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COI QUERY

Country of Origin

CAMEROON

Title

Forced recruitment of adult men by separatist groups, including prevalence, in Northwest and Southwest (Anglophone) regions; consequences for refusing to join separatist groups.

Reference period

July 2021 to 6 November 2023

Topics

1. [Overview on separatist groups \(also known as 'Ambazonians'\)](#)
2. [Forced recruitment](#)

Date of completion

7 November 2023

Query Code

Q57-2023

Contributing EU+ COI
units (if applicable)

N/A

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Forced recruitment of adult men by separatist groups, including prevalence, in Northwest and Southwest (Anglophone) regions; consequences for refusing to join separatist groups.

For information on the forced recruitment by separatist groups, self-declared as Ambazonians, in the Anglophone regions until June 2021, see [EUAA COI Query Response Q17-2021](#) of 29 June 2021.

1. Overview on separatist groups (also known as ‘Ambazonians’)

According to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts project (RULAC) of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, a number of separatist groups operate in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon.¹ The separatist groups include the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF), the Ambazonia Restoration Army, the Ambazonian Tigers, Southern Cameroons Defence Forces (Socadef), the Bansa Resistance Army, and Donga Mantung Liberation Force.² As reported by Amnesty International (AI) in 2023, separatist groups commit crimes against the civilian population living in the Anglophone region.³ The separatists are responsible for murders, abductions, torture and destruction of homes.⁴

Incidents involving separatists in the Northwest and Southwest regions, as reported by sources within the reference period of this query, include:

- In August 2023, the UN Office Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that ‘some NSAGs [non-State armed groups] factions announced a lockdown from 5 to 18 September to disrupt the back-to-school preparations.’⁵ It was reported by BBC on 12 September 2023 that disregard of such school bans in the past, resulted in attacks on schools by separatist groups.⁶
- According to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, ‘separatist groups are [...] increasingly using kidnappings as a tactic.’⁷ On 3 May 2022, France 24 reported the abduction of the Cameroonian ruling party senator Regina Mundi in Bamenda,⁸

¹ RULAC, Non-international Armed Conflicts in Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

² RULAC, Non-international Armed Conflicts in Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

³ AI, With or Against Us. People of the North-West Region of Cameroon Caught between the Army, Armed Separatists and Militias, 2023, [url](#), p. 24

⁴ AI, With or Against Us. People of the North-West Region of Cameroon Caught between the Army, Armed Separatists and Militias, 2023, [url](#), p. 24

⁵ UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West - Situation Report No. 57, August 2023, [url](#)

⁶ BBC News, Cameroon's SDF denounce separatists' attempts to disrupt return to school, 12 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷ Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Cameroon Populations at Risk, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸ France 24, Ruling party senator abducted in Bamenda, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

Northwestern Cameroon.⁹ Mundi was freed by the Cameroonian army after a month of being held hostage.¹⁰

- According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Cameroonian journalists ‘have been harassed and accused of working for the government by the separatist groups.’¹¹ As reported by Deutsche Welle (DW), one of the leaders of the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF), Daniel Capo, announced on his Facebook page that ‘any journalist who is arrested must pay 2 million Central African CFA francs (\$3,347, or €3,064) to secure their release.’¹²
- On 6 October 2023, Amnesty International (AI) reported the killings of two people by armed separatists in the Northwest region.¹³ The killings, which took place on 4 October 2023 at the Guzang Market Square, were reportedly carried out by the Ambazonia Governing Council, a separatist organisation linked to the ADF.¹⁴ An ADF spokesperson reportedly indicated that the ‘two victims were spies from the Cameroonian army and were executed “in accordance with [our] code of justice and law”.’¹⁵

For information on the general security situation in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, see the [EUAA COI Query Response Q44-2023](#) of 11 October 2023.

2. Forced recruitment

According to a March 2023 report by OCHA, ‘adolescent boy and men are most at risk of arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, forced recruitment, and physical violence.’¹⁶ Men and young men living in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon ‘remain the primary victims of recorded protection incidents, representing between 85 % and 95 % of those exposed to torture or inhuman treatment, theft, extortion, and arbitrary or unlawful arrest and/or detention.’¹⁷ Men face violence from military authorities and non-State armed groups.¹⁸ According to OCHA, families limit outside movement to their sons to prevent them from being arrested and/or forcibly recruited.¹⁹ According to NORCAP, a branch of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) that ‘works to better protect and empower people affected by crises and climate change,’²⁰ men who refuse to join the armed conflict can be perceived as spies and left with no choice - they join, hide or flee their community.²¹

⁹ France 24, Ruling party senator abducted in Bamenda, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰ Africa News, Cameroon: Soldiers free senator held hostage by Anglophone separatists, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹ RSF, Journalists in danger in Cameroon’s Anglophone western region, 7 September 2023, [url](#)

¹² DW, Cameroon: ‘Ambazonians’ threaten journalists, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³ AI, Cameroon: The unlawful killings of two people by separatists must not go unpunished, 6 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴ AI, Cameroon: The unlawful killings of two people by separatists must not go unpunished, 6 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵ HRW, Cameroon: Video Shows Killing by Armed Separatists, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2023, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁷ UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2023, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁸ UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2023, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁹ UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2023, [url](#), p. 32

²⁰ NRC, NORCAP, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

²¹ NRC, NORCAP, A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon’s North West and South West, July 2022, [url](#), p. 11

In July 2022, NORCAP indicated that, according to local sources, adolescent boys and men are at the ‘bottom’ in the list of priorities for humanitarian organisations, which further exposes them to other forms of violence such as forced recruitment, torture, and killings.²² A 2022 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report on labour market in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon similarly indicated that ‘men are excluded from economic support programmes, because they are perceived to be less vulnerable than women.’²³

According to OCHA, internally displaced men are stigmatised in the Littoral and West regions for their presumed membership in a separatist group and are called ‘Amba boys’ and ‘Bamendas,’ which makes it difficult to find employment opportunities.²⁴ HRW reported that in April 2022, Cameroonian soldiers detained between 30 and 40 motorbike riders who were part of a funeral procession and, according to sources consulted by HRW, detainees were selected based on having dreadlocks, which is an assumed ‘indication’ that the person is an ‘amba boy’ or separatist fighter.²⁵

²² NRC, NORCAP, A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon’s North West and South West, July 2022, [url](#), p. 24

²³ IOM, Labour Market Survey in North-West, South-West Regions of Cameroon for the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus, April 2022, [url](#), p. 54

²⁴ UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Needs Overview, March 2023, [url](#), p. 25

²⁵ HRW, Cameroon: Army Killings, Disappearances, in North-West Region, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED

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