



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 - Cameroon

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In 2014 Cameroon's northern region faced an increasing threat from Boko Haram, an armed extremist group based in Nigeria that aims to set up an Islamic state. Despite joint military efforts between Cameroon and Nigeria to subdue Boko Haram, it increased cross-border operations in Cameroon's rural and impoverished far north, attacking and shelling groupings of Nigerian refugees and restricting humanitarian aid efforts. It also targeted Cameroonian villages, churches and security forces, killing, wounding or displacing minority Christians and majority Muslims alike. Some of those displaced sought refuge in regional towns such as Kolofata and Mora, or in the regional capital Maroua, but as Boko Haram encroached further into Cameroon's territory, others reportedly went further south, out of danger, to Yaoundé. By late 2014 scores of schools had been closed in response to cross-border attacks and kidnappings, and the school buildings occupied by those fleeing Boko Haram. Community leaders reported that some young Cameroonian Muslims had been coerced into joining Boko Haram or reportedly recruited by the offer of a cash payment upon joining, a powerful incentive in the poor region.

February saw the beginning of a mass return to east Cameroon of Cameroonian Muslim migrants who had been living in the CAR until violence at the hands of armed Christian and animist self-defence 'anti-balaka' ('anti-machete') militias forced them to flee the country. In addition, large numbers of largely Muslim CAR refugees fled to Cameroon. During 2014, more than 187,000 CAR refugees fled to neighbouring countries. By the end of the year, UNHCR was using planning estimates for approximately 210,000 CAR refugees in Cameroon alone. Many took refuge in towns and villages somewhat inside Cameroon, away from the border, to avoid attack. By doing so they transformed a swathe of formerly majority Christian settlements into majority Muslim ones. In some areas conflict has broken out with local residents over resources, such as access to health services and shelter. Food supplies have been stretched past capacity, causing hardship for locals and refugees alike, and fuelling competition and resentment between them. Cattle-herding Peuhl (also known as Mbororo) refugees – targeted in the CAR for their perceived wealth and livestock – have also struggled to locate adequate grazing land for their cattle, at times resulting in disputes over grazing land and other resources with local farmers, who are largely Christian.

Among Cameroon's indigenous peoples, reports continued of the displacement of Ba'aka, traditional forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers, by logging and other development activities. Many have been forced to move to villages and roadside settlements elsewhere, where they face exclusion, poverty and related problems ranging from malnutrition to alcoholism. In 2014, some

Ba'aka were reportedly denied access to their ancestral lands and suffered abuse at the hands of security forces deployed to curb poaching and enforce conservation norms.

Cameroonian Mbororo pastoralists, believed to make up 12 per cent of the population, at times conflicted with sedentary farmers, ranchers, agro-industrial businesses and newly established national parks over issues around land use. In April, Rita Izsák and James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the then UN Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples' rights, expressed concern at the reported eviction of Mbororo families from their ancestral lands in western Cameroon, in the context of a long-standing land dispute with the Catholic University in Bamenda. An estimated 300 people had been made homeless. The university claimed that it had provided compensation, whereas the community stated that it had been misled and would never have agreed to leave their homes.

Cameroon has urbanized rapidly over the last three decades, in part due to drought and famine. Men from the Mbororo community, for instance, have been forced by drought to abandon pastoralism and search for work in urban centres, leaving their families behind. Climate change has led to the encroachment of invasive plant species, also limiting pasture lands. This has in turn led to a decrease in milk production, traditionally a source of income for Mbororo women; without that extra money, Mbororo women have become more dependent on men for support. These trends have disrupted family structures, damaged family cohesion, and increased the risk of violence against women as well as exposure to HIV/AIDS, among other impacts. More recently, too, conflict has also driven displacement and migration to urban areas, with cross-border attacks by Boko Haram forcing many to flee rural areas for urban centres. In eastern Cameroon, similarly, refugees from CAR have swelled the population of local towns, at times raising tensions with residents and concerns about security.

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