



World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Cameroon : Anglophones

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Profile

An English-speaking linguistic minority inhabits the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, a legacy of the region's colonial past. Anglophone activists claim that the two provinces, with roughly one fifth of national population but producing over half of the GDP, have been marginalized by a predominately French-speaking government. In 2014, the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination expressed concern at reported inequality between English- and French-speaking populations in the enjoyment of their rights, as did the Independent Expert on minority issues in the same year.

Current issues

Since strike action began in October 2016 at least six demonstrators have been shot dead and hundreds arrested. The strike was started by English-speaking lawyers and teachers, who were protesting against the increasing use of French in the courts and schools. Images of students being teargassed and beaten in November 2016 at the English-speaking University of Buea spread rapidly on social media. The UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association called for dialogue and for the authorities to respect human rights norms. In January 2017, the Cameroonian authorities shut down the internet in English-speaking areas in an effort to curb dissent; the UN has also condemned this as a violation of free speech rights. The shutdown lasted three months and had a serious impact on the local economy.

In February 2017, the trial of three leading protesters commenced. The three activists - Felix Agbor Balla, Fontem Aforteka'a Neba and Mancho Bibixy - are charged with, among other things, hostility against the state, secession and civil war. The charges, which could lead to the death penalty, have been brought under 2014 anti-terror legislation, originally intended to be applied in the fight against Boko Haram. The case was repeatedly adjourned during the subsequent months.

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