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COI QUERY

Country of Origin

CAMEROON

Title	Treatment of women by separatist groups, including information on sexual and gender-based violence, in the Northwest and Southwest (Anglophone) regions
Reference period	January 2021 to 6 October 2023
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Date of completion	11 October 2023
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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Treatment of women by separatist groups, including information on sexual and gender-based violence, in the Northwest and Southwest (Anglophone) regions

1. Prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in the Northwest and Southwest regions

Information on the treatment of women by separatist groups, including information on sexual and gender-based violence, in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

The Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon are also referred to as the Anglophone region, where separatist groups proclaimed the Republic of Ambazonia in 2017, declaring self-independence from Cameroon.¹ The Special Status that Cameroon granted to the region did not appease separatist claims.² Separatist fighters were reported not to be homogenous with a solid structure.³ Instead, the separatist movement was composed of several groups with different means and goals.⁴

According to the 2018 Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), conducted between June 2018 and January 2019, 18.6 % of women in the Northwest region and 10 % of women in the Southwest had suffered sexual violence.⁵ However, sources mentioned underreporting of sexual violence due to the stigma attached.⁶ For example, International Crisis Group reported in 2022 that it was difficult to accurately estimate the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in the Northwest and Southwest regions due to the stigma attached to sexual violence and the lack of humanitarian workers.⁷

A 2022 joint report on GBV in Cameroon stated that sexual violence was a result of the 'ongoing insecurity' in the Northwest and Southwest regions 'w[h]ere all forms of GBV are exacerbating' such as forced marriage and 'survival sex', due to the loss of livelihoods and the very hard living conditions among other reasons.⁸ International Crisis Group reported an increase of sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking of girls linked to the conflict and added

¹ R2P, Cameroon, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

² International Crisis Group, A Second Look at Cameroon's Anglophone Special Status, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

³ DW, 5 years of violent civil war in Cameroon, 10 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴ GIS, In Cameroon, centralization leads to strife, 14 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵ Cameroon, INS, and ICF, Enquête Démographique et de Santé du Cameroun 2018, February 2020, [url](#), p. 404

⁶ Cameroon Conflict Research Group, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 22; International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁷ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁸ Cameroon, UNFPA and GPC GBV AoR annual report Cameroon, 18 July 2023, [url](#), p. 6

that it had ‘made women and girls in the Anglophone regions even more vulnerable to coercion’.⁹

2. Treatment of women by separatist groups

International Crisis Group reported that women have joined the separatist movement, in some case to support the ‘separatist cause’ while in other cases they were ‘coerced or see it as a survival strategy, especially those who have fled to areas under separatist control’.¹⁰ Women were involved in carrying out activities of ‘intelligence gathering and logistics’¹¹ and acting ‘as spies or messengers’.¹² According to International Crisis Group, ‘fighters on both sides tend to view women as a source of information on the enemy or, worse, as spies’.¹³ A 2022 article on the protection of women in a conflict situation reported that many women were involved in the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions as spies either for the armed forces or for the non-state armed groups with ‘disastrous consequences’.¹⁴

The Cameroon Conflict Research Group noted that separatist fighters have been reported as responsible for sexual violence, more often on a single targeted victim than in group attacks or ‘mass rapes’.¹⁵ The source added that they did not find information on the use of ‘rape as a weapon of war’ by separatist fighters.¹⁶ However, the International Crisis Group reported that government forces and separatists used rape as a weapon of war and ‘coerce women and girls into exploitative relations that expose them to charges of espionage’.¹⁷ Both warring parties perceived women ‘as a source of information on the enemy or, worse, as spies’.¹⁸

In May 2023, more than 30 women were kidnapped by separatists in Big Babanki in the northwest of the country as they had refused to pay taxes illegally imposed by the separatists and rejected a curfew forced on them.¹⁹ The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) cited a video released by the separatists where allegedly they refer to the women as “blacklegs”, accusing them of complicity with the military in an attack against them (“amba

⁹ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 11, 13

¹¹ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹² Munge Sone, P., Protection of Women in a Conflict Situation: Lessons from the Conflict in the English Speaking Regions of Cameroon, 13 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹³ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁴ Munge Sone, P., Protection of Women in a Conflict Situation: Lessons from the Conflict in the English Speaking Regions of Cameroon, 13 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁵ Cameroon Conflict Research Group, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁶ Cameroon Conflict Research Group, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. i

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, Africa Report N. 307, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁹ CHRDA, The kidnapping and torture of women in Big Babanki of the North West Region by ‘Ambazonia’ fighters is barbaric and unacceptable, 23 May 2023, [url](#); DW, How abductions finance separatists in Cameroon, 25 May 2023, [url](#)



boys”)’ which took place the night before.²⁰ Deutsche Welle (DW) noted that, according to the founder of the Centre for Advocacy in Gender Equality and Action for Development (CAGEAD), separatists targeted women to silence them due to their traditional role in conflict resolution.²¹ Furthermore, they received threats and intimidation and separatists could perceive ‘any woman associating with the military as traitors or spies for the government’.²²

Further information on the treatment of women by separatist groups, including information on sexual and gender-based violence, in the Northwest and Southwest regions could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

²⁰ CHRDA, The kidnapping and torture of women in Big Babanki of the North West Region by ‘Ambazonia’ fighters is barbaric and unacceptable, 23 May 2023, [url](#); DW, How abductions finance separatists in Cameroon, 25 May 2023, [url](#)

²¹ DW, How abductions finance separatists in Cameroon, 25 May 2023, [url](#)

²² Munge Sone, P., Protection of Women in a Conflict Situation: Lessons from the Conflict in the English Speaking Regions of Cameroon, 13 July 2022, [url](#), p. 27

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED

ACAPS; Amnesty International (AI); Asylum Research Centre (ARC); Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); Cameroon Anglophone Crisis – Database of Atrocities; Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA); Equal Times; European Union – EUAA COI



Portal; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P); Human Rights Watch (HRW); International Center for Research on Women (ICRW); Landinfo.no; Le Monde; New Humanitarian (The); Reach Out NGO; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Women (UNWOMEN); US Department of State (USDOS) - Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons; Voice of America (VOA) News.