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COI QUERY

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CAMEROON

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Treatment of individuals perceived as separatists by the state

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1 January 2022 to 3 March 2024

Topic(s)

1. [Overview of conflict-related human rights abuses by the state](#)
2. [Treatment of individuals perceived as separatists by the state](#)

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Treatment of individuals perceived as separatists by the state

1. Overview of conflict-related human rights abuses by the state

In October 2017, separatist groups located in the Southwest and Northwest Region, in predominantly Anglophone regions, proclaimed independence from Cameroon, declaring the Republic of Ambazonia.¹ Cameroon's government in 2019 granted a special status to Anglophone regions, giving them an increased autonomy, which nevertheless did not appease the separatist claims.² According to an article from January 2023, Paul Biya, the President of Cameroon, stated that 'many rebel groups have been crushed and the threat from separatists has been significantly reduced'.³ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report covering events of 2023, clashes have continued between armed groups and government forces in the Anglophone and Far North region, which has 'severely impacted civilians, with cases of unlawful killings, abductions, and raids on villages increasing in the second half of the year'.⁴

Multiple sources described that state forces have committed conflict-related human rights abuses in Cameroon.⁵ The conflict in the Anglophone region has 'resulted in widespread civilian deaths and displacements'.⁶ There were reports that government authorities committed arbitrary arrests,⁷ and arbitrary and unlawful killings through 'excessive use of force in the course of their official duties',⁸ in which 'most killings were associated with the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest region'.⁹ Human rights violations committed by members of the security forces from 2020 to 2023 in the Northwest and Southwest region have been documented,¹⁰ and the Cameroonian security forces 'have been responsible for numerous human rights violations, including unlawful killings, rapes, tortures, destructions [and] arbitrary detentions'.¹¹ Since 2016, 'more than 6,000 people have been killed' due to the violence, 'although actual numbers are expected to be higher'.¹²

¹ R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

² International Crisis Group, A Second Look at Cameroon's Anglophone Special Status, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

³ VOA, Cameroon Separatists Enforce Curfew After President Says Troops Crushing Rebellion, 2 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴ HRW, World Report 2024 – Cameroon, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

⁵ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 17; HRW, World Report 2024 – Cameroon, 11 January 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#); HRW, Cameroon: Army Killings, Disappearances, in North-West Region, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 11

⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 35

¹² R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

Additional information on the security situation in the Anglophone regions can be found in the EUAA query response on the [Security situation in the Far North, Northwest and Southwest regions](#), published on 11 October 2023.

2. Treatment of individuals perceived as separatists by the state

Multiple sources have stated that civilians have been accused of complicity with separatists and this has reportedly resulted in retaliations by government forces.¹³ A joint declaration by civil society organisations published by Amnesty International (AI) in November 2023 affirmed that testimonies have recounted that government soldiers accusing civilians of complicity with separatists have set homes alight and soldiers have committed sexual violence, ‘in retaliation for separatist attacks against them’.¹⁴ The same source described that, ‘in response’ to armed separatist activity, government forces have ‘responded with further human rights violations, arbitrarily arresting and detaining people accused of being armed separatists, or accused of supporting them’.¹⁵ According to AI, ‘hundreds of people have been detained, prosecuted or tried before military tribunals, whose jurisdiction should be reserved for military offenses, according to international standards for the protection’ and ‘many defendants have spent over a year in prison without access to a judge’.¹⁶ AI also noted the ‘lack of transparency on the judicial process that follows, giving rise to fears of impunity and leaving the majority of victims without justice’.¹⁷

In February 2024, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) described that security forces have committed ‘extrajudicial killings and widespread sexual and gender-based violence, burned Anglophone villages and subjected individuals with suspected separatist ties to arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment’ during the conflict.¹⁸ In addition, a report covering July to September 2023, on the human rights situation in the Southwest and Northwest regions of Cameroon by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) affirmed that Cameroonian state forces have ‘increased their crackdown’ on ‘anyone suspected of having links with separatist networks’, which has led to ‘gross human rights violations and abuses including extrajudicial killing, targeted executions, arbitrary arrests and detention, arson and destruction of civilian property among other violations’.¹⁹ The 2022 annual report by United States Department of State (USDOS), citing an external source,

¹³ CHRDA, Midterm Summary Report in the Human Rights Situation in the Conflict -Affected Regions of Cameroon, 22 September 2023, [url](#), p. 4; AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon's Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1; R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴ AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon's Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵ AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon's Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶ AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon's Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷ AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon's Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸ R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁹ CHRDA, The Human Rights Situation Of The North West, South West And Far North Regions Of Cameroon For The Third Quarter (July-September) Of 2023 (Summary Report), 9 December 2023, [url](#), pp. 27-28

reported that ‘citizens were tortured for their opposition to the state’.²⁰ The same source, citing multiple organizations, added that a Cameroonian soldier of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), ‘arrested many civilians in the Southwest Region, accused them of being separatists, and administered harsh treatment to secure confessions’.²¹

The annual report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), covering events of 2023, described that state forces responded to separatist attacks through counter-insurgency operations ‘that often failed to protect civilians or targeted them outright’.²² The same source added that ‘killings of civilians may also have been perpetrated against individuals suspected of being separatists or in retaliation for attacks against army positions’.²³ HRW in the prior annual report, covering 2022, illustrated that security forces responding to separatist attacks, ‘often’ targeted civilians across the Anglophone region.²⁴ Some examples documented by HRW of civilians being targeted for perceived involvement with separatist activity are:

- On 24 April 2022 in the Northwest region, BIR forces beat and detained 30 to 40 motorbike riders, ‘allegedly because they suspected the bikers of being separatist fighters’, in which up to 17 of those detained were forcibly disappeared.²⁵
- On 1 June 2022, soldiers killed nine people in the Northwest region, ‘in a reprisal operation against a community suspected of harboring separatist fighters’.²⁶
- Although prior to the reference period, on 10 December 2021, security forces accused 80 residents of Chomba, a village in the Northwest region, of ‘harbouring separatist fighters, and threatened them with death’. Four villagers were ‘forcibly disappeared’ by the soldiers and later found dead by villages with ‘apparent gunshot wounds to their head’.²⁷

As described in a July 2023 report, AI documented ‘several cases’ of individuals being arbitrary arrested and detained on the ‘mere suspicion of collaborating with armed separatists’.²⁸ A lawyer interviewed by AI in April 2023, stated that ‘most of the charges related to the Anglophone crisis are trumped-up charges’.²⁹ The same report included three incidents of arbitrary arrests and detainments between 2019 and 2021: a Cameroonian woman was arrested in September 2019 in the Northwest region for allegedly ‘being the girlfriend of an armed separatist’, a Cameroonian man was detained in August 2020 for ‘involvement in secession’, and a disabled Cameroonian man was found ‘non-guilty’ in July 2021 after being ‘arrested and detained for more than three months on mere suspicion of “financing of terrorist

²⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 6

²¹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 19

²² HRW, World Report 2024 – Cameroon, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²³ HRW, World Report 2024 – Cameroon, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁴ HRW, World Report 2023 – Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ HRW, World Report 2023 – Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁶ HRW, World Report 2023 – Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ HRW, Cameroon: Army Killings, Disappearances, in North-West Region, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 42

²⁹ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 42

acts”’.³⁰ The source does not mention any incidents after July 2021 and the aforementioned incidents have been included due to their relevance despite occurring prior to the reference period of the query.

According to a security situation report on the Anglophone region, published in February 2023 by Cedoca, Belgium’s country-of-origin information research unit [informal translation], separatists particularly targeted civilians suspected of collaborating with government forces whilst the defence and security forces were carrying out ‘a campaign of reprisals’ against those they believe support armed fighters. Students and educational staff, humanitarian workers, and health workers, traditional leaders, civil servants, elected officials, and journalists, were included in categories particularly targeted by violence.³¹

Concerning journalists, a September 2023 article by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), described that journalists reporting from the Anglophone region were ‘threatened’ by central government’s security forces.³² As reported in the same article, a quote from an investigative reporter, based in the Northwest region, stated that ‘even when we strive to be balanced, the police accuse us of being the ones sending information to separatists’.³³ RSF further described that Cameroon is one of Africa’s ‘most dangerous’ country to be a journalist and ‘journalists from the English-speaking regions in the west of the country are often accused of complicity with a secessionist movement’.³⁴ An August 2022 news article by Al Jazeera affirmed that journalists ‘commonly’ face being ‘arrested by government forces for reporting on the conflict between the two sides’.³⁵ In a report covering 2022, Freedom House noted that ‘the government continued to suppress media coverage of the Anglophone crisis’ and ‘independent and investigative journalists continue to face serious pressure including risk of attack or detention’.³⁶ According to AI in November 2023, there also has been ‘many apparent attempts’ by the government ‘to silence human rights defenders, activists, academics, lawyers and journalists who speak out against atrocities’ in the Anglophone region and those found ‘denouncing or documenting atrocities committed by either side have also found themselves targeted with death threats, or targeted with arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment’.³⁷

On humanitarian workers, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) specified that the government remained ‘suspicious’ of humanitarian workers’ activities in the in the Northwest and Southwest regions, detaining several humanitarian workers between 2021 and 2022.³⁸ Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that, in December 2022, five of its staff members, who had been arrested in separate incidents between 2021 and 2022 in the Southwest region, had been

³⁰ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 42

³¹ Belgium, Cedoca, COI Focus: Régions anglophones : situation sécuritaire 20 February 2023, [url](#), p. 37

³² RSF, Journalists in danger in Cameroon’s Anglophone western region, 7 September 2023, [url](#)

³³ RSF, Journalists in danger in Cameroon’s Anglophone western region, 7 September 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ RSF, Cameroon, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵ Al Jazeera, Caught between warring factions - life as a journalist in Cameroon, 6 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ AI, Joint Declaration: Cameroon’s Universal Periodic Review provides an Opportunity to call on the Cameroon Authorities to protect Human Rights in the Anglophone Regions, 13 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸ UNOCHA, Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (March 2023), 11 May 2023, [url](#), p. 20

acquitted in Cameroon military tribunal from accusation of complicity with separatist groups. As a result of these arrests, in May 2022, MSF decided to suspend its medical activities in the Southwest region.³⁹ Moreover, since 2020, the Cameroonian authorities suspended the activities of the MSF in the Northwest region accusing some MSF staff members of supporting local armed groups and as of February 2024, the restriction has not been lifted.⁴⁰ A report covering 2022 jointly written by Insecurity Insight and Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition indicated that at least 12 health workers were arrested by police and the Cameroonian Armed Forces (CAF) in 2022, in which four were accused of complicity with separatists.⁴¹

Additional information on healthcare workers being perceived as part of separatists by the state, can be found in the EUAA query response on the [Treatment of healthcare workers by the state in Northwest and Southwest \(Anglophone\) regions, including whether healthcare workers are perceived as part of separatist groups by the state](#), published on 17 November 2023.

Freedom House in a report covering 2022, described that 'Anglophone activists have faced harassment, violence, and arrest for their activities'.⁴²

Additional information on students and protestors being perceived as part of separatists by the state, can be found in the EUAA query response on the [Treatment of pro-Anglophone protesters and activists, including students, in Northwest and Southwest regions](#), published on 19 October 2023.

In a report from February 2024, R2P indicated that the Anglophone population were targeted due to their cultural identity.⁴³ The same source added that 'ethnic communities are also often targeted for their alleged collaboration with either side of the conflict'.⁴⁴ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query. The Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford reported in June 2023 that the detention of family members of alleged separatist fighters, specifically wives, had become 'a worrying trend', in which 'the alleged "crime" accused of these family members is that of being related to a suspect, which has no basis in law'.⁴⁵ The same report noted in June 2023 that the BIR soldiers arrested a woman for being the wife of a separatist general.⁴⁶ CHRDA further reported that a woman was arbitrarily detained for 16 months, from October 2021 until February 2023, during which she was tortured and harassed

³⁹ MSF, Cameroon: All MSF staff acquitted in military tribunal, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ MSF, Cameroon: All MSF staff acquitted in military tribunal, 2 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹ Insecurity Insight, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, Cameroon: Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2022, 28 June 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁴² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

⁴³ R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁴ R2P, Cameroon, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁵ University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23 - From January 2021 to April 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁶ University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23 - From January 2021 to April 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 11



on the grounds of her alleged links to separatist fighters and ‘was accused of failure to report terrorism’.⁴⁷

Additional information on civilians and women being perceived as part of separatists by the state on the [Treatment of civilians affiliated with members of the self-declared Ambazonian armed groups and treatment and situation of women in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon](#), published on 11 July 2023.

⁴⁷ CHRDA, CHRDA welcomes the release of Kongnso Antoinette Gohla and calls on the Cameroon government to release other victims of human rights violations and hold the perpetrators accountable, 18 February 2023, [url](#)

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