

ALERT



CAMEROON

“This crisis has had a heavy toll on us all, but especially on women and children, and I think it is high time we learn to talk to each other for the sake of humanity. Those involved in this pointless war must put their egos aside and engage in genuine talks.”

—Esther Oman, local civil society leader

THE CRISIS IN CAMEROON BEGAN IN THE END OF 2016 WHEN ENGLISH-SPEAKING

(Anglophone) citizens in the country’s Northwest and Southwest regions protested discriminatory policies by the French-speaking (Francophone) government. The central government responded to these protests with violent repression. By January 2017, several Anglophone separatist groups took up arms to fight for independence for the territory they refer to as Southern Cameroon or Ambazonia.

The cultural and linguistic divide between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians began during colonial times, when Cameroon was divided between French and British control. Since the two regions were combined in 1961, Anglophone separatist groups have expressed distrust of the central government and called for independence. Since the protests in 2016, the situation has devolved into a violent crisis. As of August 2021, more than 4,000 civilians have been killed by separatist or government forces and more than 712,000 people have been internally displaced.

The conflict has involved frequent attacks on schools, which are perceived as the battleground for the cultural future of Cameroon. Separatist groups have attacked civilians they view as supporting the government, and have kidnapped and attacked children, teachers, and school administrators. An entire generation is losing access to education as a result. Government security forces have been accused of arbitrary detention, torture, and killings. Crimes of sexual violence are reportedly widespread. **Experts have asserted that attacks by both government security forces and Anglophone separatists may amount to crimes against humanity.**

The crisis appears to be at a stalemate. The government of Cameroon has been hesitant to participate in mediation efforts and appears committed to a military victory. Anglophone separatists are not united and the

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fractured groups have different perspectives on the usefulness of mediation. Until a solution to this conflict is reached, civilians will remain at serious risk of mass atrocities.

The Museum's **Simon-Skjodt Center** is deeply concerned by this situation and calls for increased international action.

Specifically, governments around the world should:

- Encourage all parties in the conflict to cease their attacks on civilians and come to the negotiation table and reach a mediated agreement.
- Support justice and accountability initiatives that seek to document and deter mass atrocities.
- Condemn the targeting of children and schools and support efforts to increase access to education throughout affected areas.
- Protect those fleeing violence in Cameroon.

LEARN MORE AT ushmm.org/cameroon

Previous page: Cameroonian army soldiers secure the perimeter of a polling station in Lysoka, near Buea, Southwestern Cameroon, on October 7, 2018, during the presidential election. *Marco Longari/AFP via Getty Images*



WHAT YOU DO MATTERS. We can all play a role in helping prevent genocide. Action takes many forms, and every action counts. You can:

Stay informed. Follow the news; visit our website to learn more about places at risk of genocide and other violence, ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries

Join the Museum community. Sign up to receive email updates and follow us on Twitter @CPG_USHMM and Facebook @CenterForThePreventionOfGenocide

Engage with your community. Spread the word about what you've learned with friends, family, and colleagues

Support education and relief efforts. Find out more about humanitarian organizations, what they are doing in response to mass atrocities, and how you can help

Contact the media. Tell television, radio, newspaper, and online journalists that you want better coverage of places at risk of genocide and other violence; visit their websites, tag them on social media, call them, and send emails that provide feedback on their coverage

Contact your elected representatives. Alert them to the need to provide humanitarian assistance, protect civilians, stop the violence, and promote solutions to crises

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