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## **United Nations Human Rights Council**

**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON ADEQUATE HOUSING AS A COMPONENT OF THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING, AND ON THE RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION IN THIS CONTEXT**

## **Call for input: Protecting the right to adequate housing during and after violent conflict – the situation in the Anglophone part of Cameroon**

Submitted by Franciscans International

*(General Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC)*

**Geneva, 03 May 2022**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Submitting organization
2. Franciscans International (FI) presents this submission concerning the situation of the right to adequate housing of the anglophone minority in Cameroon in the context of an internal armed conflict, the “anglophone crisis”, that began in 2017.
3. Franciscans International is a faith-based International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) in General Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was founded in 1982 to bring the concerns of the most vulnerable to the United Nations. FI relies on the expertise and first-hand information of Franciscans and other partners working at the local level around the world to advocate at the United Nations for structural changes addressing the root causes of social and environmental injustice.
4. The anglophone crisis: general context
5. FI wishes to draw the Special Rapporteur’s attention to the systematic violation of the right to adequate housing perpetrated against the English-speaking minority by the predominantly French-speaking national authorities as well as by separatists armed groups in Cameroon. The English-speaking community, who represents approximatively 20 per cent of the population,[[1]](#footnote-2) has been historically marginalized and discriminated against.
6. The current crisis started between 2016 and 2017 when English-speaking lawyers, students and teachers began protesting against their under-representation and the *de facto* progressive imposition of the French language in courtrooms, schools, and other administrations by the Francophone government. The latter responded by sending its security forces and by violently repressing the protests, which resulted in arbitrary arrests, and the killing of civilians. The political crisis in Cameroon has deepened since October 2017 when Anglophone separatists proclaimed independence, declaring a new state of “*Ambazonia*”.
7. Since 2017, the military have committed violations including violent repression of protests, widespread destruction of property especially burning down of houses, clinics and schools, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual assault, rape, and extrajudicial executions.[[2]](#footnote-3) On the other side, secessionists have committed abuses such as arson, looting, kidnappings, killings, and violence against civilians through coercion.2 As of today, more than 4’000 civilians have reportedly been killed[[3]](#footnote-4) as a result of the ongoing armed conflict.[[4]](#footnote-5)

**SYSTEMATIC VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO HOUSING SINCE THE START OF THE CRISIS**

1. State military forces and separatists are both responsible for massive destructions of homes[[5]](#footnote-6) since the beginning of the crisis, which has triggered severe internal displacements. These destructions have caused widespread panic forcing many civilians to relocate in French-speaking regions or to migrate to neighboring Nigeria. Attacks on more than 230 villages caused mass exodus with 573’000 civilians internally displaced and 72,000 having fled from the conflict areas to neighboring Nigeria and other countries.[[6]](#footnote-7) Our partners based in the North-West region observed that the damages to material property have reached millions of Francs CFA as of March 2022.
2. The destruction of homes that affects English-speaking Cameroonians violates the right to an adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living (ICESCR article 11). In its concluding observations from 25 March 2019, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was already concerned about “*the negative impact of this situation on the affected persons’ enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights (arts. 2 and 11)*” and recommended to Cameroon to “*provide effective protection to displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers so that they have access to adequate housing…*”.[[7]](#footnote-8)
3. Our partners based in the North-West region have documented human rights violations during several fact-finding missions and inquiries in the North-West region of Cameroon between January 2018 and January 2022. A total of 154 cases of human rights violations were reported. It included violations of the right to life, the right to housing, the right to freedom of movement, the right to security and protection as well as unlawful arrests and detentions. Of the 154 cases of human rights violations reported, 32 could be identified as violations of the right to housing committed by both the State military forces (25 out of 32) and the separatist forces (7 out of 32) taking the form of arson, looting and destruction of property. This represents 20% of the violations reported over the period.
4. Property destructions by the State military forces often follow the same patterns as the one in the attack from 1 April 2020, where State forces burned five homes in Kimar-Bui. They looted the houses first and then they set them on fire. On 1 December 2020, a very similar scenario happened in Kishong where the State military forces broke into four houses and looted them. This illustrates how government forces do not protect nor respect the civilian right to housing of the population in the anglophone regions.
5. On 10 January 2021, Human Rights Watch reported that Mautu Village was raided by Cameroonian forces. The State military forces acknowledged the raid but did not recognize how it damaged homes and injured and killed civilians.[[8]](#footnote-9) This has caused many villagers to leave after the attack.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Take all necessary measures to ensure that internally displaced persons are able to return to their home regions safely or ensure them appropriate and sustainable alternatives.**
2. **Investigate all cases of home destruction and prosecute those responsible for the destruction of the possessions of anglophone Cameroonians.**

1. GLOBAL CENTER FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT, *Cameroon Populations at Risk,* 1 March 2022 available at: <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/cameroon/> (Last accessed on 3 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Report 2017/18 The State of the World’s Human Rights*. 2018. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/POL1067002018ENGLISH.pdf> Also see: Amnesty International, *Cameroon: New Abuses by Both Sides*. 2 August 2021. Available at:[*https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/02/cameroon-new-abuses-both-sides*](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/02/cameroon-new-abuses-both-sides)*.* (Last accessed 2 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Report 2022: Cameroon*. 2022. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon>. (Last accessed 2 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See AL JAZEERA, *Violence in Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis takes high civilian toll.* 1 April 2021. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/1/violence-in-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-takes-high-civilian-toll>. (Last accessed 2 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, Cameroon: *Soldiers on Rampage in North-West Region*. 3 February 2022. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/03/cameroon-soldiers-rampage-north-west-region>. (Last accessed 2 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue n°29, January 2022. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cameroon_humanitarian_bulletin_janvier_vf.pdf>, (Last accessed on 3 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, *Concluding observations on the fouth periodic report of Cameroon,* 25 March 2019, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/ec12cmrco4-concluding-observations-fourth-periodic-report> (Last accessed on 3 May 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Cameroon: Nine filled in Army attack,* 4 February 2021, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/04/cameroon-nine-killed-army-attack> (Last accessed on 16 March 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)