



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Cameroon

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Cameroon was formed in 1961 from two former colonies, one British and one French; since independence it has had two presidents. The current one, Paul Biya, took office in 1982, introducing multi-party politics several years later. It is religiously and ethnically diverse: minority and indigenous groups include forest-dwellers, such as Ba'Aka in the south, and nomadic pastoralist Mbororo in the north. In 2013 Cameroon saw a number of cross-border incidents from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Séléka in the CAR. At year's end there were more than 100,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country, primarily from the CAR, Nigeria and Chad.

Forest-dwelling groups and nomadic Mbororo pastoralists faced continued difficulties, particularly over issues around rights to land and resources. Ba'Aka and other indigenous groups were among the communities threatened by the expansion of logging, agro-industry, mining and natural protected areas into their customary lands. In January a group of NGOs petitioned the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to review Cameroon's proposed reforms to its Forest Code, which they claimed failed to protect the land rights of indigenous groups in particular. In an effort to make their voices heard more effectively in discussions about logging, conservation and related issues, some Ba'Aka continued efforts such as participatory mapping of forest resource use.

Nomadic pastoralist Mbororo communities in the north-west continued to face problems with access to land for their herds, particularly in the face of expansions to cattle ranching, agro-industry and protected nature reserves. They continued to accuse land-owners of seizing traditional grazing lands and other abuses. As part of a larger land reform, consultations opened with civil society groups around the text of a draft Pastoral Code developed with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The code would reportedly recognize Mbororos' right to lands they have been using and ease procedures for obtaining titles. It would include provisions for community pastures, demarcated corridors for herders to move their stock, designated watering sites and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Ahead of legislative elections in April, Mbororo and traditional forest-dwelling groups as well as members of the Montagnard minorities (also known as *kirdi*, a derogatory term that has been adopted as a marker of ethnic and religious pride) from the northern highlands reportedly criticized political parties for not honouring previous commitments to field minority candidates. They urged the President, who has the right to appoint some legislators, to name minority

representatives. The UN Independent Expert on minority issues visited Cameroon in August. While recognizing the government's efforts to protect minority rights, she emphasized that important steps are still required on behalf of both forest-dwellers and Mbororo pastoralists, particularly around issues of poverty and land rights.

Following on from the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Cameroon, in June the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted her first visit to the country to investigate issues including violence against women, harmful traditional practices and the vulnerability of indigenous peoples in the face of large-scale agro-business.

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