

CAMEROON



THE ISSUE:

Many Anglophone Cameroonians have long felt marginalized by the official actions and policies of the ruling government, including the abolishment of a federal form of government under which English-speaking Cameroonians had joined the government. Anglophone Cameroonians are concerned about calls for a unitary state, which they fear will marginalize them further and privilege their Francophone neighbors.

Starting in late October 2017, several peaceful protestors have been subjected to beatings by police forces. These crackdowns have targeted lawyers, human rights defenders, teachers, and Anglophone judges.

In 2017, Anglophone separatists launched a campaign to pressure school officials in the Northwest and Southwest Anglophone regions to go on strike as part of a boycott against the government of Cameroon and reportedly begun burning school buildings, threatening education officials with violence if they did not comply with a boycott. There were reports that armed groups killed religious leaders and civilians. Meanwhile, the administration arrested an Anglophone opposition leader Maurice Kamto in January 2019, and restricted freedom of expression by shutting down the internet.

Human rights violations continue to happen in the context of trials, as well; opposition party leaders' right to bail and habeas corpus have also been violated. An estimated 3,000 to 12,000 deaths have been documented in the country since the onset of the crisis. There are concerns that the country is on the verge of a possible civil war or genocide given that there is evidence of the commission of war crimes by the security forces.

The country also has a high number of displaced persons. According to the United Nations, rising insecurity led to the internal displacement of about 530,000 people. A growing number of Cameroonians are seeking safety in the United States – recent reports estimate that over 300 Cameroonians are currently detained in the U.S.

THE HUMAN COST:

Activist Franklin Mowha, the president of the NGO Frontline Fighters for Citizens Interests (FFCI), went missing on August 6 during a mission in the southwest region of Cameroon. His friends and family have not heard from him since. They fear he might have been caught up in one of the frequent raids that the military conducts in the region and subjected to enforced disappearance.

TALKING POINTS:

The widespread violation of human rights in Cameroon is staggering. We cannot wait for the situation to deteriorate further. The U.S. will not provide security assistance to security forces that are responsible for human rights abuses. This is the law of the land, and it will be the policy of the U.S. government.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The White House should announce the suspension of all security assistance to Cameroon, in particular to the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) consistent with the Leahy Law, which prohibits military assistance to foreign security force units who violate human rights with impunity. It should also call upon the Cameroonian authorities to conduct credible and transparent investigations into all allegations of torture.
- The White House and Department of State must ensure that human rights and accountability are centered in any conflict resolution negotiations between the government and separatist groups in the Anglophone region.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Adotei Akwei
Deputy Director, Advocacy & Government Relations
(202) 509-8148
AAkwei@aiusa.org