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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Cameroon

Overview: In 2020, terrorist activity increased in Cameroon in the Far North Region. Terrorists launched at least 400 attacks during the year, a 90 percent increase since 2019. The government attributed these terrorist attacks to Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. According to reports, terrorists mostly targeted civilians. In November, Caritas Maroua-Mokolo, a Catholic humanitarian organization based in the Far North Region, reported that terrorist attacks on civilians were “grossly underreported.” The International Organization of Migration estimated the number of displaced persons as of October at 321,886, while UNHCR reported 114,710 Nigerian refugees in October. Boko Haram and ISIS-WA carried out significantly more suicide attacks, compared with 2019. Terror attacks appeared to target communities and locations that hosted internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Terrorists attacked vigilance committee members and local community leaders in the Far North Region. In July the government relocated 155 former Boko Haram and ISIS-WA fighters from the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) camp in Mora to a demobilization, deradicalization, and reintegration (DDR) center in Meri. In September the government inaugurated a camp in Mozogo for the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), an elite military force that has played a large part in the Cameroonian and regional war against Boko Haram.

Cameroon continued its CT cooperation with the international community. Over the course of the year, Cameroon contributed to operations of the MNJTF. Cameroon also remained a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Countering terrorist threats remained a top security priority for the Government of Cameroon, which continued to work with the United States to improve the capacity of its security forces.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: On November 13 the African Center for Strategic Studies reported that Boko Haram and ISIS-WA carried out at least 400 attacks in 2020, compared with just over 200 in 2019. Attacks included raids in search of supplies, indiscriminate killings, targeted murders, beheadings, suicide bombings, abductions, arsons, and lootings. A representative sample of the deadliest attacks in the Far North Region included the following:

- On January 19, Boko Haram terrorists ambushed and killed at least six civilians in Ganse.
- On April 5, Boko Haram suicide bombers killed more than 10 civilians in Amchide.
- On August 1, two suicide bombers killed at least 17 civilians and injured 16 others in Nguetechewe.
- On August 25, according to authorities, ISIS-WA fighters killed 14 community leaders on Bulgaram, an island in Lake Chad.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: In 2020, Cameroon prosecuted numerous alleged Boko Haram-affiliated defendants for terrorism-related crimes. U.S. government officials observed greater adherence to fair trial principles in court, including the requirement of evidence to support convictions. In September a judge at the Yaoundé Military Tribunal sentenced four Cameroonian soldiers to 10 years in prison for killing 13 unarmed civilians during a counter-Boko Haram operation in 2015 in the Far North.

Cameroon continued to use the 2014 antiterrorism law to suppress dissent and arrested journalists, activists, and opposition party members. In September the government banned a protest by the Cameroon Renaissance Movement opposition party and threatened to prosecute anyone who defied the ban under the antiterrorism law.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: There have been no significant updates since 2019. Cameroon is a member of the Task Force on Money Laundering in Central Africa (GABAC), a FATF-style regional body. Cameroon's FIU, the National Agency for Financial Investigation, is a member of the Egmont Group.

Countering Violent Extremism: In July the government relocated 155 former Boko Haram and ISIS-WA fighters from the MNJTF camp in Mora to a temporary DDR center in Meri. In November, Far North Region DDR coordinator Oumar Bichair told media the government was financing apprenticeships and income-generating activities for ex-fighters at the Meri Center. In 2020 the government reintegrated at least 20 ex-Boko Haram and ex-ISIS-WA hostages kidnapped from Amchide and Limani in the Far North Region.

During a four-day operation in February dubbed “BIR Against Blindness,” the BIR, carried out more than 100 free eye surgeries in the Far North Region as part of a drive to strengthen collaboration with local communities in the fight against terrorism. Before school resumption in October, security forces who described education as the “most effective tool against terrorism” refurbished many schools destroyed by violent extremists.

In 2020 the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education and the United Nations Population Fund launched a project to stabilize and revive communities affected by terrorist attacks in the Far North Region. They organized a workshop to train youth to carry out actions aimed at preventing the terrorist radicalization of adolescents in the Far North Region.

In 2020, SADEC, a local NGO based in the Far North Region, launched a community radio program to inform communities affected by terrorist attacks about DDR programs and encourage host communities to forgive and accept ex-Boko Haram and ex-ISIS-WA fighters.

In 2020, ADELPA, a local NGO, implemented a project where youth associations carried out actions to promote peace in the areas of the Far North Region affected by terrorist attacks.

International and Regional Cooperation: Cameroon continued its counterterrorism cooperation with the international community, contributing significantly to operations of the Multi-National Joint Task Force.

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