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Republic of Cameroon

Head of state: **Paul Biya**

Head of government: **Philémon Yang**

The armed group Boko Haram continued to commit serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in the Far North region, including killing and abducting hundreds of civilians. In response, the authorities and security forces committed human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, torture and enforced disappearances. As a result of the conflict, more than 170,000 people had fled their homes since 2014. Freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly continued to be restricted. Demonstrations in Anglophone regions from late October were violently repressed by the security forces. Journalists, students, human rights defenders and members of opposition parties were arrested and some faced trial before military courts. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people faced discrimination, intimidation and harassment, although the number of arrests and prosecutions continued to fall.

ABUSES BY ARMED GROUPS – BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram committed crimes under international law and human rights abuses, including suicide bombings in civilian areas, summary executions, torture, hostage-taking, abductions, recruitment of child soldiers, looting and destruction of public, private and religious property. During the year, the group carried out at least 150 attacks, including 22 suicide bombings, killing at least 260 civilians. The crimes were part of a systematic attack on the civilian population across the Lake Chad basin.

Boko Haram deliberately targeted civilians in attacks on markets, mosques, churches, schools and bus stations. In January alone, at least nine suicide attacks killed more than 60 civilians. On 10 February in the town of Nguéchéwé, 60km from Maroua, two women suicide bombers attacked a funeral, killing at least nine civilians, including a child, and injuring more than 40 people. On 19 February, two women suicide bombers killed at least 24 civilians and injured 112 others in a

crowded market in the village of Mémé, near Mora. Suicide bombings on 21 August and 25 December killed a total of five people and wounded at least 34 at markets in Mora.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

Security forces continued to arbitrarily arrest individuals accused of supporting Boko Haram, often with little or no evidence, and detained them in inhumane, often life-threatening conditions. Hundreds of suspects were held in unofficial detention centres, such as military bases or premises belonging to the national intelligence agencies, without access to a lawyer or their families.

The security forces continued to use "cordon and search" operations, leading to mass arrests.

TORTURE, DEATHS IN CUSTODY AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Dozens of men, women and children accused of supporting Boko Haram were tortured by members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), an elite army unit, at the military base known as Salak, near Maroua, and by officers of the General Directorate of External Research (DGRE), an intelligence service, in premises in the capital, Yaoundé. Some of them died as a result of torture; others disappeared. ^[1]

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

Human rights defenders, including civil society activists and journalists, continued to be intimidated, harassed and threatened. In response to curtailed freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, journalists reported that they self-censored to avoid repercussions for criticizing the government, especially on security matters.

Kah Walla, President of the Cameroon People's Party, was victim of several arbitrary arrests. On 8 April, she was detained along with 11 members of her party at the Judicial Police station located at the Elig-Essono neighbourhood in Yaoundé on charges of "insurrection and rebellion against the State", for peacefully protesting against the government. On 20 May, she was detained along with 14 members of her party at the Directorate for the Surveillance of the National Territory in Yaoundé charged with "rebellion, inciting insurrection and inciting revolt"; they were all released the same day without any explanation. On 28 October Kah Walla was arrested at her party headquarters in Yaoundé and detained at the Yaoundé 1 Central Police Station alongside 50 of her supporters as they gathered for a prayer for the victims of the Eseka train crash. The arrest was carried out without any warrant. They were detained for more than seven hours without charge. No reason was given for their arrest.

In late October, lawyers, students and teachers from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon went on strike, in opposition to what they viewed as the marginalization of the Anglophone minority. Protesting erupted in several cities in the southwest and northwest of the country, including Bamenda, Kumba and Buea. Cameroon's security forces arbitrarily arrested protesters and used excessive force to disperse them. In one example, on 8 December, the use of live bullets by security forces led to the deaths of between two and four people during a protest in the northwestern city of Bamenda.

UNFAIR TRIALS

People continued to face unfair trials before military courts.

The trial of Radio France Internationale correspondent Ahmed Abba, who was arrested in Maroua in July 2015, began at Yaoundé Military Court on 29 February. It was marred by irregularities, including witnesses not being called to testify, and documents not being shared with defence

lawyers. Charged with complicity with and non-denunciation of terrorist acts, he was tortured while held incommunicado for three months.

The trial of three journalists – Rodrigue Tongué, Felix Ebole Bola and Baba Wamé – continued at Yaoundé Military Court. They were charged in October 2014 with non-denunciation of information and sources. If convicted, they could face up to five years' imprisonment. Trial proceedings were marred by substantive and procedural irregularities, including the refusal by the judges to allow witnesses to testify. Aboubakar Siddiki, leader of the political party Mouvement patriotique du salut camerounais, and Abdoulaye Harissou, a well-known notary, faced trial alongside the three journalists. Arrested in August 2014, they were both held incommunicado at the DGRE for more than 40 days before being transferred to Prison Principale in Yaoundé. They faced charges of illegal possession and use of weapons of war, murder, revolution, insulting the head of state and hostility against the state.

Fomusoh Ivo Feh, arrested in December 2014 in Limbe for forwarding a sarcastic text message about Boko Haram, was sentenced to 10 years in prison by Yaoundé Military Court on 2 November for "non-denunciation of a terrorist act". Convicted on the basis of limited and unverifiable evidence, his trial was marred by irregularities, including the lack of an interpreter.

IMPUNITY

On 11 July, the State Secretary to the Minister of Defence in charge of the national gendarmerie said that a commission of inquiry to investigate crimes committed by the security forces engaged in operations against Boko Haram would be set up. No further information was provided.

In August, the trial of gendarmerie Colonel Zé Onguéné Charles, charged with negligence and breach of custody law, started before Yaoundé Military Court. The Colonel was in charge of the region where, on 27-28 December 2014, at least 25 men accused of supporting Boko Haram died while detained in a gendarmerie building.

PRISON CONDITIONS

Prison conditions remained poor, marked by chronic overcrowding, inadequate food, limited medical care, and deplorable hygiene and sanitation. Maroua prison housed around 1,400 detainees, more than three times its intended capacity. The population of the central prison in Yaoundé was approximately 4,000, despite a maximum capacity of 2,000. In Prison Principale in Yaoundé, the majority of suspected Boko Haram detainees were permanently chained until August.

The main factors contributing to overcrowding included the mass arrests of people accused of supporting Boko Haram, the large number of detainees held without charge, and the ineffective judicial system. The government promised to build new prisons and began constructing 12 new cells for the prison in Maroua. The measures were considered insufficient to resolve the crisis.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

At least 276,000 refugees from the Central African Republic lived in harsh conditions in crowded camps or with host families along border areas of southeastern Cameroon. Some 59,000 refugees from Nigeria lived in the UN-run Minawao camp in the Far North region, but around 27,000 others struggled to cope outside the camp, facing food insecurity, lack of access to basic services and harassment by the security forces. The insecurity created by both Boko Haram and the military also led to the internal displacement of around 199,000 people in the Far North region. Agreements between Cameroon, Nigeria, Central African Republic and UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, to facilitate voluntary return of refugees were being finalized at the end of the year.

RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination, intimidation, harassment and violence. The criminalization of same-sex sexual relations was retained when the Criminal Code was revised in June.

On 2 August, three young men were arrested in Yaoundé and taken to a gendarmerie station where they were beaten, insulted and had their hair partially shaved off. The gendarmes poured cold water on the men, forced them to clean the gendarmerie building, and demanded they "confess" their sexuality. They were released 24 hours later on payment of a bribe.

RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

The Boko Haram violence exacerbated the hardships of communities in the Far North region, limiting their access to basic social services, and disrupting trade, farming and pastoralism. Some 1.4 million people in the region, most of them children, faced crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, and 144 schools and 21 health centres were forced to shut down due to insecurity.

An amended version of the Penal Code, passed in July, provided that tenants owing more than two months' rent could be sentenced to up to three years in prison. About a third of households lived in rented accommodation and almost half of the country's population lived below the poverty line.

DEATH PENALTY

People accused of supporting Boko Haram continued to be sentenced to death following unfair trials in military courts; none were executed during the year. The vast majority of cases were prosecuted under a deeply flawed anti-terrorism law passed in December 2014.

[1. Right cause, wrong means: Human rights violated and justice denied in Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram \(AFR 17/4260/2016\)](#)

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