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In the Northwest and Southwest regions, the army and armed separatist groups committed serious human rights violations and abuses. In the Far North region, armed groups continued to carry out deadly raids on villages. Dozens of opposition party supporters and anglophone leaders remained arbitrarily detained. The authorities announced judicial inquiries after alleged mismanagement of Covid-19 funds.

Background

Fighting between armed separatist groups and the army continued in the Northwest and Southwest anglophone regions. The armed conflict in the Far North region continued to rage with the active presence of the armed groups Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). As of 31 October, Cameroon hosted more than 1 million internally displaced people in the Northwest, Southwest and Far North regions.

Unlawful attacks and killings

According to Human Rights Watch, soldiers killed at least nine people in the Southwest region on 10 January and looted homes. On 8 and 9 June, Cameroonian security forces also killed two people, raped a 53-year-old woman, and destroyed and looted at least 33 homes, shops and a traditional leader's palace in the Northwest region.

Following an improvised explosive device attack on a Rapid Intervention Battalion convoy in Bamenda on 8 December, elements of the army forces reportedly burnt a large number of houses in the town.

Abuses by armed groups

Northwest and Southwest regions

Armed groups continued to commit grave human rights abuses in the Northwest and Southwest regions, targeting people, healthcare facilities and schools.

From January to June, OCHA reported 29 attacks on healthcare facilities in the Northwest region and seven in the Southwest region; health workers and patients were abducted and installations were burnt.

On 9 January, the head of a school in Ossing, Southwest region, was reportedly killed by unidentified men. According to the OCHA, on 5 March unidentified armed men abducted a student from a school in the village of Batoke, Southwest region. On 6 March, armed men abducted two teachers and a student from a school in Bamenda, Southwest region. On 24 November, unidentified gunmen attacked a school in Ekondo Titi, Southwest region, killing four students and a teacher.

On 27 February, suspected armed separatists abducted a doctor in the Northwest region, accusing him of not supporting the separatist cause. He was released after payment of a ransom. On 13 March, according to the National Union of Journalists, a journalist at Cameroon Radio Television was abducted from her home by suspected armed separatists. She was released after payment of a ransom. On 15 June, six civil servants were abducted in Misore-Balue, Southwest region, and one of them was executed, according to government media and human rights organizations.

Traditional authorities were also targeted, suspected of siding with the Cameroonian government. On 13 February, armed men abducted four traditional leaders in Fontem, Southwest region. Three of them were reportedly later found dead.

These human rights abuses happened in the context of growing inter-communal tensions. Between 22 and 26 February, at least 4,200 people were displaced from seven villages in Nwa subdivision, Northwest region, after attacks by Fulani vigilante groups, resulting in the deaths of at least eight people.

On 5 March, armed men attacked Fulani herdsmen in the lower Menchum valley in Boyo, Northwest region, killing at least 10 people, after the herdsmen's cattle had allegedly destroyed a farmer's crops. According to the OCHA, two days later in the same locality armed men attacked Fulani people, killing six people, allegedly to avenge the death of a woman burnt alive in her house in Beneng village.

Far North region

Boko Haram and ISWAP continued to commit serious human rights abuses in the Far North region, including killings, abductions, looting and burning of homes and properties, mostly targeting farmers and fishermen in remote areas.

As of 24 October, at least 70 civilians had been reportedly killed in at least 51 attacks. On 8 January a female suicide bomber killed at least 15 people in Mozogo.

According to reports, at least 15 fishermen were abducted on 30 August in Blaram village, and on 10 November four villagers were killed in a village of Mokolo commune in an attack attributed to Boko Haram.

Denial of humanitarian access

Doctors Without Borders announced on 3 August that it had been forced to withdraw teams from the Northwest region, after the authorities suspended its activities in December 2020, accusing it of supporting local armed groups.

Arbitrary detention

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in two Opinions adopted in August 2019 and May 2021, called for the release of Mancho Bibixy Tse and Tsi Conrad. The two men had led protests in the anglophone regions in 2016 and 2017 and were sentenced by a military court in Yaoundé to 15 years in prison, following their conviction notably for "acts of terrorism, secession, spreading false information, and contempt for public bodies and officials". Dozens of other anglophone leaders remained in detention after having been tried by military tribunals.

More than 100 Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC) members and supporters reportedly remained in arbitrary detention; they were charged or sentenced by military courts, for attempted revolution, rebellion, aggravated assembly, or participation in the organization of an undeclared public meeting, in relation to their activism or their participation in banned protests in September 2020. Among them, Olivier Bibou Nissack, the spokesperson of MRC leader Maurice Kamto, and Alain Fogué Tedom, national treasurer of the MRC, were sentenced to seven years in prison.

On 31 December, after 15 months of pretrial detention, four members of the Stand Up for Cameroon movement were found guilty of "insurrection" and sentenced to 16 months in prison by a military tribunal. They had been arrested during a meeting ahead of the September protests.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly

On 21 July the authorities banned a demonstration planned by the MRC for 25 July in Yaoundé, on the grounds of "risk of serious disturbance to public order" and "risk of the spread of Covid-19." However, several demonstrations in support of the ruling party were authorized the same month.

On 26 August, the Ministry of Territorial Administration gave "promoters and representatives of foreign associations" working in Cameroon one month to send them information relating to their headquarters and offices, and names and contact details of staff as part of an "updating operation"; otherwise they would not be authorized to work in the country. Human rights defenders and associations denounced the move.

Right to health

Civil servants complained in the media about the lack of financial support by the government to their establishment to fight against Covid-19. On 19 May, a report by the Supreme Court's audit chamber was leaked to social media. It revealed potential dubious contracts, falsified accounts, and the alleged misappropriation of billions of CFA francs by government bodies from the Special National

Solidarity Fund – created in March 2020 by President Paul Biya – for the fight against Covid-19. On 28 May the authorities announced judicial inquiries on the management of Covid-19 funds. As of 28 December, only 1,020,007 Covid-19 vaccinations had been administered.

LGBTI people's rights

LGBTI people continued to be subjected to human rights violations.

On 8 February, two transgender women were arrested in a restaurant by gendarmes. They said they were physically and verbally assaulted before being transferred to New Bell prison in Douala. Both were charged with attempted homosexuality, affront to public decency and non-possession of identity cards, and were sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 FCFA (about US\$345). They were released in June pending appeal.

On 24 February, according to Human Rights Watch, police forces raided the office of Colibri, an HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment group in Bafoussam, West region, and arrested 13 people on charges of homosexuality, before releasing them a few days later. Those arrested said they were forced to sign statements, were physically and verbally assaulted, and were forced to undergo HIV tests and anal examinations. Article 347-1 of the Criminal Code punishes with up to five years' imprisonment "any person who has sexual relations with a person of his sex".

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