

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	275
Land:	Cameroun
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	World Report 2023 – Cameroon
Udgivet:	2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	12. januar 2023

World Report 2023



Cameroon

Events of 2022

A group of women walk through the Bogo displaced persons camp during a field visit by Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in Maroua, Cameroon, April 28, 2022.

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- [English](#)
- [Français](#)

In 2022, armed groups and government forces committed human rights abuses, including unlawful killings, across Cameroon's Anglophone regions and in the Far North region.

As the crisis in the Anglophone regions continued for the sixth year [598,000](#) people were internally displaced as of August and at least [2 million](#) people needed humanitarian aid in the North-West and South-West.

Separatists, who have violently enforced a [boycott](#) on education since 2017, [continued](#) to attack schools, students and education professionals, destroying buildings and depriving hundreds of thousands of children of their fundamental right to education.

The Islamist armed groups Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) [continued](#) attacks in the Far North region from January to April, killing scores of civilians and contributing to the internal displacement of over [378,000](#) people as of July. Government forces violated applicable international humanitarian and human rights law by failing to fairly prosecute suspected members of the Islamist groups who committed serious crimes. The government has fallen short on its promises to assist former members of Boko Haram and ISWAP who voluntarily left as part of a disarmament program. The authorities have also failed to assist and protect women and children linked to these groups.

Restrictions against [freedoms of expression](#) and association continued as did persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Mob attacks against members of the LGBT community [intensified](#).

Government forces [subjected](#) Cameroonian asylum seekers deported from the United States in 2020 and 2021 to serious human rights violations following their return, including physical assault and abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, and confiscation of identity documents, thus impeding freedom of movement, ability to work, and access to public services.

In April, Cameroon took an important step to protect the right to education of students who are pregnant and adolescent mothers. The government's [new re-entry policy](#) prescribes that pregnant students will be able to stay in school until the 26th week of their pregnancy and will be allowed back in school after delivery, subject to a number of conditions.

Anglophone Crisis

At least [6,000](#) civilians have been killed by both government forces and armed separatist fighters since late 2016 in the North-West and South-West regions, as armed separatist groups seek independence for the country's minority Anglophone regions.

Violations by Government Forces

Security forces responded to separatist attacks with a heavy hand, often targeting civilians across the Anglophone regions.

On April 24, in Ndop, North-West region, soldiers from the Rapid Intervention Battalion (*Bataillon d'intervention rapide*, BIR) [stopped, severely beat, and detained](#) between 30 and 40 motorbike riders who were part of a funeral convoy, allegedly because they suspected the bikers of being separatist fighters. Up to 17 of those detained are presumed forcibly [disappeared](#). As of September, their whereabouts remained unknown.

On June 1, soldiers from the 53rd Motorized Infantry Battalion (*Bataillon d'infanterie motorisée*, BIM) [killed](#) nine people, including four women and an 18-month-old girl, in Missong village, North-West region, in a reprisal operation against a community suspected of harboring separatist fighters.

On June 8, soldiers [conducted](#) a military operation in Chomba, North-West region, burning a home and looting the local health center. They also arrested a woman along with her 11-year-old foster child and held them for 24 days at the BIR barracks in Bafut, North-West region.

From June 9 to 11, in Belo, North-West region, security forces [killed](#) one man, injured another, burned at least 12 homes, destroyed a community health center, and looted at least 10 shops.

Abuses by Armed Separatists

Separatist fighters continued to kill, torture, assault, and kidnap civilians. They also continued their attacks against pupils, teachers, and education, depriving thousands of students of the right to education.

On June 12, separatist fighters [physically assaulted, threatened, and humiliated](#) a group of 11 students, aged from 14 to 18, walking to the Bokova high school, in Buea, South-West region. They shot one of the students in the right leg and seized or destroyed the students' school material.

On January 19, separatist fighters [attacked](#) the government high school in Weh, North-West region, abducting five teachers, and injuring two students for not complying with a school boycott and for not contributing financially to their struggle for independence. The teachers were released on January 24 following a ransom payment.

Separatist fighters, [vowing to disrupt the Africa Cup of Nations soccer tournament](#), which was held in Cameroon between January 9 and February 6, carried out a series of attacks in the town of Buea on January 12. They declared a lockdown and punished people who did not observe it. They [shot and killed](#) a 30-year-old male taxi driver and another man at Bwitingi market area and [shot](#) a man in both his legs and stomach at the checkpoint area in the same area of the city.

On January 13, separatist fighters [attacked](#) a rubber estate plantation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a public agribusiness company, in Tiko, South-West region, abducted nine workers, six of whom were women, and set a tractor ablaze. The workers were all released on January 25 following a ransom payment.

On February 11, separatist fighters [set fire](#) to three dormitories of the all-girls boarding secondary school Queen of the Rosary College, in Okoyong, South-West Region.

On April 5, separatists [stormed](#) the campus of the Bamenda university, North-West region, shooting in the air, causing panic among students and teachers, leading to a stampede that injured at least five people. The fighters attacked the university for not observing a “lockdown,” or stay-at-home order, that they had declared across the area.

On April 28, separatist fighters [attacked](#) the taxi and bus station in Mamfe, South-West region. They burned at least five cars and killed three men, accusing station workers of operating during their declared lockdown.

On May 30, suspected separatist fighters [kidnapped and killed](#) Lukong Francis, a retired teacher at the government high school in Jakiri, North-West region, and a member of the ruling party, in retaliation for his participation in the May 20 public celebrations for Cameroon’s Unity Day, which separatist groups oppose.

On June 10, suspected separatist fighters [burned down](#) the district hospital in Mamfe, South-West region, [depriving 85,000 people](#) of access to health care.

On September 16, armed militants [attacked and set fire](#) to St. Mary’s Church in Nchang, diocese of Mamfe, and kidnapped nine people – including five priests. Pope Francis [joined an appeal](#) by bishops from Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference to release those abducted. The nine abducted people were all released on October 23.

Restrictions on Humanitarian Access and Abuses against Aid Workers

Humanitarian access was restricted in the Anglophone and Far-North regions and humanitarian workers have been victims of attacks by both government forces and armed groups. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), humanitarian actors continued to operate [under](#) severe constraints including repeated lockdowns, harassment at checkpoints, and the risk of improvised explosive devices by armed separatist fighters in the Anglophone regions.

In April, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) [suspended](#) all its activities in the South-West region following the “unjust detention” of four of its workers. In December 2020, Cameroonian authorities [had suspended](#) MSF activities in the North-West region, accusing the organization of being too close to Anglophone separatists, leaving tens of thousands of people in the region without access to health care.

Separatist fighters and Islamist armed groups have hindered aid agencies' access in the areas under their control.

On February 25, unidentified armed men [kidnapped](#) five MSF workers from their residence in Fotokol, Far-North region, an area where Boko Haram operates. They were [released](#) a month later.

On February 26, separatist fighters [stopped](#) two vehicles from the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS), a nonprofit medical organization, at a checkpoint in Mile 90, North-West region. They fired at one vehicle, killing a 46-year-old nurse, and injuring another nurse and a doctor.

On July 2, in the Far-North region, suspected Boko Haram fighters [attacked](#) the Mada hospital in the Logone-et-Chari division, killing one civilian, leading to the temporary closure of the health facility, and [leaving](#) thousands without essential healthcare.

Attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP

Attacks and raids by the Islamist armed groups Boko Haram and ISWAP continued in the Far North region.

The UN [Department of Safety and Security](#) (UNDSS) [reported](#) an escalation of violence with 23 attacks by both Boko Haram and ISWAP, leading to 13 civilians killed, including 2 children and one woman; 12 injured, 10 kidnapped, and an additional 7,600 internally displaced. In response to this resurgence of attacks, Cameroon [has deployed](#) hundreds of additional troops to the Far North region.

Crackdown on Political Opposition, Dissent

The government continued to limit the ability of the political opposition and civil society to function freely.

On April 22, four UN special rapporteurs focusing on human rights defenders, extrajudicial executions, the right to freedom of expression and the right to association, [addressed a letter to Cameroon's President Paul Biya](#) raising concern over repeated death threats sent since 2015 to the president of Organic Farming for Gorillas, a Cameroonian civil-society organization which has exposed abuses by businesses in the North-West region.

On August 11, soldiers [arrested](#) Abdul Karim Ali, a prominent Cameroonian Anglophone peace activist, in Bamenda, North-West region. While there are no official charges against Ali, he was told he is accused of "apology for terrorism" for possessing a video on his phone showing alleged human rights abuses committed by a Cameroonian soldier against civilians in the country's English-speaking regions. As of September, Ali remained in detention awaiting trial.

At least 105 opposition party members and supporters [arrested](#) in September 2020 for defying a ban on protests [remain in detention](#) as they have been sentenced by military courts to prison terms ranging from two to five years on politically motivated charges. They include [Olivier Bibou Nissack and Alain Fogué Tedom](#), two prominent members of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement.

Some detainees died in appalling detention conditions in the country's prisons, including [Rodrigue Ndagueho Koufet](#), one of six detainees in Douala prison who died of cholera between February and April. Koufet had been held arbitrarily since September 2020 [for taking part](#) in peaceful assemblies.

In an October [opinion](#) adopted at its 94th session, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention qualified the 2018 arrest and detention of 10 Cameroonian activists in Abuja, Nigeria, as arbitrary and called for their immediate release. The group observed that the individuals were forcibly returned from Nigeria to Cameroon in 2018, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, and concluded that the overall proceedings of the court did not meet international standards.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Cameroon's [penal code](#) punishes "sexual relations between persons of the same sex" with up to five years in prison. There was an [uptick](#) in violence and abuse against LGBTI people in Cameroon in 2022.

From March to May, security forces arbitrarily arrested at least 6 people and detained 11, for alleged consensual same-sex conduct and gender nonconformity. In April, a crowd of about eight men armed with machetes, knives, sticks, and wooden planks, attacked a group of at least 10 LGBTI people. Gendarmes detained and beat at least two of the victims.

Justice and Accountability

Between January and August, eight hearings were held in the trial of three security force members accused of involvement in the [killings of 21 civilians](#) in Ngarbuh village, North-West region. The trial is being held before a military court in Yaoundé and at time of writing had lasted 21 months. Senior officers who could have command responsibility have not been arrested or charged, and there are limited opportunities for access by victims' families.

In June 2020, the French ambassador to Cameroon told the media that President Biya had assured him that an investigation would be opened into the death in custody of journalist [Samuel Wazizi](#) in August 2019. However, as of September, there has not been any progress on the investigation.

In a June 7 [press release](#), Cameroon's army spokesperson Col. Cyrille Serge Atonfack Guemo acknowledged the military's responsibility for the [killing of nine people in Misong](#) village, North-West region, on June 1. He said that four soldiers have been arrested and an investigation has been opened. As of September, there has not been any progress on the investigation.

In a September 21 [press release](#), the Ministry of Defense acknowledged the responsibility for the killing of 2 civilians in Momo division, North-West region, on September 19. The communique indicates that elements of the Defence and Security Forces acted in violation of the instructions.

Key International Actors

On March 21, the European Union [expressed concerns over](#) "the ongoing crisis in the North-West and South-West regions" and called for "immediate end to the violence, respect of human rights and humanitarian principles, unimpeded humanitarian access and a safe environment for humanitarian work."

On April 15, the United States Department of Homeland Security [announced](#) the designation of Cameroon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months. Cameroonian nationals [residing in the US](#) as of April 1, and who cannot safely return due to the conditions in their home country—including violence by government forces and armed groups, destruction of civilian infrastructure, economic instability, and food insecurity—will be able to remain in the US until conditions improve.

On July 25 and 26, French President [Emmanuel Macron visited Cameroon](#) and met with President Biya. The visit [focused on strengthening political and economic ties](#) between Paris and Yaoundé. Macron did not publicly express concerns on the human rights situation in the country.