

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (Geneva, Switzerland)

12 May 2021

Multilateral action is needed to address the human rights crisis in Cameroon

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, are deeply concerned over ongoing grave human rights violations and abuses in Cameroon. Ahead of the Human Rights Council’s (“HRC” or “Council”) 47th session (21 June-15 July 2021), we urge your delegation to support multilateral action to address Cameroon’s human rights crisis in the form of a joint statement to the Council. This statement should include benchmarks for progress, which, if fulfilled, will constitute a path for Cameroon to improve its situation. If these benchmarks remain unfulfilled, then the joint statement will pave the way for more formal Council action, including, but not limited to, a resolution establishing an investigative and accountability mechanism.

Over the last four years, civil society organisations have called on the Government of Cameroon, armed separatists, and other non-state actors to bring violations and abuses¹ to an end. Given Cameroonian institutions’ failure to deliver justice and accountability, civil society has also called on African and international human rights bodies and mechanisms to investigate, monitor, and publicly report on Cameroon’s situation.

Enhanced attention to Cameroon, on the one hand, and dialogue and cooperation, on the other, are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing. They serve the same objective: helping the Cameroonian Government to bring violations to an end, ensure justice and accountability, and fulfil its human rights obligations. In this regard, the establishment of cooperation between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Government of Cameroon, following High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet’s May 2019 visit to Yaoundé,² and building on the capacity of the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Africa (CARO),³ is a step forward.

However, since a group of 39 States delivered a joint oral statement to the HRC during its 40th session (March 2019), and despite the High Commissioner’s visit, the holding of a national dialogue, and OHCHR’s field presence, violations have continued unabated. Some of the violations and abuses committed by Government forces and non-state armed groups may amount to crimes under international law. Impunity remains the norm.

In the English-speaking North-West and South-West regions, abuses by armed separatists and Government forces continue to claim lives and affect people’s safety, human rights, and livelihoods. The grievances that gave rise to the “Anglophone crisis” remain unaddressed.⁴ In the Far North, the armed group Boko Haram continues to commit abuses against the civilian population. Security forces have also committed serious human rights violations when responding to security threats. In the rest of the country, Cameroonian authorities have intensified their crackdown on political opposition members and

¹ See the annex.

² OHCHR, “Bachelet welcomes Cameroon’s willingness to cooperate to tackle human rights crises,” 6 May 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24565&LangID=E> (accessed on 7 April 2021).

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/UN-Human-Rights-in-Central-Africa.aspx>

⁴ See the annex.

supporters, demonstrators, media professionals, and independent civil society actors, including through harassment, threats, arbitrary arrests, and detentions.

Cameroon is among the human rights crises the Human Rights Council has failed to adequately address. Given other bodies' (including the African Union (AU) and the UN Security Council) inaction, it is all the more vital for the HRC to send a clear message by stepping up its scrutiny and engagement.

We believe that further multilateral action is needed. At the Council's 47th session, we urge Member and Observer States to, at a minimum, support a joint statement. This statement should make clear that should Cameroon fail to take concrete steps to investigate human rights violations and abuses, ensure accountability, and improve its human rights situation, more formal action will follow in the form of a resolution establishing an investigative and accountability mechanism.

A joint statement should:

- Address violations and abuses committed by Government forces and non-state armed groups in the North-West, South-West, Far North, and other regions of Cameroon, and urge all parties to immediately bring these violations and abuses to an end;
- Remind the Cameroonian Government of its primary responsibility to protect its population from crimes and human rights violations;
- Urge the Cameroonian Government, in cooperation with OHCHR and Cameroonian human rights groups, to design and implement a road map for human rights reforms and accountability with a view to preventing further human rights violations and abuses and ensuring accountability as part of a holistic effort to settle the crisis in the country, in particular in the North-West and South-West regions and the armed conflict in the Far North region;
- In addition to designing and implementing a road map for reforms and accountability, outline concrete benchmarks to be fulfilled by the Government of Cameroon to ensure demonstrable progress on human rights, including by:
 - putting an immediate end to violations committed against members and supporters of the opposition, media professionals and outlets, demonstrators, and members of civil society, including lawyers, union leaders, teachers, and human rights defenders and organisations;
 - releasing prisoners of conscience;
 - fully respecting all Cameroonian citizens' human rights, including their rights to freedoms of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, and association, as well as the right to life, liberty and security of person;
 - fully cooperating with OHCHR, including granting it unhindered access to the North-West and South-West regions to conduct human rights investigations, monitoring, and reporting;
 - fully cooperating with the Council and its mechanisms, including granting access to special procedure mandate-holders, in line with Cameroon's Council membership obligations;
 - granting unrestricted access to humanitarian aid and human rights organisations and workers, including restoring access for international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to report on the human rights situation in the country; and
 - engaging with regional bodies and mechanisms, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR);⁵
- Encourage the High Commissioner for Human Rights to make the findings of the OHCHR 2019 investigations in the Anglophone regions public, and to provide regular updates to the Council, including by holding inter-sessional briefings or informal conversations with Council Members and Observers. These updates should include information about her engagement with Cameroonian authorities, the situation in the country, and OHCHR's work in the country;

⁵ ACHPR Resolution 395 (LXII) 2018, in which the Commission decided to "undertake a general human rights promotion mission to the Republic of Cameroon, in collaboration with the government authorities" ("395 Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Cameroon – ACHPR/Res. 395 (LXII) 2018," 9 May 2018, <https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=404> (accessed on 7 April 2021)).

- Encourage states to enhance their voluntary contributions for OHCHR’s activities, including for the OHCHR Regional Office for Central Africa’s work in Cameroon and Central Africa; and
- Make clear that should Cameroon fail to take concrete steps to improve its situation and ensure demonstrable progress on human rights by the Council’s 48th session (13 September-1 October 2021), more formal Council action will follow, under the appropriate agenda item.

We thank you for your attention and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely,

1. Africa Call – South Sudan
2. AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network)
3. Amnesty International
4. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
5. CDDH – Benin
6. Center for Human Rights Defenders Zimbabwe (CHRDZ)
7. CIVICUS
8. Club Humanitaire sans Frontières (CHF)
9. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
10. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) – South Sudan
11. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
12. Defenders Coalition – Kenya
13. Dialogue and Research Institute (DRI) – South Sudan
14. Dignity Association – Sierra Leone
15. Economic Justice Network Sierra Leone
16. Franciscans International
17. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
18. HAKI Africa
19. HRDSNET Uganda Ltd – Human Rights Defenders Solidarity Network
20. Human Rights Defenders Network – Sierra Leone
21. Human Rights Watch
22. Initiative for Plataforma das Organizações Lusófonas dos Direitos Humanos (POLDH)
23. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
24. International Refugee Rights Initiative
25. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
26. Kenya Human Rights Commission
27. National Alliance of Women Lawyers (NAWL) – South Sudan
28. Network of the Independent Commission for Human rights in North Africa
29. Nouvelle Génération de la Cinématographie Guinéenne (NOGECIG)
30. Oasis Network for Community Transformation
31. Pan African Lawyers Union
32. Partnership for Justice, Lagos – Nigeria
33. Protection International – Kenya (PIK)
34. Raise The Young Foundation
35. REDRESS
36. Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile pour l’Observation et le Suivi des Élections en Guinée (ROSE)
37. Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)
38. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN)
39. Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC)
40. The Independent Medico-Legal Unit
41. Togolese Human Rights Defenders Coalition / Coalition Togolaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CTDDH)

42. Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC)
43. West African Human Rights Defenders Network / Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (ROADDH/WAHRDN)
44. Watch Democracy Grow
45. Women's Centre for Guidance and Legal Awareness (WCGLA) – Egypt
- ...
62. *17 additional organisations join this letter, which brings the total number of signatories to 62. In light of the security environment they face, their name is kept confidential.*

Annex: Human rights violations and abuses in Cameroon since October 2016

Part 1: Developments between October 2016-August 2019⁶

In October 2016, protests in Cameroon's two minority English-speaking regions, the North-West and South-West, triggered what has been referred to as the country's "Anglophone crisis." Demonstrators, including students, teachers, and lawyers, took to the streets to protest what they perceived as social, political, and economic marginalisation of the Anglophone regions and population, and to demand greater respect for their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Cameroon's security forces' violent response, and the Government's crackdown on civil society and freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including through an Internet shutdown, escalated the crisis.

Since then, the two regions have been embroiled in a cycle of violence and human rights violations and abuses committed by both armed separatist groups and Government forces. Human rights violations committed by Cameroon's security forces included killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and incommunicado detention, the excessive use of force against civilians, the burning or destruction of hundreds of homes, and rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

In the fall of 2017, Cameroonian security forces suppressed large-scale protests organised to celebrate the symbolic independence of Anglophone regions, which separatists call "Ambazonia," and ahead of and during demonstrations organised for 1 October 2017, which marked the 56th anniversary of the reunification of Cameroon, killing scores of protesters.

Armed separatists have also committed serious abuses. They have killed, kidnapped, and tortured perceived opponents, while enforcing a boycott of education that kept children and their teachers out of school. Family members of those kidnapped were forced to pay huge sums of money in exchange for the release of the victims. Some of the abductees were killed.⁷

Despite mediation efforts and increasing international attention, including at the UN Security Council and by Switzerland,⁸ the situation has not improved. So far, the African Union (AU) has failed to address the situation⁹ despite its potential adverse impact on the stability of the Central African and

⁶ Ahead of the HRC's 42nd session, a group of civil society organisations wrote a letter to Member and Observer States, urging them to support enhanced multilateral attention to Cameroon's, including through a gradual approach relying on a joint statement. This section is based on the letter these organisations sent to a number of States on 30 August 2019.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Cameroon: Security Forces Kill Civilians, Rape Woman," 22 July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/22/cameroon-security-forces-kill-civilians-rape-woman> (accessed on 15 February 2021). See also HRW, "Cameroon: New Attacks on Civilians By Troops, Separatists," 28 March 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists>; "These Killings Can Be Stopped: Abuses by Government and Separatist Groups in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions," 19 July 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/19/these-killings-can-be-stopped/abuses-government-and-separatist-groups-camerouns> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

⁸ The Conversation, "African Union needs a more robust response to conflict in Cameroon," 2 March 2020, <https://theconversation.com/african-union-needs-a-more-robust-response-to-conflict-in-cameroon-132449> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

⁹ The Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, welcomed the initiative of the Government and stakeholders in Cameroon to resolve, through dialogue, the crisis in the North West and South West regions (AU Commission, "The Chairperson of the African Union Commission welcomes the initiative to bring peace to Cameroon," 27 July 2019, <https://au.int/ar/node/37074> (accessed on 15 February 2021)). He later held talks with Cameroonian President Paul Biya and continued to encourage dialogue (see for instance African Union, "Joint Final Declaration of the Tripartite Visit of the

West African sub-regions. The crisis in Cameroon remains absent from the agenda of the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council.¹⁰

In the rest of the country, in particular in the Far North, the human rights situation remains dire. Boko Haram continues to commit abuses against the civilian population, including suicide bombings in crowded civilian areas, kidnappings, including of women and children, and widespread looting and destruction of property. The response of the security forces has also resulted in human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, and unlawful killings.

Since the October 2018 presidential elections, the Government has cracked down on political opposition and dissent. Human rights groups have reported abuses against opposition members and supporters, including arbitrary arrests, lack of due process, and torture and other forms of ill-treatment.¹¹ On 22 July 2019, security forces used firearms to quell a riot in Cameroon's largest prison, Kondengui, which houses hundreds of Anglophones detained in connection with the crisis. Kondengui is overcrowded and houses not only Anglophone detainees, but also political opponents, criminals, and Boko Haram members.

In May 2018, the ACHPR adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Cameroon, condemning "violations committed in the country since October 2016," regretting "the loss of many lives among the population and the armed forces," and "the continuous repression against human rights defenders," and calling for "an end to the use of force against unarmed civilians, respect for the right to freedom of expression and information, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to liberty and security of the person."¹²

In November 2018, the ACHPR adopted another resolution on Cameroon, expressing deep concern over "the continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in the country in general and in particular in the English-speaking North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon" and strongly condemning "the various human rights violations committed in the country, and in particular during the electoral process."¹³

During the Human Rights Council's 40th session, in March 2019, a cross-regional group of 39 Council Members and Observers expressed deep concern about "the deteriorating situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon" and called on "all actors to end [the] cycle of violence." They urged the Cameroonian Government to "work alongside the international community, including with regional partners, to ensure prompt and thorough investigation of all violations and abuses" and outlined initial steps the Government could take to build confidence towards dialogue and reconciliation, including the timely, fair trial or release of political detainees and initiating a meaningful dialogue with the participation of all sectors of society." They encouraged the Government to accept the OHCHR's offer to conduct an urgent assessment mission to the North-West and South-West regions.¹⁴

Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Secretaries General of the OIF and the Commonwealth," 28 November 2019, <https://au.int/ar/node/37799> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

¹⁰ On 13 May 2019, the UN Security Council held an "Arria Formula" meeting on the crisis in Cameroon, but this meeting had no follow up; it did not lead to any outcome (resolution or statement). See HRW, "Africa Should Not Fail Cameroon," 28 June 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/28/africa-should-not-fail-cameroon> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Cameroon: Nearly 60 opposition members tortured by security forces," 26 July 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/07/cameroon-opposition-members-tortured-by-security-forces/> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

¹² ACHPR, ACHPR/Res. 395 (LXII) 2018, *op. cit.*

¹³ ACHPR, "405 Resolution on the Continuing Human Rights Violations in the Republic of Cameroon – ACHPR/Res. 405 (LXIII) 2018," 13 November 2018, <https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=425> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

¹⁴ UK Mission to the United Nations Geneva, "Human Rights Council 40: Cameroon," 21 March 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/human-rights-council-40-cameroon>.

In April 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning violence by all sides in the Anglophone regions, expressing concern at the Government of Cameroon's failure to hold its security forces to account for human rights abuses and urged Cameroon's authorities to adopt all necessary measures to end the cycle of violence.¹⁵

In May 2019, the United Nations Security Council organized an informal meeting¹⁶ on the humanitarian situation in Cameroon. Although faced with fierce resistance from the Council's African Members, the meeting succeeded in putting the situation in Cameroon on its Members' radar.¹⁷

Also in May 2019, High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet conducted a mission to Yaoundé and met with President Paul Biya and various stakeholders.¹⁸ Her visit paved the way for more cooperation between her Office and the Government of Cameroon, beyond the work of CARO.

Part 2: Developments since September 2019

During the Council's 42nd session (September 2019), the Cameroonian President, Paul Biya, announced the convening of a "national dialogue" to discuss political issues, including the crisis on the North-West and South-West regions. Cameroon also accepted the deployment of an OHCHR team to the North-West and South-West regions, for a technical visit.

The national dialogue, which took place in October 2019, did not lead to any tangible improvement of the human rights situation or discussion of key political and governance issues pertaining to the Anglophone regions. While President Biya made announcements regarding the acceleration of decentralisation, the status of the North-West and South-West regions, and the review of the education and legal systems, issues such as federalism were not on the agenda.¹⁹

The deployment of an OHCHR team and the enhancement of cooperation between OHCHR and the Government of Cameroon were positive steps. However, at the time of writing, OHCHR has not made any report or recommendations public. The High Commissioner's Office and the Cameroonian Government have not agreed on any plan of action or road map to settle the crisis, implement human rights reforms, and ensure justice, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition.

Since September 2019, international attention to the Cameroon's crisis has neither decreased nor significantly increased. The UN Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, other UN officials, as well as independent experts have publicly raised concerns over violations and abuses, including massacres of civilians.²⁰

¹⁵ European Parliament, "Joint Motion for a Resolution," 17 April 2019, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2019-0245_EN.html (accessed on 29 April 2021).

¹⁶ UN Web TV, "Arria-Formula Meeting of the UN Security Council," 13 May 2019, <http://webtv.un.org/live-now/watch/arria-formula-meeting-of-the-un-security-council/6036271424001/?term=> (accessed on 29 April 2021).

¹⁷ HRW, "Africa Should Not Fail Cameroon," *op. cit.*

¹⁸ OHCHR, "Bachelet welcomes Cameroon's willingness to cooperate to tackle human rights crises," 6 May 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24565&LangID=E> (accessed on 26 July 2019).

¹⁹ Africa News, "Has Cameroon's national dialogue delivered solutions to Anglophone crisis?," 1 November 2019, <https://www.africanews.com/2019/11/01/has-cameroon-s-national-dialogue-delivered-solutions-to-anglophone-crisis/>; Africa News, "Cameroon govt declares dialogue 'success', Anglophones doubtful," 5 October 2019, <https://www.africanews.com/2019/10/05/cameroon-govt-declares-dialogue-success-anglophones-doubtful/>; The Africa Report, "Cameroon must move beyond dialogue to solve Anglophone crisis," 21 October 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/18972/cameroon-must-move-beyond-dialogue-to-solve-anglophone-crisis/> (accessed on 29 April 2021).

²⁰ UN News, "Guterres 'deeply concerned' over deadly assault in north-west Cameroon," 18 February 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057571>; OHCHR, "Press briefing note on Cameroon," 18 February 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25566&LangID=E>; OHCHR, "Cameroon killings:

Four special advisers to the UN Secretary-General, including the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, deplored the “continued reports of attacks against civilians including extra-judicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and property destruction, as well as retaliatory attacks, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, disproportionately affecting women and children in the south-west and north-west regions of Cameroon and forcing many to flee their homes.” They called on the Government to “discharge its primary responsibility to protect its population by addressing the root causes of violence and ensuring that victims of the attacks are provided with the appropriate protection and assistance” and on the authorities to “fully investigate and hold accountable those responsible for the serious violations and abuses that have been committed.”²¹

Special procedure mandate-holders have also expressed concerns over the treatment meted out against the political opposition and demonstrators and demanded that Cameroon impartially investigate all human rights violations.²²

At the HRC, a number of States mentioned Cameroon in their statements, in the framework of general debates. The Government of Cameroon has consistently denied the concerns these States voiced over the human rights situation and rejected civil society statements and reports. The Government went as far as to claim that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and NGOs propagated “fake news,” and that NGOs provided logistical support to terrorists.²³

In the country, violations and abuses, committed by both Government forces and non-state armed groups, continue unabated. They include:

- Serious violations and abuses against civilians,²⁴ including killings, kidnappings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, the use of excessive and indiscriminate force, looting, burning of homes, rape and SGBV, and torture and ill-treatment, including in relation to elections;²⁵
- Attacks on schools and students;²⁶

Bachelet urges full accountability,” 22 April 2020,

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25817&LangID=E>; OHCHR, “Press briefing notes on Cameroon,” 27 October 2020,

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26428&LangID=E> (accessed on 7 April 2021).

²¹ “UN Officials call for enhanced protection of civilians facing escalating violence in Cameroon,” 21 February 2020, available at <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/2020.shtml> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

²² OHCHR, “Cameroon: UN human rights experts call for end to detention and intimidation of peaceful protesters,” 12 October 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26372&LangID=E> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²³ Government of Cameroon, oral statement, general debate on agenda item 4, 10 March 2020.

²⁴ HRW, “Cameroon: Civilians Massacred in Separatist Area; At Least 21 Killed in Attack on Ngaruh Village, Set Independent Inquiry,” 25 February 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area>;

“Cameroon: Civilians Killed in Anglophone Regions: Attacks as Peace Talks Take Place,” 27 July 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/27/cameroon-civilians-killed-anglophone-regions>; “Horrible Video Shows Cameroon Killing Separatists’: Abuse Continues in South-West,” 14 August 2020 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/14/horrific-video-shows-cameroon-killing>; Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), “CHRDA strongly condemns the heinous killing of at least eight civilians in Maotu Village in Muyuka – Cameroon,” 10 January 2021, <https://www.chrda.org/chrda-strongly-condemns-the-heinous-killing-of-at-least-eight-civilians-in-maotu-village-in-muyuka-cameroon/> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²⁵ HRW, “Cameroon: Election Violence in Anglophone Regions; Investigate Abuses, Ensure Justice,” 12 February 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/12/cameroon-election-violence-anglophone-regions> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²⁶ HRW, “Targeted for Going to School in Cameroon: Separatists Continue Attacks on Education with Impunity,” 12 March 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/targeted-going-school-cameroon>; “Cameroon: Gunmen Massacre School Children; Ensure Independent and Effective Investigation; Protect Right to Education,” 2 November 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/02/cameroon-gunmen-massacre-school-children>; CHRDA, “CHRDA condemns the gruesome killing of school children at the Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba-Cameroon,” 24 October 2020, <https://www.chrda.org/chrda-condemn-the-gruesome-killing-of-school-children-at-the-mother-francisca-international-bilingual-academy-in-kumba-cameroon/>; The New Humanitarian, “In Cameroon’s separatist war, children are

- Attacks on aid and health workers;²⁷
- Attacks against opposition members and supporters, including through the use of arbitrary detention and proceedings before military courts;²⁸
- Violations of due process and fair trial rights;²⁹
- Attacks against civil society members, human rights defenders, media professionals,³⁰ and teachers,³¹ which include violations of their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Independent actors, including human rights defenders and journalists, have faced intimidation, threats, smearing campaigns, arrests, and arbitrary detention.³²

In August 2020, the ACHPR adopted a new resolution on Cameroon, in which the Commission reaffirmed its previous resolutions and expressed deep concern over “the continuation of human rights violations [...] which continues to give rise to a proliferation of armed groups, a massive flow of refugees and internally displaced persons and an increase in cases of sexual abuse of women and under-age girls,” as well as at “the reports of assassinations, murders, enforced disappearances, summary and extrajudicial killings of civilians, security personnel, administrative and religious authorities, journalists and human rights defenders in the North-West and South-West regions, including the destruction of villages and livelihoods.” The Commission also encouraged the Government to “establish an inclusive commission of inquiry and fact-finding on the human rights situation in the country” and urged the State to “establish mechanisms for peace and reconciliation by addressing the historical causes of the

the biggest losers,” 16 February 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/first-person/2021/2/16/Camerouns-separatist-war-children-biggest-losers> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²⁷ HRW, “Renewed Attacks on Aid Workers in Cameroon: Ensure Protection of People in English-Speaking Regions,” 4 June 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/04/renewed-attacks-aid-workers-cameroon> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²⁸ HRW, “Cameroon: Political Opponent Freed; Scores Still Held for Political Activism,” 7 October 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/07/cameroon-political-opponent-freed>; “Cameroon: Heightened Crackdown on Opposition: Stop Using Covid-19, Anti-Terror Law as Pretext to Quell Dissent,” 21 September 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/21/cameroon-heightened-crackdown-opposition>; “Cameroon: Opposition Leaders, Supporters Detained; Release Those Held Arbitrarily; End Crackdown on Dissent,” 19 October 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/19/cameroon-opposition-leaders-supporters-detained>; “Cameroon Court Denies Request to Release Opposition Leaders: Free Arbitrarily Arrested Opponents, Ensure Freedom of Assembly,” 15 January 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/15/cameroon-court-denies-request-release-opposition-leaders>; Amnesty International, “Cameroon: Arbitrary detentions and military courts highlight the latest crackdown on opposition members,” 9 December 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/cameroon-arbitrary-detentions-and-military-courts-highlight-the-latest-crackdown/> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

²⁹ HRW, “Cameroon: Separatist Leaders Appeal Conviction: Grave Questions About Fairness of Trial,” 3 September 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/03/cameroon-separatist-leaders-appeal-conviction>; “Cameroonian Lawyers Say ‘Enough is Enough’: Bar Association Denounces Rights Violations,” 18 September 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/18/cameroonian-lawyers-say-enough-enough> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

³⁰ HRW, “Cameroon: Ensure Independent Probe of Reporter’s Death: Transparency, Accountability Needed for ‘Wazizi’ Case,” 9 June 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/09/cameroon-ensure-independent-probe-reporters-death> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

³¹ HRW, “Hard Lessons in Cameroon: Discussing Current Events Lands Teacher in Jail,” 25 September 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/25/hard-lessons-cameroon>; “No Room for Debate in Cameroon Classrooms: Education Minister Censors Discussion of Anglophone Crisis,” 1 May 2020 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/01/no-room-debate-cameroon-classrooms>; CHRDA, “The abduction of teachers by unidentified armed group in Kumbo, North West Region of Cameroon is unacceptable,” 3 November 2020, <https://www.chrda.org/the-abduction-of-teachers-by-unidentified-armed-group-in-kumbo-north-west-region-of-cameroon-is-unacceptable/> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

³² Réseau des défenseurs des droits humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC), “Liberté d’expression et de réunion en péril,” 30 November 2020, www.redhac.info/detail-actualite.php?idactualite=96; “République du Cameroun: Manifestation pacifique du 2 septembre 2020,” 25 September 2020, www.redhac.info/detail-actualite.php?idactualite=92 (accessed on 15 February 2021).

For specific cases of human rights defenders at risk, see AfricanDefenders, “Joint letter to the Security Council on the situation of human rights defenders in Cameroon,” 6 January 2020, <https://africandefenders.org/joint-letter/> (accessed on 7 April 2021).

crisis, including systemic discrimination against the English-speaking minority, in order to achieve genuine reconciliation and social cohesion.”³³

High levels of violence continue to be reported and the humanitarian situation remains serious. According to OCHA, 4 million people are in need of assistance.³⁴ To date, more than 3,000 civilians (and likely hundreds of members of the security forces) have lost their lives, more than one million have been internally displaced (including more than 700,000 in the North-West and South-West regions), and over 60,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring Nigeria.³⁵ As of November 2020, 1.1 million students were out of school in Cameroon.³⁶

The Government has taken limited steps to ensure accountability for violations, in particular at the command responsibility level.³⁷

Cameroon’s first regional elections took place in December 2020. Ceasefire negotiations between the Cameroonian Government and armed separatists, led by the “interim government of Ambazonia,” began in July 2020.³⁸ They have not led to any significant results. Some of the separatist groups, who have not participated in these talks, continue to reject any negotiation with the Cameroonian Government.

At the time of writing, the AU and the UN Security Council are still to act to bring violations and abuses to an end, improve Cameroon’s human rights situation, and ensure justice and accountability, which are preconditions for sustainable peace in the country. International action is vital.³⁹

³³ ACHPR, “442 Resolution on the Deterioration of the Human Rights Situation in Cameroon during the Covid-19 Period - ACHPR/Res. 442 (LXVI) 2020,” 7 August 2020, <https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=473> (accessed on 7 April 2021).

³⁴ As of 1 December 2020: <https://www.unocha.org/cameroon> (accessed on 18 February 2021).

³⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Cameroon (last updated 31 January 2021), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>; and UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Nigeria (last updated 31 January 2021), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/nga> (both accessed on 15 February 2021). As of 31 January 2021, IDPs include 711,056 people in the North-West and South-West regions, and 321,886 people in the Far North region.

³⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “UNICEF alarmed by spike in school attacks in Cameroon,” 6 November 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-alarmed-spike-school-attacks-cameroon> (accessed on 17 February 2021).

³⁷ HRW, “Cameroon: Massacre Findings Made Public; Despite Flaws, Conclusions that Soldiers Bear Responsibility Important Step,” 24 April 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/24/cameroon-massacre-findings-made-public>; “A Chance for Accountability in Cameroon?,” 25 June 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/25/chance-accountability-cameroon>; “Cameroon: Step Toward Justice for Massacre; Ensure Fair Ngarbuh Trial and Participants’ Safety; Prosecute All Responsible,” 14 December 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/cameroon-step-toward-justice-massacre-0>; “Cameroon: Soldiers Get 10 Years for Murder of Civilians: Trial Conducted Behind Closed Doors,” 23 September 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/23/cameroon-soldiers-get-10-years-murder-civilians> (accessed on 15 February 2021).

³⁸ Al Jazeera, “Cameroon holds first peace talks with main separatist group,” 4 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/4/cameroon-holds-first-peace-talks-with-main-separatist-group> (accessed on 16 February 2021).

³⁹ Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, “Cameroon,” 15 January 2021 update, <https://www.global2p.org/countries/cameroon> (accessed on 18 February 2021).