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World Report 2024



Cameroon

Events of 2023

A portrait of President Paul Biya is seen as soldiers prepare for a parade marking the 51st celebration of Unity day in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on May 20, 2023.

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Continued clashes between armed groups and government forces throughout Cameroon's Anglophone and Far North regions severely impacted civilians, with cases of unlawful killings, abductions, and raids on villages increasing in the second half of the year.

The violence across the two English-speaking North-West and South-West regions continued for a sixth year, despite [President Paul Biya saying](#) in January that many armed separatist groups had surrendered and that the threat they posed had been significantly [reduced](#). As of mid-year, there were [over](#) 638,000 internally displaced people across the Anglophone regions and at least 1.7 million people in need of humanitarian aid.

Armed separatists, who have violently enforced a boycott on education since 2017, continued to attack schools, students, and education professionals. Assaults on school infrastructure and staff were recorded in 2023, in keeping with a [pattern](#) of attacks on education throughout the crisis.

Civilians faced killings and abductions by armed Islamist groups in the Far North region, including by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Between January and July, at least [169 civilians](#) died in attacks by non-state actors. [Floodings and torrential rains](#) in early July

destroyed crops and further impeded humanitarian access in a region where [1.6 million](#) people are in need of assistance.

The political space remains closed, with the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (Rassemblement démocratique du peuple camerounais, RDPC), taking the majority of contested senate seats in elections held in March, further consolidating its [40 year-long](#) political hegemony over the country's political landscape. The RDPC and its allies also have a majority of 164 deputies out of 180 in the National Assembly.

Freedom of expression continues to be curtailed and independent journalists face risks. Three journalists, including a high profile investigate journalist, were killed in 2023.

Anglophone Crisis

At least 6,000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and separatist fighters since the violence started in late 2016. Civilians across the Anglophone regions continue to face abuses by [multiple actors](#) involved in the crisis, including [sexual and gender-based violence](#).

Abuses by Government Forces

State forces responded to separatist attacks with [counter-insurgency operations](#) that often failed to protect civilians, or targeted them outright. In some instances, such as that outside [Bamenda](#), North-West region, in July, victims may have been fleeing fighting when they were killed. [Abusive army raids](#) and killings of civilians may also have been perpetrated against individuals suspected of being separatists or in retaliation for attacks against army positions.

Abuses by Armed Separatists

Separatist fighters continued to target civilians, forcing people to stay at home and launching attacks around major events, including an annual [race](#), the [elections](#), and as [schools re-opened](#) in early September.

After Biya's announcement that senatorial elections would be held in March, several separatist groups [threatened](#) anyone who announced their intention to participate, and [killed](#) an election official on January 18, among several others. On February 5, [Honourine Wainachi Nentoh](#), a member of parliament of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), was abducted by armed separatists who allegedly demanded ransom in exchange for her liberation. She was [freed](#) days later.

On May 20, more than 30 women were [abducted](#) by separatists in a North-West village after protesting unlawful [taxes](#) imposed by armed groups. A government spokesperson [said](#) that some of the women had been tortured.

During the night from July 16 to 17, unidentified alleged separatists killed at least 10 civilians in Bamenda. The assailants who were wearing military uniforms reportedly [opened fire in a bar](#) after accusing locals of [failing to support](#) the separatists.

On August 11, separatists [reportedly](#) raided Kekukesim village, killing at least four civilians, including the village chairperson, and burning houses.

Separatist fighters disrupted the start of the 2023 academic year, planned for September 4, by [enforcing](#) a school [boycott](#). On September 7, days after schools reopened, at least three civilians in the South-West were [killed](#) in an assault blamed on separatists, who shot at car passengers and [set](#)

vehicles ablaze. According to the United Nations, at least 2,245 schools are not functioning in the Anglophone regions due to attacks and threats by armed separatists.

Attacks in the Far North

In the Far North region, Boko Haram and ISWAP have attacked civilians, carrying out killings, abductions, and lootings. In the past, government forces also committed serious abuses as they responded forcefully to the attacks.

Since January, 246 attacks have been reported, causing the deaths of 169 civilians. Most of these deaths were caused by attacks by Islamist groups.

Civic Space and Democracy

In November 2022, Cameroon's government and supporters held events across the country to celebrate President Biya's 40 years in power.

On March 12, senatorial elections were held. The electoral law provides that 70 senators out of 100 are to be elected by an electoral college of regional and municipal councilors, while the president nominates another 30. Although 10 political parties participated, the ruling party won all 70 seats. On March 31, President Biya then appointed 30 other senators, including 5 from the opposition, further consolidating the RDPC's grip on power.

Opposition parties claimed the elections were marred by irregularities, accusing Biya's ruling party of vote-buying. Three political parties filed a complaint with the Constitutional Council, asking for a revote or partial revote in the center of the country, alleging fraud and lack of transparency. The Council rejected the complaint on March 21.

In the days leading up to the election, the military said separatists launched an attack against army vehicles in an effort to disrupt voting in the Anglophone regions.

On May 7, leader of the opposition party, Cameroon Renaissance Movement (Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun, MRC), Maurice Kamto, held the party's first political meeting in Yaoundé, the capital, since the 2018 presidential election. The opposition group had not been allowed to hold a meeting in the capital since Biya was re-elected for a seventh term five years ago.

Opponents from the MRC arrested in 2020 after participating in peaceful protests and exercising their right to freedom of assembly remained in detention. These include the party's treasurer, Alain Fogue Tedom, and Kamto's spokesperson, Olivier Bibou Nissack.

On June 12, prominent Anglophone opponent and leader of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) John Fru Ndi died. Hundreds attended his funeral in a village 18 kilometers from Bamenda to pay tribute to Ndi, seen as a historical figure.

Freedom of Speech and Media

The year 2023 was a dark year for media freedoms in Cameroon, as several journalists were killed in unclear circumstances.

On January 22, Martinez Zogo's body was found in a suburb of Yaoundé, showing signs consistent with torture. Zogo, a prominent investigative journalist and director of a radio station, regularly exposed corruption. In the weeks before he was killed, he had reported on air about a case of alleged embezzlement involving a media outlet owned by the businessman Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga.

Belinga was [arrested](#) on February 6 and [charged](#) on [March 4](#) for complicity in kidnapping and torture on the basis of statements made by Lt. Col. Justin Danwe, a former head of operations at Cameroon's counter-espionage agency. Danwe [confessed](#) in police custody to having set up the operation to abduct Zogo and identified Belinga as the mastermind.

On February 2, [Jean-Jacques Ola Bebe](#), an Orthodox priest and radio host, was found dead in Yaoundé. Ola Bebe, who had been a vocal advocate for justice for Zogo, regularly [commented](#) on current affairs issues, including corruption, as a guest on local radio stations.

Anye Nde Nsoh, a weekly newspaper's bureau chief in Bamenda, was killed in a separatist attack on May 7. The government announced an investigation. Capo Daniel, a separatist group leader, admitted in a [video statement](#) that one of his group's fighters had killed Nde Nsoh, but that it had been a case of mistaken identity. No one has been held accountable for Nde Nsoh's killing.

On September 12, the governor of the South-West region banned *The Post* newspaper after it ran an article on the possibility of a military coup in Cameroon. The paper resumed publication on October 18.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Cameroon's [penal code](#) punishes "sexual relations between persons of the same sex" with up to five years in prison.

Cameroonian authorities [objected](#) to a [visit](#) by the French ambassador for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people, Jean-Marc Berthon, scheduled for June 27, to attend an event on gender and sexuality held by Yaoundé's French Institute. The event also sparked online hatred against sexual minorities in the country, and the planned visit was canceled.

Accountability and Justice

Hearings in the trials of three security force members accused of involvement in a [massacre](#) in Ngarbuh village, North-West region, were repeatedly postponed. Initial trial hearings are being held in a military court in Yaoundé, about 380 kilometers from the village, making it hard for victims to attend. The defendants are charged with murder, arson, destruction, and disobeying orders.

Although the beginning of the trial, following international pressure, was a positive move toward justice in Cameroon, its [slow pace](#) and irregularities in procedure have cast doubt on the government's will to ensure accountability for state forces' abuses.

Key International Actors

Journalists Zogo and Ola Bebe's death prompted strong condemnation inside and outside of Cameroon, including by the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) and the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (UNESCO), which called on the government to allow an independent effective investigation into the killings.

On January 20, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Mélanie Joly, [announced](#) that Cameroon's government and Anglophone separatists had agreed to start negotiations toward a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Although several separatist leaders committed to participating, on January 24, Cameroon's authorities publicly [disavowed](#) Canada's initiative, claiming it had not mandated a third party to facilitate any peace process. The public denial came as a surprise, as Yaoundé initially took part in Canada-led negotiations, and dashed hopes for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

