

February 21, 2017

Secretary-General António Guterres  
United Nations

**RE: Human Rights Violations in Cameroon: Anti-Anglophone Discrimination & Violence**

Dear Secretary-General Guterres:

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), I write to express our utmost concern about the troubling situation in Cameroon. Reports from the media as well as from some members of the IUAES indicate that the human rights of the country's Anglophone citizens, concentrated in the Northwest and Southwestern regions of the country, are being horrifically violated. The rights to their freedom of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association, and to freedom from discrimination based on minority status, in this case related to language, are being flagrantly abused. We implore you to use the moral and legal authority of your office's mandate to intervene in the crisis and bring it to peaceful resolution.

Discrimination against English-speaking Cameroonians has inhibited their access to education and employment as well as their participation in the country's political leadership in other than minimal, subordinate capacities. The escalation of political repression, especially targeting the leaders and supporters of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium, has resulted in abductions, arrests, imprisonment, torture, and even death. Those awaiting trial in military court have been charged with terrorism and treason for mobilizing strike actions, expressing dissent against societal discrimination and government persecution, and advocating for either secession or a return to the two-state federation that the early postcolonial leadership of the former French Cameroon unilaterally and undemocratically dismantled in 1972.

Since the November 2016 strike of English-speaking educators and lawyers, which led to an indefinite closure of all Anglophone schools and universities, the overall conditions in Western Cameroon have seriously deteriorated. This has exacerbated the social suffering that the imposition of unequal and discriminatory economic and educational development has engendered over an extended period of time. This troubling state of affairs and the legitimate grievances being expressed by critics and protesters have been supported in statements made by religious leaders from the Presbyterian Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The latter, namely the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda, sent a 14-page memorandum to President Paul Biya which presented details on the current unrest and its historical background, which dates back to the colonial era. With ample evidence supported by references cited in endnotes, they explain the manufacture of the "Anglophone problem" based on the

discriminatory treatment of English and the English-speaking population along with the forced Francophonization of the educational system. They also describe how the government has facilitated the massive migration of French-speaking administrators and workers into Anglophone areas.

Currently, access to communication circuits, such as email, and the internet, has been shut down. Journalists have been arrested and detained. According to the *Cameroon Concord*, these include the editor of the political desk of *The Sun* and reporters from *The Guardian Post* and *The Voice of the Voiceless*. Besides journalists, students and scholars are also having their voices silenced and academic freedom denied. This is unfortunate, because Cameroonian intellectuals have made significant contributions to the intellectual life of their country and to transnational networks of scholars both in Africa (e.g., the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa [CODESRIA]) and globally.

We are encouraged by the UN Special Rapporteurs who are following the situation and have called on the Government of Cameroon to desist from its human rights violations. The Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, David Kaye; Maina Kial, the Special Rapporteur for the Rights to Peaceful Assembly and Association; Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; and Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders have all urged the Government of Cameroon to cease violating its citizens' rights to freedom of expression, peaceful protest, and language rights along with related rights delineated in key human rights instruments, especially those comprising the International Bill of Rights (i.e., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with its two Optional Protocols).

We support the Special Rapporteurs' call on the Government to investigate the deployment of violence against protesters and to exercise greater restraint in policing. We agree that marginalized minorities have the right to voice their alternative perspectives to established political authorities in the interests of democracy. As the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues has recommended, we concur that the Government should implement its official policy of bilingualism, because refusing to fulfill linguistic rights will only deepen the existing tensions. The rapporteurs, the Bishops of Bamenda, and all Cameroonians seeking peaceful conflict resolution, have urged the Biya Government to exercise restraint and to engage in earnest dialogue rather than descending further into the abyss of violence.

For your information, I bring your attention to the following links, including one from the African Studies Centre at the University of Leiden, which provide further information on Anglophone Cameroon:

<http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroon-bamenda-provincial-episcopal-conference-memorandum-to-president-paul-biya-on-the-current-situation-in-278001.html>

<http://www.ascleiden.nl/news/reading-list-anglophone-crisis-and-internet-shutdown-cameroon>

<http://www.langaa-rpcig.net/+Public-Documents-on-Southern+.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13148483>

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/world/africa/a-bilingual-cameroon-teeters-after-english-speakers-protest-treatment.html?emc=eta1&\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/world/africa/a-bilingual-cameroon-teeters-after-english-speakers-protest-treatment.html?emc=eta1&_r=0)

The Executive Committee of the IUAES, an organization that has historical ties to UNESCO and whose delegates have participated in United Nations conferences, beseech you to do all that is within your authority and that of the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council to work toward remedying the current predicament in Cameroon and helping to create a social and political climate in which all of Cameroon's citizens, regardless of the language they speak or region in which they live, can enjoy full citizenship and human rights.

Sincerely,



Faye V. Harrison  
IUAES President  
Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies  
Faculty Affiliate with the Center for African Studies  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
1201 W. Nevada Street  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA

Cc:

Dr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Mr. Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders  
Ms. Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues  
Mr. David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression  
Mr. Maina Kial, the Special Rapporteur for the Rights to Peaceful Assembly and Association