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3. EU financial engagement: In 2021, the EU in Cabo Verde has focused its attention and cooperation activities on the above-mentioned issues that appear more problematic from human rights perspective. Both the EU and Member States have either supported or developed projects aimed at eradicating gender-based violence and the EU delegation took public initiatives to promote gender equality. Regarding the rights of child, the EU and Portugal co-financed a project aimed at “Promoting the Inclusion of Children with Neurological Disabilities”. The EU delegation supports Social and Labour Rights through two projects implemented by ILO.

Many of the EU and Member States’ activities and projects in Cabo Verde include a human development and human rights dimension with a particular focus on gender. The EU delegation maintains a regular dialogue with the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDHC), which plays a determinant role in monitoring and promoting human rights in the country. In 2021, about 30% of the EU delegation’s press and information budget was allocated to outreach and awareness-raising activities on human rights.

4. Multilateral context: Cabo Verde has ratified most international and regional human rights instruments and ensures their implementation and enforcement in a generally effective manner. The country joined the international Human Rights Coalition in 2018.

Cameroon

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: There has been no improvement to the human rights and democracy situation in Cameroon in 2021. In the regions affected by the Anglophone separatist crisis (North-West and South-West) and by terrorism (Far North), numerous human rights abuses and violations were reported, committed by both separatist armed groups, terrorist groups (Boko Haram and ISWAP) and national security forces. In the rest of the country, substantial progress on respect of human rights and democratic principles remains to be accomplished. Restrictions on meetings and peaceful demonstrations by NGOs and opposition political parties continued. The right to a fair trial was infringed in several cases, especially in those related to separatists or political opponents: for example, in December 2021, a military tribunal sentenced to up to seven years imprisonment 54 protesters of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement for taking part in peaceful demonstrations in September 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was also abused to justify restrictions to public freedoms. While freedom of expression is limited when it comes to challenging the system in power, there seems to be no restraint when it comes to attacking political opponents. As a result, there is a high profusion of fake news, disinformation and hate speech on social media, the press and traditional media against ethnic or linguistic communities, or against some prominent political figures.

In the context of the separatist crisis and counter-terrorism operations, the right to life and physical integrity have been infringed in many cases. Cases of torture and unlawful killings have been reported, committed by both security forces and armed separatist or criminal groups. There were also reports of destruction and burning of houses and villages, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention, and kidnapping with ransom, as well as increasing cases of harassment or life threats against human rights defenders. Disputes over natural resources continued, especially in the Far-North region and resulted in human rights

infringements and violent clashes in August and December between Arab Choa herders and Mousgoum fishermen, leaving 44 dead, 111 wounded and almost 100,000 displaced (15,000 IDPs and around 80,000 refugees to Chad).

The country faces systemic weaknesses in ensuring sufficient protection of the groups in the most vulnerable situations, notably children and displaced people. Displaced populations (475,000 refugees and asylum seekers, 937,000 IDPs) were mostly in the East, Far North, North-West and South-West regions. Women and children are the first victims of conflict. Many of them have been raped, killed, deprived of their rights to education, health and human dignity, or have been enrolled in armed groups or forced to prostitution. In the Far North and NWSW regions, 4.293 schools remain closed due to security concerns (in NWSW, separatist groups have been trying for years to impose a public schools boycott).

2. EU action: key focus areas: EU's priorities in 2021 were:

- abolition of death penalty, eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and fair access to justice;
- protection, conflict prevention and crisis/conflict resolution;
- gender equality, women's rights and non-discrimination, including as regards to sexual orientation;
- strengthening civic and democratic spaces, good governance and accountability, transparency and fight against corruption;
- green deal, business and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The policy priorities defined by the EU and its Member States present in Cameroon in new human rights, civil society and gender action documents were the subject of a dedicated point in the article 8 political dialogue with the Cameroonian government in June 2021. There has been a follow up at high level with some of the line ministries. A number of specific human rights issues were discussed with ministers, including during the political dialogue in June 2021 and January 2022 (postponed from December 2021). Among them were abuses of the antiterrorism law in cases of peaceful opposition protests; impunity for human rights violations by armed forces and lack of compliance with international humanitarian law; lack of compliance with the principles of habeas corpus; disinformation and fake news; tensions with local and international NGOs and civil society.

Regarding crises in Anglophone regions and the Far North, the EU continued to support civil society to promote the role of women and youth as agents of development and change. The EU and Member States published statements on the Anglophone crisis, condemning violence and calling for the respect of human rights.

The EU and Member States continued to speak and carry out demarches for the abolition of death penalty (not applied since 1997) and to monitor trials of journalists and human rights defenders, as well as to cooperate with civil society and authorities to improve detention conditions and judicial procedures.

4. EU financial engagement: In December 2021, a contract was signed for a two-year project to support survivors of torture, monitor human rights and train lawyers, security forces and non-state armed groups in accountability, access to justice and respect for human rights in conflict regions.

The EU has provided support to civil society linked to civil registry at the local level (under PROCIVIS programme), and in conflict prevention to promote a culture of tolerance and prevent radicalisation among vulnerable youth (IcSP support to a UN-implemented project in Far North). All new projects funded through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights included components to promote women and girls' rights in regions affected by crisis, as well as protection, conflict prevention and crisis/conflict resolution. The EU and Member States supported projects on the rights of LGBTI persons (Belgium, Spain, Germany) and human rights defenders (France, Belgium, Germany), as well as women's rights and the rights of the child (Germany, Italy, Spain, France).

Member States have also worked on governance and local participation (France, Italy), on capacity-building in the penitentiary and justice system (France, Italy), on countering hate speech and disinformation in social media (Germany, Italy), and on promoting the leadership of women and girls and combatting gender-based violence and discrimination against women (France, Germany).

The Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for Cameroon approved in December 2021 also embraces democracy, human rights and gender equality in particular among the three priority domains.

5. Multilateral context: Cameroon is party to several key international human rights treaties. In 2021, it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the rights of older persons. The signing and ratification of instruments such as the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which aims at the abolition of the death penalty, have been repeatedly rejected by Cameroon in the Universal Periodic Review. Cameroon has not signed the African Union Charter on democracy, governance and elections. Cameroon issued a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures in 2014.

In the UN Human Rights Council, of which Cameroon is a member until 2024, the EU included Cameroon in its item 2 statements in the 46th, 47th and 48th sessions, condemning violence against civilians by both parties in the Anglophone crisis, as well as calling for a dialogue and impartial investigations into alleged human rights violations and abuses. In multilateral fora on human rights resolutions tabled by the EU, Cameroon voted against when the subject was an African country, and abstained for countries outside Africa.

Central African Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Central African Republic (CAR) is still struggling to emerge from the long crisis that it has been experiencing for more than two decades. Severe and widespread violations of human rights occurred throughout 2021, in spite of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR), and the unilateral cease-fire decided by President Touadéra on 15 October 2021. The use of verbal violence and hate speech, in particular against the Fulani community, has increased. Human rights abuses and international humanitarian law (IHL) violations were mostly committed by armed groups, but also by the country's own security forces and "Russian instructors"⁹.

⁹ Language used by the national commission of inquiry and the UN (MINUSCA/OHCHR).