

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

OVERVIEW

Since 2016, Cameroon has been plagued by conflict between the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists which has led to the killing of over 6,000 people and the displacement of approximately 598,000 others. This complex security and humanitarian crisis has also led to the effective closure of civic space. The Cameroonian government continues to stifle freedom of expression, association and assembly, including through intimidation, arbitrary arrests, detention, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.

SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The situation of HRDs in Cameroon continues to deteriorate as they are frequently prevented from carrying out their work due to intimidation, harassment, and other forms of persecution at the hands of Cameroonian authorities. HRDs are not allowed to access free, independent information, and face reprisals for cooperating with the UN. HRDs face both prosecution by criminal or military courts and violations at the hands of non-state armed groups.

Women, girls, LGBTQ+ individuals, and all others working on gender issues face major risks. Women HRDs (WHRDs) face unique risks and challenges including gender-based discrimination, gender-specific threats and violence, exclusion, targeting of family members and loved ones, barriers to accessing decision-making spaces, stigmas, workplace harassment, smear campaigns, travel bans, and gender-specific online harassment and violence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

There have been numerous attacks on civic space and restrictions on freedom of expression and

opinion in recent years. This includes attacks on journalists and the press as well as obstructing HRDs from doing their work. Journalists and HRDs have faced bans on protests and gatherings, arbitrary arrest, detention, fair trial violations, torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. As press freedom declines throughout the country, journalists in particular have dealt with censorship and a general atmosphere of intimidation, which has also negatively impacted Cameroonians' right to information. While all of these attacks impede individuals' rights to freedom of expression and opinion, collectively, they show a wider narrative of an increasingly hostile and closed environment for civic space and human rights.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

While the government has not officially banned any organizations, it continues to restrict the activities of some NGOs and other organizations by banning protests and other meetings. Individuals have faced arbitrary arrest and detention simply for exercising their rights to freedom of association and assembly. In some instances, police have resorted to brutality and violence against protestors, including the use of tear gas and live ammunition.

ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION

The Cameroonian government regularly conducts arbitrary arrests and detentions. HRDs and journalists face a heightened risk because of their role in exposing violations and trying to hold the government accountable. Arrests often take place without a warrant nor providing reason, and are carried out by police in plain clothes or military officials who often employ undue force. While in detention, detainees face horrific conditions including poor nutrition, spread of infectious

diseases, lack of qualified medical attention, overcrowding, and torture.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

There have been multiple incidents of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings at the hands of the Cameroonian government. The government typically targets HRDs, journalists, and those who openly criticize the government's handling of the conflict or who expose violations and corruption. Many enforced disappearances include violent abductions, torture, and in some cases result in murder.

FAIR TRIAL RIGHTS

Fair trial violations are abundant in the judicial system. Those facing charges are regularly denied access to lawyers or family and face harassment and intimidation, discrimination, and poor treatment in detention facilities. Many of those arrested are transferred to other detention facilities and some even face torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. In some instances, civilians are summoned to military courts instead of having their cases adjudicated through traditional civilian court systems. Further, there is a widespread failure on the part of the authorities to keep proper records and documentation, often resulting in individuals languishing in pre-trial detention for extended periods of time.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAMEROON:

- Ensure that HRDs and journalists are able to effectively carry out their work without fear of reprisal or intimidation, both online and offline, and guarantee their safety and well-being;

- Guarantee legal protection to HRDs by adopting the “Protection of Human Rights Defenders” law, which has been in the Senate since November 2021;
- Ensure that all Cameroonians have open access to free, independent information;
- End the judicial harassment and intimidation of lawyers;
- Ensure that WHRDs and LGBTQI+ activists are able to work safely;
- Investigate all acts of threats or aggression against HRDs, WHRDs, and LGBTQI+ activists and bring those perpetrators to justice;
- Ensure the right to freedom of expression and cultivate a thriving civic space;
- Investigate and prosecute all threats and attacks on journalists;
- Respect the right to peaceful assembly and protest and lift any restrictions not in line with the ICCPR and international human rights standards;
- Ensure the right to association, including by eliminating the abuse of laws to limit political gatherings and criticism of the government;
- Ensure the independence of associations;
- End the use of arbitrary arrest and detention;
- Eradicate torture and carry out investigations into all alleged acts of torture and ill-treatment;
- Ratify the Optional Protocol on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- End all enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and hold all perpetrators accountable;
- Guarantee the right to a fair trial and access to justice;
- Ensure that prison conditions are safe, healthy, clean, and in line with international human rights standards;
- Fully cooperate with the Secretary-General and OHCHR on the human rights situation in Cameroon.

