22 May 2023).

<sup>197</sup> 9 May 2018, 13 November 2018, 7 August 2020, 5 December 2021.

<sup>198</sup> Law 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 on the creation, organization and functioning of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission. Its mandate allows it "to conduct investigations in accordance with the laws in force", and to "request the competent authorities to put an end to human rights violations".



# 6. ARMS TRANSFERS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

## 6.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### 6.1.1 PROVISIONS OF THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

On 2 April 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which came into force on 24 December 2014.<sup>199</sup> It is the first international instrument setting global standards to regulate the international trade in conventional arms and ammunition.

Article 6 of the treaty prohibits states parties from authorizing a transfer of conventional arms and related munitions that would violate their obligations under measures taken by the Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (in particular arms embargoes), or those resulting from relevant international agreements to which they are party. In addition, transfers are prohibited when the state concerned is aware, during the authorisation process, that the arms in question could be used to commit genocide, crimes against humanity, or grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

Once a state party establishes that a transfer is not prohibited by Article 6, it is required to conduct an objective and non-discriminatory assessment of each export proposal under Article 7. It is thus up to the state to determine whether the arms to be exported could undermine or contribute to “peace and security” (Article 7.1.a). Each state party must also assess whether such weapons or related goods could be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international human rights or humanitarian law, or an act constituting an offence under the international conventions and protocols on terrorism or transnational organized crime. The exporting country should consider adopting measures to mitigate the risks described in Article 7.1 before authorizing the export. If these risks cannot be properly addressed and mitigated, the transfer should not take place. Under Article 7.4, states parties must also take into account the risk of arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children. Finally, Article 11 urges states parties to put in place measures to prevent the diversion of the transfer of conventional arms to unauthorised end users.

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<sup>199</sup> The Arms Trade Treaty, <https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/English7.pdf>

## 6.1.2 PROVISIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU member states are bound by Common Position 2008/944/CFSP<sup>200</sup> defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.<sup>200</sup> This legally binding instrument predates the ATT and is complementary to it. In order to fulfil their obligations under this Common Position, member states must assess applications for export authorizations on a case-by-case basis against eight criteria, including: respect for human rights in the country of final destination and respect for international humanitarian law (second criterion); the existence of a risk of diversion of military technology or equipment in the buyer country or re-exportation of such equipment under undesirable conditions (seventh criterion). Member states are required to incorporate these criteria into national law.



Amnesty International calls on the states that provide weapons, military and other assistance to Cameroon to put in place mitigating measures to ensure such assistance does not contribute to violations of international human rights law; to cease the provision of all such assistance if it is contributing to the facilitation of violations of international human rights law; to regularly assess its cooperation with Cameroon in light of human rights violations committed by its defence and security forces in the Anglophone regions.

## 6.2 MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN CAMEROON AND PARTNERS

### 6.2.1 RISK OF WEAPONS BEING USED TO COMMIT OR FACILITATE SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Given the patterns of serious human rights violations documented in this report, and credible evidence of the diversion of arms to armed separatist groups, Cameroon is a high-risk destination for arms transfers – particularly transfers of small arms and light weapons.



  Picture shared on social media of “General No Pity” and other armed separatists with military equipment and taken from the Cameroonian defence and security forces. BIR and GPIGN (Groupe polyvalent d’intervention de la gendarmerie nationale) insignia are visible. © Private.

<sup>200</sup> Council common position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008E0944>

This risk obviously exists when the military assistance has no geographical limit but also when the military assistance is provided in the context of the conflict between the Cameroonian army and Boko Haram armed groups in the Far North region. There is indeed no indication that units deployed in the Far North could not later be deployed in the Anglophone regions, together with their military equipment.

Amnesty International sent letters for information to the British,<sup>201</sup> Croatian, French,<sup>202</sup> Israeli<sup>203</sup>, Russian,<sup>204</sup> US<sup>205</sup>, and Serbian authorities, asking them what measures they have taken to ensure that transferred arms would not be used in Anglophone regions where Cameroonian forces and armed separatist groups have a history of committing serious human rights violations and crimes under domestic law. Only the United States government responded to this (see section 6.2.2).

In the absence of such information, Amnesty International was unable to trace precise chains of custody of weapons observed in the hands of armed groups but did identify several weapon types in propaganda videos posted on social networks by armed separatist groups, some of which could have come from foreign assistance to Cameroonian army. These weapons include: AKM (Russian made), PKM (Russian made), Galil (Israel made), Beretta (Italian made), FAL (Belgium made), RPG-7 (Russian made) and their Chinese or Romanian variants, Zastava M21 (Serbian made), and VHS-H2 (Croatian made).

Several of these videos were expressly filmed and broadcast by the armed separatist groups to claim successful attacks against defence and security forces, and to suggest that they had seized Croatian, Serbian and Israeli weapons from government stocks. While tracing individual weapons was not possible, Croatia<sup>206</sup> and Serbia<sup>207</sup> have officially reported transfers of small arms and other weapons to the Cameroonian defence and security forces to the ATT.



Screenshot from a propaganda video posted on social media by the armed separatist group Fako Mountains Lions, showing a Galil Israel-made assault rifle (left) ©Private



Screenshot of an HS Product VHS-2 assault rifle seized from the Cameroonian defence and security forces by armed separatists, and displayed in a video posted on social media © Private



Screenshot of a Zastava M21 assault rifle on a member of an armed separatist group, shown in a video posted on social media © Private

<sup>201</sup> Request for information sent to Ben Wallace, Secretary of State for Defence, 22 December 2022.

<sup>202</sup> Request for information sent to Catherine Colonna, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs; and to Sébastien Lecornu, Ministry of Armed Forces, 31 January 2023.

<sup>203</sup> Request for information sent to the Ministry of Defense, 17 April 2023.

<sup>204</sup> Request for information sent to Sergei Kuzhugetovich Shoigu, Minister of Defence; and to Sergei Victorovich Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 5 April 2023.

<sup>205</sup> Request for information sent to Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, 5 April 2023.

<sup>206</sup> Government of Croatia, "Annual report on exports and imports of conventional arms, in accordance with article 13(3) of the Arms Trade Treaty", submitted on 28 April 2021, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/download/0f4bf477-8ae6-3931-be3f-4f6ddd42162a>

<sup>207</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia, "Annual report on exports and imports of conventional arms, in accordance with article 13(3) of the Arms Trade Treaty", submitted on 31 May 2021, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/download/dd31aca9-497f-3da1-9d3c-e7a30048f615>

## 6.2.2 PRESENTATION OF THE MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN CAMEROON AND PARTNERS

Several countries have been providing Cameroon with military and security assistance through arms sales or donation, and/or military cooperation agreements. In this section, Amnesty International presents information collected on the military assistance between Cameroon and Belgium, Croatia, France, Israel, Russia, Serbia, United Kingdom and United States of America.

### COOPERATION BETWEEN FRANCE AND CAMEROON

France has long been one of Cameroon's main military allies. In recent years, this support has mainly focused on cooperation in the armed conflict opposing Cameroon and the Boko Haram armed group in the Far North region.

In an official ceremony in January 2016, France handed over "11 light tactical P4 vehicles in perfect working order, equipped with their collective weapons and their transmission stations, 40 bulletproof vests and as many helmets", according to several media reports. Other vehicles (including Bastion type armoured fighting vehicles) were delivered in 2016, 2017 and 2021.

French arms exports to Cameroon continued even after human rights violations by the Cameroonian defence and security forces in the Far North<sup>208</sup> and the North-West and South-West regions had been well documented by several human rights NGOs,<sup>209</sup> and sometimes acknowledged by the Cameroonian authorities themselves, as in the case of Ngarbuh. In 2021, for example, France exported to Cameroon 21 "armoured combat vehicles", 100 "precision rifles" and 30 "machine guns" according to the French Ministry of Armed Forces' report to the Parliament.<sup>210</sup>

On 23 September 2021, Cameroon and France signed two agreements to strengthen their military cooperation, concerning the financing of the International War College in Yaoundé and the support and training of the Cameroonian Navy.

The Ministry of Armed Forces and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs did not respond to Amnesty International's request for information and the offer of a right to reply.

### COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND CAMEROON

In response to a written question from Alexander Stafford MP on 16 January 2023, asking whether the Secretary of State for Defence would publish "a breakdown of the armed forces' cooperation with the armed forces of Cameroon", the authorities replied on 23 January 2023:

**"The UK is committed to supporting the Government of Cameroon in its efforts to counter the threat to regional security posed by Boko Haram terrorism. Since 2018, therefore, we have been providing capacity-building assistance to security forces operating in the Far North of Cameroon. Since January 2021, this assistance has been delivered by means of a persistent forward presence. Through this assistance, we have helped our partner forces to strengthen their capabilities in cross-agency working and operating in complex and difficult environments. The latter activity has involved developing skills in patrolling, countering improvised explosive devices, providing medical treatment and conducting mountain warfare."<sup>211</sup>**

This response does not explicitly mention the existence of a military cooperation agreement. However, a UK official gave details to Amnesty International about the existence of a "current agreement": "It involves basic training in the following: first aid, counter IED threat, capture persons handling and rules of engagement. We also conduct planning training to HQ elements in the higher command in crisis response. This was done for the Africa Cup of Nations [football tournament]. All trainee names and units are recorded to track who was trained. The agreement in place at present is solely for training BIR forces in the Far North and at times for higher command too. Assistance is strictly conditional on the fact that military are only fighting Boko Haram,

<sup>208</sup> Amnesty International, *Cameroon's secret torture chambers: Human rights violations and war crimes in the fight against Boko Haram* (Index: AFR 17/6536/2017), 20 July 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/6536/2017/en/>

<sup>209</sup> See for example publications from CHRDA, REDHAC, Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch.

<sup>210</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Rapport au Parlement sur les exportations d'armement de la France", 2022, <https://shorturl.at/anDY5>

<sup>211</sup> Question for Ministry of Defence, UIN 124153, tabled on 16 January 2023, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-16/124153/>

and not being redeployed to the North-West and South-West.”<sup>212</sup> In the absence of a response from the UK and Cameroonian authorities on this issue, Amnesty International is unaware of the mechanisms for implementing and monitoring this conditionality. According to the same person, a new agreement was supposed to be signed in 2023.

The figures for UK defence spending on military assistance to Cameroon since 2018-19, provided in the answer to Alexander Stafford MP, are shown by Amnesty International in the following graph. It shows a sharp increase in spending from 2019-2020. This effort has continued in subsequent years, even after well-documented human rights abuses by Cameroon’s defence and security forces in the Far North, North-West and South-West regions.

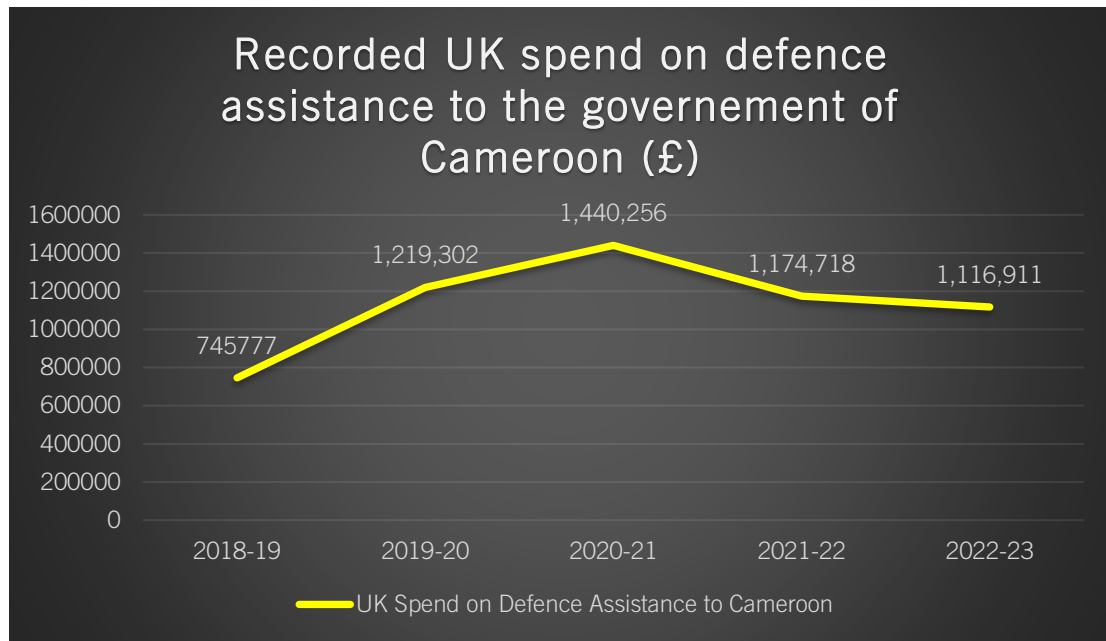


Chart showing UK spend on defence assistance to the government of Cameroon.

### COOPERATION BETWEEN CROATIA AND CAMEROON

Following a request for information sent by Amnesty International to the Croatian authorities on 21 December 2022,<sup>213</sup> the Ministry of Trade and Sustainable Development informed the organization<sup>214</sup> that Croatia exported 2,850 assault rifles to Cameroon in 2019. The Ministry also confirmed that the export to Cameroon was reported to the UN as part of the annual report in accordance with the ATT. The report for the calendar year 2019, submitted on 28 April 2021 by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, also shows that Croatia exported 140 “hand-held, under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers”.

Croatian authorities told Amnesty International they do not have data for 2022, and that no export was made in 2021. As for the type of rifle and the producer, the Ministry of Trade and Sustainable Development claimed that it does not collect these statistics, and therefore cannot provide that information. Croatia requested that its 2021 ATT report not be made public.

### COOPERATION BETWEEN SERBIA AND CAMEROON

Following a request for information sent by Amnesty International to the Serbian authorities on 21 December 2022,<sup>215</sup> regarding the sale of weapons to Cameroon, the Serbian trade ministry answered on 30 December 2022, with details about type of weapons, quantity and end users.<sup>216</sup> According to this document, 21

<sup>212</sup> Interview in person with diplomat, 25 November 2022, Yaoundé.

<sup>213</sup> Request for information sent by email.

<sup>214</sup> Email received on 25 January 2023 from the Croatian Ministry of Trade and Sustainable Development.

<sup>215</sup> Request for information sent by email on 21 December 2022.

<sup>216</sup> Email received on 30 December 2022.

authorizations were granted to export weapons and military equipment to Cameroon: two permissions in 2018, five in 2019, two in 2020, 12 in 2021, and none in 2022.

The exports include 22 M84 assault rifles exported in 2019 and 80 in 2021; 1,000 M21 assault rifles in 2020, and 500 in 2021; 13,500 mortar shells in 2018; 10 M91 sniper rifles in 2021 and 10 in 2022; 2,000 grenades in 2021; 2,300 VHS-D2 automatic rifles; all with the corresponding ammunition. Serbian trade ministry also confirmed Zastava made M21 assault rifles were exported in 2018 (130 pieces), 2019 (6,870 pieces), 2020 (7,000 pieces) and in 2021(500 pieces).

Amnesty International experts have identified the Serbian-made Zastava M21 assault rifle in the hands of armed separatists in various footage and images posted on social media, including some which could have been seized during attacks on defence and security forces.



 ↑ *Soldiers from Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) holding Zastava M91 during a Flintlock exercise in Ghana, 7 March 2023 @ Private.*

## COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CAMEROON

Following a first military cooperation agreement signed in 2015 between Cameroon and Russia,<sup>217</sup> a new one was signed on 12 April 2022,<sup>218</sup> whose full contents have not yet been made public.<sup>219</sup>

The 2015 agreement contained assistance regarding military equipment. At the time, the Office of the President of Cameroon said in a statement: “This will mostly be in the form of very sophisticated military equipment, the latest version of heavy artillery, including missiles, aerial protection equipment, anti-aircraft missile systems, canons, armoured vehicles and several other military equipment and armaments.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Link to the agreement (in Russian language): <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/420272921>

<sup>218</sup> Defence Web, Cameroon and Russia sign defence agreement, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/cameroon-and-russia-sign-defence-agreement/>

<sup>219</sup> RFI, « Le Cameroun signe un accord militaire avec la Russie », <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20220420-le-cameroun-signe-un-accord-militaire-avec-la-russie>

<sup>220</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, “Russia to assist Cameroon in the fight against Boko Haram”, <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/audiences/1126-russia-to-assist-cameroon-in-the-fight-against-boko-haram>

## **COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CAMEROON**

In a letter dated 9 March 2022 to Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Defense Austin,<sup>221</sup> three members of the USA Congress expressed their concern “about whether U.S. security assistance may be contributing to serious human rights abuses” in Cameroon, mentioning that “the State Department has reprogrammed some security assistance since 2019, but our understanding is that other assistance – including to the BIR – continues”. The USA had reduced its military assistance to Cameroon in 2019 following accusations of human rights violations.<sup>222</sup> .

Responding to an information request sent by Amnesty International, the Department of State responded that:

“In 2018, the United States carefully recalibrated its military assistance strategy such that it includes only programmes where we have assessed there is little risk of assistance being diverted from the intended purpose of the programming.”

According to the response, “individual and unit-level recipients of applicable U.S. assistance are vetted prior to receiving such assistance to ensure there is no credible information that members of the unit have committed a gross violation of human rights (GVHRs), in accordance with the Leahy Law”.

The State Department added that: “there is no broad-based bilateral defence cooperation agreement between the United States and Cameroon; there is, however, a standard agreement pertaining to end use of U.S.-provided grant defence article and services”.

## **COOPERATION BETWEEN BELGIUM AND CAMEROON**

The latest annual report on exports authorized by the Walloon government, covering the year 2021, shows an export licence to Cameroon worth €5,750,000.<sup>223</sup> This concerns material in the category of “missiles and explosives”. This makes it the largest licence for Walloon arms granted to any African country in 2021. It is important to note that this is a licence, not an actual export.

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<sup>221</sup> Letter wrote on 9 March 2022 by members of Congress Ilhan Omar, Karen Bass and Sara Jacobs. On file with Amnesty.

<sup>222</sup> The Washington Post, “U.S cuts some military assistance to Cameroon, citing allegations of human rights violations”, 7 February 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/us-cuts-some-military-assistance-to-cameroon-citing-allegations-of-human-rights-violations/2019/02/06/aeb18052-2a4e-11e9-906e-9d55b6451eb4\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/us-cuts-some-military-assistance-to-cameroon-citing-allegations-of-human-rights-violations/2019/02/06/aeb18052-2a4e-11e9-906e-9d55b6451eb4_story.html)

<sup>223</sup> Rapport au Parlement wallon sur l'application du décret du 12 juin 2012 relatif à l'importation, au transfert, à l'exportation et au transit d'armes civiles et de produits liés à la défense, <https://dirupo.wallonie.be/files/Publications/Rapport%20Armes%202021.pdf>

# 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation remains dire in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions almost six years after the outbreak of the armed violence, following the brutal repression by Cameroonian authorities of protest movements calling for greater respect for the rights of the Anglophone minority in Cameroon.

In the North-West which is the focus of this report, armed separatist groups are responsible for the killings of people suspected of not supporting their cause or collaborating with the Cameroonian state and military, including members of the Mbororo Fulani community, abductions and burning of homes. In turn, Mbororo Fulani militias – sometimes with the complicity of army forces – are also responsible for killings and destruction of property.

The defence and security forces have also carried out attacks on villages and communities accused of harbouring or tolerating the presence of armed separatists or failing to inform the army of their presence. Such attacks have involved unlawful killings, the destruction of homes, rape and other sexual assaults.

The political and judicial authorities have responded to this situation with further human rights violations. Separatist political leaders and members of civil society, including journalists, have been sentenced by military courts for terrorism-related offences, though military courts should not, in any circumstances whatsoever, have jurisdiction over civilians according to international and regional human rights norms. People accused of being armed separatists or their supporters have at times been arbitrarily arrested and detained. Meanwhile, very little information has been made available on genuine investigations into the crimes committed by armed separatists against the population, leaving many victims of these crimes waiting for justice.

The government has at times announced investigations and prosecutions of certain human rights violations committed by the armed forces, but apart from the opening of the trial more than two years ago on the Ngarbuh massacre, no further information has been made available on how the proceedings have evolved, raising concerns about de facto impunity in these cases.

Moreover, those who try to monitor and report on the context of the armed violence are often prevented from access to the regions, and threatened, even by the authorities themselves.

In this context, several of Cameroon's long-standing and more recent partner countries have continued to supply arms to the authorities and have maintained military agreements without providing information on the mitigating measures in place to ensure their assistance does not contribute to serious human rights violations and crimes committed by armed separatists, army forces and militias in the Anglophone regions. However, there is credible evidence of the diversion of weapons to armed separatist groups, including weapons that may have come from foreign assistance to the Cameroonian army.



Concrete actions are needed to prevent crimes and human rights violations in the context of the Anglophone crisis, to fight against impunity for perpetrators and to protect the rights to freedom of expression and to seek information.

Amnesty International therefore makes the following recommendations:

## **TO ALL STATE FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS**

- Immediately cease all human rights violations and crimes under domestic law including killings, rapes, acts of torture, burning of homes against the population in the North-West and South-West regions.

## **TO THE CAMEROONIAN AUTHORITIES**

### **ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE**

- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of crimes under domestic law and human rights violations committed by all armed forces in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, including into the state's responsibility for crimes committed by the militias, and prosecute and sentence those responsible in fair trials, without recourse to the death penalty;
- Ensure that all victims of crimes and human rights violations are able to participate in the above-mentioned trials and, more broadly, provided with truth and justice;
- Ensure that all victims of crimes and human rights violations are granted reparation, including measures of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition, and including ensuring those people whose identity documents have been destroyed or lost in the context of the armed violence can get prompt support from the authorities to obtain new ones;
- Ensure military tribunals can only have jurisdiction over offences of a purely military nature committed by military personnel;
- Make the declaration under Article 34.6 of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which enables NGOs and individuals to bring cases to the court directly.

### **PREVENTING ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION**

- Immediately and unconditionally release all persons arbitrarily detained;
- Ensure that arrests and detentions are conducted in compliance with international human rights standards and domestic law, and that all security forces are trained on and understand these norms;
- Ensure that there are sufficient, recognizable and precise grounds for arrest and that evidence is appropriately gathered. A suspect must only be arrested if there is a reasonable suspicion that he or she may have committed a crime. If there are insufficient grounds for arrest, the person must be immediately released;
- Ensure that detainees are promptly brought before an ordinary court that upholds international fair trial standards, are informed of the charges against them, and have knowledge of and access to legal procedures allowing them to challenge the legality of their detention;

## **PROTECTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY**

- Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;
- Immediately end the arbitrary arrest and detention of people who are merely exercising their right to freedom of expression or peaceful assembly;
- Refrain from implementing total or partial Internet blackouts, in compliance with international standards on freedom of expression;
- Take all appropriate measures to protect journalists, human rights defenders and activists who receive threats for having documented or denounced crimes and human rights violations in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions;
- Respect the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

## **ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

- Finalize, within a clear time frame, the adoption of a comprehensive legal framework on minorities and Indigenous peoples, including constitutional protection, via a process that ensures the effective and meaningful participation of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups as well as civil society organizations.

## **ON COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS**

- Affirmatively respond to requests for visits by UN Special Procedures without further undue delay, especially the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders;
- Affirmatively respond to the request made by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to conduct a fact-finding mission on human rights violations in the Anglophone regions.

# **TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

- Condemn crimes and human rights violations committed by Cameroonian defence and security forces, militias and armed separatists and publicly call on the government of Cameroon to urgently initiate thorough, independent, impartial investigations into allegations of human rights violations and crimes committed in the context of the armed violence in the Anglophone regions, and to prosecute those responsible in fair trials.

# **TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

- Continue to monitor the human rights situation in the Anglophone regions and to condemn human rights violations and crimes committed by Cameroonian defence and security forces, militias and armed separatists, and publicly call on the government of Cameroon to urgently initiate thorough, independent, impartial investigations into allegations of human rights violations and crimes committed in the context of armed violence, and to prosecute those responsible in fair trials;
- As a follow-up to its previous resolutions, including Resolution 511 on the continuing violation of human rights situation in the Republic of Cameroon (5 December 2021), the ACHPR should reiterate its request to Cameroon to authorize a fact-finding mission to the country. If the request is granted, the ACHPR's delegation should be composed of all its relevant mandates, including the Working

Group on Death Penalty, Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings and Enforced Disappearances, and the Focal Point on Human Rights in Conflict Situations in Africa.

## **TO STATES PROVIDING WEAPONS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO CAMEROON**

- Carry out rigorous, regular risk assessments, unit vetting and post-delivery monitoring to verify all recipients of arms and related military assistance are operating fully in line with international human rights law;
- Work with the Cameroonian authorities on measures to prevent the diversion of arms to armed groups, including strengthening stockpile management and security, registration, marking and keeping inventories of all military material;
- Where there is credible evidence that units in receipt of arms or military assistance have committed or facilitated serious human rights violations of international human rights law or humanitarian law, and there are no sufficient measures in place to improve compliance with international human rights law or humanitarian law, immediately cease the provision of all forms of military assistance.

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# WITH OR AGAINST US

## PEOPLE OF THE NORTH-WEST REGION CAUGHT BETWEEN THE ARMY, ARMED SEPARATISTS AND MILITIAS

Since 2017, the inhabitants of Cameroon's Anglophone regions, the North-West and the South-West, have been caught between armed separatist groups, the army and militias, and subjected to unlawful killings, rapes, abductions and property destructions.

In the North-West in particular, long-standing conflicts between Mbororo Fulani herders and farmers have been fuelling armed violence. As the situation deteriorated, militias, mainly composed of Mbororo Fulani, supported or tolerated by the authorities, committed atrocities against populations.

The political and judicial authorities have responded to this situation with further human rights violations. Separatist political leaders and civil society members were sentenced by military courts. Alleged armed separatists or their supporters were arbitrarily arrested.

The government has announced the opening of investigations on human rights violations committed by armed forces' elements. However, for many cases, there has been no further information release, raising impunity concerns.

Moreover, the authorities are attempting to silence human rights defenders, activists, lawyers, and the media speaking out against atrocities. Armed separatists also threaten those exposing their crimes.

In this context, Cameroon's international partners have continued their military assistance, including through the supply of arms and military equipment which highly risk being used by army, militias, or armed separatists to commit crimes.