

## **Briefing Note: Women Affected by Crisis in Cameroon**

Canada has a role to play in Cameroon's 'Anglophone Crisis.' With our track record of standing up against human rights abuses across the world, we cannot ignore the conditions faced by women in this conflict. Canada's focus on Women, Peace and Security, our Feminist International Agenda, and our history of supporting minority populations, including women, must be employed in Cameroon's case.

Cameroon's crisis, ongoing for more than four years, has caused mass devastation. What began as a peaceful protest by Anglophone lawyers and teachers against the government's placement of French-speaking judges and teachers in English-speaking courts and schools, has deteriorated into a violent conflict and humanitarian disaster. Government security forces are battling non-state armed separatist militias, and civilians are helplessly caught in the crossfire and increasingly the targets of these violent actors.

Atrocities include burning of entire villages, extrajudicial killings, torture, amputations, and kidnappings. Hospitals are violently targeted. Schools have been closed for four years, leading to illiterate and radicalized youth. Massacres have included civilian women and children—the Ngarbuh Massacre, in which soldiers and local herders killed 21 civilians, including 14 children and a pregnant woman; the Kumba Massacre, in which 7 pupils were killed at their desks; and the Mautu Massacre, in which soldiers killed 10 civilians, including women and a girl.

The Norwegian Refugee Council has named this conflict the world's most neglected displacement crisis for two years running. The United Nations estimates that 1.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

This severely underreported conflict has especially harmed women and girls due to the vulnerability of displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, and school boycotts enforced by separatist groups. Women have great capacity to advocate for peace in times of insecurity, but their voices are largely neglected in Cameroon today.

### **EXAMPLES OF IMPACTS ON WOMEN**

These examples of abuse faced by women and girls in the conflict are not comprehensive.

Internal Displacement: Many women and girls are living unprotected in the bush.

- Having lost their incomes, some women and girls engage in prostitution for money and basic needs.
- Soldiers have chased and beaten women for farming, accusing them of feeding separatist fighters.
- While collecting water or food, women and girls have been sexually assaulted.
- Children have been orphaned or separated from their parents; girls are vulnerable to exploitation.
- Over 60,000 are refugees in Nigeria, including women and girls; some of the girls now have babies.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: State security forces and non-state armed groups have committed rape, sexual exploitation, public humiliation, and torture against women.

- Women travelling without National ID Cards have been sexually exploited by security forces in exchange for letting them pass through checkpoints.
- In March 2020, state forces raped over 20 civilian women in Ebam ([HRW](#)).
- In August 2020, a woman in Bamenda was killed for dating a Cameroonian soldier.
- In August 2020, a woman in Muyuka was beheaded for her relations with a Cameroonian soldier.
- In October 2020, a video surfaced of a kidnapped woman made to strip and rub herself in mud for dating a Cameroonian soldier.

A June 2019 report following fact-finding interviews found that “[m]ore than 75 percent of women interviewed had experienced physical or sexual violence” (CHRNA/RWCHR, 2019:33). The impacts of rape and sexual assault include threats of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, along with

immense psychological harm and insecurity. In January 2021 alone, 318 cases of sexual violence in the Anglophone regions were reported to [UN OCHA](#), with many more going unreported.

These cases have been compounded by a culture of impunity. “In Cameroon, there is no indication of proper investigations of allegations of sexual assault or that the victims or their families have received compensation for the abuse to which these women have been subjected” (CHRDA/RWCHR, 2019: 51).

**School Closures:** In many areas of the Anglophone regions, children have been out of school for four years, due to a school boycott and general insecurity. Some non-state armed groups kidnap for ransom or otherwise harm teachers, headmasters, and children who attend school. The Cameroonian government, despite signing the Safe Schools Declaration, has not kept schools safe.

- Principal Georgiana Enanaga of GHS Mile 16 Buea, and Principal Mary Singe of GHS Bomaka, were kidnapped, in May and July 2018, respectively.
- In July 2019, a woman in Tiko was mutilated for home-schooling her children.
- With children at home for four years, mothers are additionally burdened.
- Children out of school are more prone to take up arms or be sexually abused.
- Children, including girls, have been forcibly recruited into armed groups.

## WOMEN, PEACE, SECURITY

At the same time that they face these challenges, “Women are naturally more prone to negotiate for peace than men, and in achieving this, women devise all available strategies and resources within their reach to mediate and resolve conflicts for peace to reign” (CHRDA, 2019). Right now, woman-led groups—such as REDHAC, SNWOT, and Reach Out Cameroon—are speaking out for peace and risking their lives to advocate for women in Cameroon.

## TWEETS FROM THOSE ON THE GROUND (#MyAnglophoneCrisisStory)

 **Zyh, MD** ❤️🇸🇪 @ZyhAkumawah · Oct 21, 2020

I was pregnant when the crisis started..She is 3yrs + right now and knows what gunshots sound like. She knows the part of the house to run to when they start shooting..

This is not what I wanted for her

#MyAnglophoneCrisisStory

#EndAnglophoneCrisis [twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...](https://twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...)

[Show this thread](#)

 **E! NGWA** @ernincool · Oct 22, 2020

My younger brother was kidnapped on his way back from school. His finger was chopped off even after paying ransom.

#MyAnglophoneCrisisStory

#EndAnglophoneCrisis [twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...](https://twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...)

 **Anne KEDI SIADE** ❤️ @AnneK\_Siade · Oct 22, 2020

I met a few months ago, those young IDP's. If I was to start telling one of their stories, I'll end up crying all day. Women pay a great toll to sexual violence. I remember one, raped by three military, got pregnant and gave birth to three children #MyAnglophoneCrisisStory [twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...](https://twitter.com/PoiseSocial/st...)

 **nnn-zung-eh** @Nzunghe\_ · Oct 21, 2020

My grand aunt was burned to death in her sleep at night alongside another relative.

Mom's cousin shot at close range because he was suspected to be part of the Amba boys

#MyAnglophoneCrisisStory

#EndCameroonGenocide #EndAnglophoneCrisis 🇸🇪

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- [US Senate Resolution 684 on Cameroon \(adopted January 1, 2021\)](#)
- [Policy Brief: Risk of Mass Atrocities in Cameroon \(US Holocaust Memorial Museum\)](#)
- [A Human Rights Situation Report, North West and South West Regions, Oct 2020-Feb 2021 \(CHRDA\)](#)
- [Cameroon's Unfolding Catastrophe \(Raoul Wallenberg Centre & CHRDA\)](#)
- [Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks? \(International Crisis Group\)](#)
- [Drawing a Line in the Sand \(The Globe & Mail\)](#)
- [The Crisis in Cameroon Exposes Lingering Problems in Canadian Foreign Policy \(The Globe & Mail\)](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is vital for outside actors to move from condemning atrocities to taking action.

1. **Use bilateral and multilateral diplomatic pressure** to encourage a temporary cessation of hostilities, and urge the Cameroonian government to attend the Swiss-led peace talks on offer since 2019. Canada admirably supports the talks, but the Cameroon government has so far refused to join the table.
2. **Pass a parliamentary resolution on the Anglophone Crisis.** On January 1, the US Senate passed Resolution 684, a significant bipartisan effort that called on the warring parties to end hostilities, and for the US to take action if not. We ask the Canadian Parliament to take an equivalent action, following the path of US Senate Resolution 684.
3. **Use the Magnitsky Law** to impose targeted smart sanctions against individuals implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and corruption in Cameroon. Canada's friends, namely the US, the UK, France, and the EU, have all mentioned possible sanctions.
4. **End all forms of security cooperation, as well as military and dual-use exports**, to Cameroon's defence and security forces. The US reduced military aid to Cameroon in 2019 under the Leahy Law.
5. **Increase humanitarian assistance** to local civil-society groups in Cameroon, with an emphasis on women-led groups. Additional funding for the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) in Cameroon can help local organizations access remote, vulnerable areas that international humanitarian groups cannot access.

Please heed this March 2021 news release on Cameroon from Canada's SDIR Subcommittee:

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing  
Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

Sous-comité des droits internationaux de la personne du Comité  
permanent des affaires étrangères et du développement  
international

For immediate release

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

Ottawa, March 01, 2021 -

On 16 February 2021, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Subcommittee) heard from witnesses who gave members an update on the conflict between the Government of Cameroon and the English speaking regions of the Republic of Cameroon that has been escalating since 2016.

The Subcommittee last held a meeting on this topic on 13 June 2019. Its subsequent news release shed light on a host of human rights violations in the country perpetrated by the Cameroonian government. The Subcommittee concluded that since the root causes of the crisis continue to be ignored, "there is no end to hostilities in sight."

Tragically, the situation in Cameroon has not improved. As summarized by one witness:

In the northwest and southwest regions, it is nothing short of an atrocity situation, consisting of widespread and systematic crimes against humanity against the civilian population and serious violations of international humanitarian law or the laws of war against civilians as protected persons, amounting to war crimes.

Witnesses, including an academic and people with regional experience, shared horrific stories of mass killings, forced disappearances, torture, burning and the worst forms of sexual violence. Since 2017, more than 700,000 civilians have been forcibly displaced from their homes, with over 60,000 refugees fleeing to neighbouring Nigeria.

The Subcommittee is particularly worried about the impact of this conflict on children in primarily English-speaking regions of the country. Not only are they witnessing the violence, but they are subject to it and concerns were raised that they are being recruited as child soldiers. Witnesses reported that between 800,000 and 1.1 million children have been out of school since 2017.

Witnesses lamented the fact that this is a neglected crisis. The international community cannot continue to stand idly by while atrocities in Cameroon continue unabated. The Subcommittee shares the view of witnesses that the situation needs urgent attention – with no end to the conflict in sight, Cameroon's divisions are becoming increasingly entrenched.

The Subcommittee agrees with witnesses that, as a member the Commonwealth of Nations and the Francophonie alongside Cameroon, Canada could play a stronger role in helping to end this crisis. As such, the Subcommittee shares the view that the Government of Canada should rally allies through multilateral organizations to call for an immediate ceasefire and end to hostilities. It should mount an international campaign pressuring the Government of Cameroon to allow the establishment of an independent fact-finding commission of inquiry to investigate the conflict, including the atrocities and its root causes. The Government of Canada should also consider, alongside international allies, sanctioning those responsible for atrocities and severe human rights violations through the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law).