



CAMEROON

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CAMEROON 2024

People critical of the authorities were prosecuted and threatened with restrictions on their right to freedom of movement, and journalists were intimidated by security forces. Anglophone leaders, activists and journalists as well as opposition activists were arbitrarily detained. Armed separatists were responsible for murders and attacks against schools in North-west and South-west regions, and armed groups killed civilians in Far North region.

Background

A year before the 2025 presidential elections, political tensions mounted and armed conflict and violence continued in the Far North, North-west and South-west regions. More than 580,000 people were displaced by armed violence in the North-west and South-west regions. In September, Norwegian police arrested Lucas Cho Ayaba, one of the main Anglophone separatist leaders, on suspicion of incitement to commit crimes against humanity in Cameroon.

Between January and October, flooding in Far North region affected 356,730 people, killing at least 30.

Freedom of expression

In a decree issued on 16 July, the senior divisional officer of Mfoundi division, a geographical area which includes the capital, Yaoundé, stated that “anyone who dangerously insults the [state] institutions or the person who embodies them” could be banned from staying in Mfoundi. Two days later, the communications minister issued a press release stating that “it is unacceptable for compatriots... to use irreverent language” about the president, Paul Biya, “who was freely and overwhelmingly elected by his fellow citizens.”

Junior Ngombe, a hairdresser and social media activist, was released on bail on 31 July by a military court after seven days’ detention at the Secretariat of State for Defence in Yaoundé, where he had been transferred after his arrest in Douala on 24 July. He had shared videos on social media urging Cameroonian youth to register to vote for the upcoming presidential election and denouncing the control of the country by the ruling party.

Cameroonian activist Yves Kibouy Bershu, known as Ramon Cotta, was arrested on 19 July in Gabon and transferred to Cameroon on 23 July without any known legal or diplomatic procedure. He was charged with “apology for the crime of secession, illegal acquisition of weapons of war, contempt of constituted bodies and lack of a national identity card” and transferred on 9 October to pretrial detention in Kondengui central prison in Yaoundé. Videos he had posted on social media criticized the Cameroonian authorities and the Cameroonian embassy in Gabon.

On 3 October the National Trade Union of Journalists of Cameroon issued a declaration denouncing pressure by security officers on media outlets “to silence those who express criticisms against the authorities”.

On 9 October, following rumours about the health of the president, the minister of territorial administration banned “any media debate on the state of the President of the Republic”, in a letter addressed to the country’s governors.

Freedom of association

On 6 December the minister of territorial administration issued a decree banning or suspending for three months the activities of several organizations, including the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, based on accusations including “illicit funding”.

Arbitrary detention

Dozens of Anglophone people remained arbitrarily detained after being sentenced by military courts in the context of armed violence in the Anglophone regions. They included journalist Thomas Awah Junior, protest leaders Mancho Bibixy, Tsi Conrad and Penn Terence Khan, and 10 political leaders including Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considered their detention arbitrary and urged the Cameroonian authorities to release them.

Kingsley Njoka, a freelance journalist from the Anglophone North-west region who had been arrested in 2020, initially held incommunicado, and charged with secessionism and complicity in an armed group, was sentenced on 24 September by a military tribunal to 10 years in jail.

Forty-one activists and opposition leaders remained arbitrarily detained after being sentenced by military courts for taking part in a march on 22 September 2022, organized by the Cameroon Renaissance Movement opposition party.

Abuses by armed groups

North-west and South-west regions

In the two Anglophone regions, real or suspected armed separatists continued to carry out murders, hostage-taking for ransoms and extortion, targeting defence and security forces, political and administrative authorities, civil servants and other civilians they accused of not complying with their rules, including lockdowns and a “liberation tax”.

On 11 February, during the Cameroon Youth Celebrations, a home-made bomb killed one person and injured more than 100 others in Nkambe, North-west region. On 26 May a grenade attack on a bar in Bamenda, North-west region killed two people and injured 41.

On 20 May, the mayor of Belo, Boyo division, North-West region, his deputy and an inspector of basic education were shot dead. On 26 October, the second deputy mayor of Bamenda II was abducted and murdered.

Far North region

In Far North region, the armed conflict between state forces and armed groups was ongoing. Armed groups affiliated to Islamic State’s West Africa Province and Jamatu Ahli Al-Sunna lil Da’wa Wal Jihad, both descended from the Boko Haram armed group, continued to attack civilians in villages along the border with Nigeria and on islands in Lake Chad, looting and killing and abducting civilians, according to security sources.

On the night of 1-2 January, four people were killed, eight abducted, and two properties set on fire during an attack in Bargaram in Hile-Alifa commune. Three Cameroonian aid workers from the French NGO Première Urgence Internationale, who were abducted on 10 January in Kolofata district, were released on 19 April. In June, 13 children, women and men from the fishing community were abducted in Mourdas. In October, around 15 fishermen were abducted in Darak, and four civilians were killed in Kalguiwa.

Unlawful killings

In the North-west and South-west regions, defence and security forces were accused of unlawful killings of people suspected of collaborating with armed separatist groups, according to Cameroonian NGOs. The government did not respond to accusations of unlawful killings, including the killing of four civilians in Mamfe in April during a military operation.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

No information was made public regarding an investigation into the murder of journalist Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé in Yaoundé in February 2023. On 9 September the Yaoundé military tribunal publicly announced charges against 17 defendants on trial in relation to the murder of journalist Martinez Zogo in Yaoundé in January 2023.

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