



COI QUERY

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Title	Treatment of civilians affiliated with members of the self-declared Ambazonian armed groups and treatment and situation of women in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon
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Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Treatment of civilians affiliated with members of the self-declared Ambazonian armed groups, including their relatives, by the state.Situation of women and their treatment by the state in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.
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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Treatment of civilians affiliated with members of the self-declared Ambazonian armed groups and treatment and situation of women in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Brief background information

On 1 October 2017, separatist groups located in the South-West and North-West Region, English speaking regions, proclaimed self- independence from Cameroon declaring the Republic of Ambazonia.¹ In 2019, the Cameroon’s government granted a Special Status to Anglophone regions, which did not appease the separatist claims.² According to sources, the separatist movement was not organised in a single unified group but there were several groups without solid structure.³

1. Treatment of civilians affiliated with members of the self-declared Ambazonian armed groups, including their relatives, by the state

Anglophone population in Cameroon suffered widespread discrimination according to Freedom House.⁴ The Anglophone population was also target of attacks based on cultural identity.⁵ Individuals who were suspected of supporting the separatist cause⁶ were subjected to ‘arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment’.⁷ Amnesty International (AI) reported in 2023, that the Army and Mbororo Fulani militias perpetrated attacks against communities ‘said to support or tolerate the armed separatists’.⁸

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that ‘security forces responded to separatist attacks with a heavy hand, often targeting civilians across the Anglophone regions’.⁹ In a report published in July 2023, Amnesty International (AI) reported that ‘the Cameroonian defence and security forces have been responsible for numerous human rights violations, including unlawful killings, rapes, tortures, destructions, arbitrary detentions’.¹⁰ According to sources, in some cases Cameroon authorities had denied their responsibility although at a later stage, the army

¹ R2P, Cameroon, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

² International Crisis Group, A Second Look at Cameroon’s Anglophone Special Status, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

³ R2P, Cameroon, 31 May 2023, [url](#); Afrique XXI, Au Cameroun, une guerre qui ne dit pas son nom, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, March 2023, [url](#)

⁵ R2P, Cameroon, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶ AI, Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p. 42

⁷ R2P, Atrocity Alert No. 320: Ethiopia, Cameroon and Myanmar (Burma), 5 October 2022, [url](#)

⁸ AI, With or against us: the population caught between the army, armed separatists and militias in north-west Cameroon, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p.16

⁹ HRW, World Report 2023 – Cameroon, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ AI, With or against us: the population caught between the army, armed separatists and militias in north-west Cameroon, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p.35



recognised its responsibility in incidents where civilians in the North-West region were killed.¹¹ In some cases, the government first blamed separatists for the attacks and later recognised its responsibility.¹² Cameroon government communicated the opening of investigations into some of the actions carried out by armed forces although the lack of transparency in information related to the enquiries raised impunity concerns.¹³

The Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford reported in June 2023 that the detention of family members of alleged separatist fighters, specifically wives, had become 'a worrying trend': 'the alleged "crime" accused of these family members is that of being related to a suspect, which has no basis in law'.¹⁴ Children were assumed as members of separatist groups and were subject to 'arbitrary arrests and detainment' when not attending school, in particular in the North-West region, according to the information collected by ACAPS in an interview with an informant.¹⁵

Within the time and sources available to complete this query response, some cases regarding relatives accused and detained on the grounds of alleged links to separatists were found and mentioned below.

The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) reported the case of Kongnso Antoinette Gohla, who was arbitrarily detained for 16 months, from October 2021 until February 2023, during which she was tortured and harassed on the grounds of her alleged links to separatist fighters, she 'was accused of failure to report terrorism'.¹⁶ Mimi Mefo Info, an online media based in the UK, Germany and Cameroon reporting news about Cameroon, published in August 2021, that the relatives of the separatist fighter 'General No Pity' were arrested by security forces.¹⁷ His brother and cousin were released on the same month, and his mother and uncle remained in custody as of the end of 2022.¹⁸ The Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford reported in June 2023 that the Rapid Intervention Battalion [BIR] soldiers arrested a woman for being the wife of a separatist general.¹⁹

For more information on political prisoners and prison escapes, it is possible to consult the [EUA Query Response, Cameroon, Political prisoners and prison escapees completed, 22 February 2022](#)

¹¹ HRW, Cameroon: Military Killings Inquiry a Positive Step, 8 July 2022, [url](#); Maxwell Bone, R., Cameroon's Forgotten Civil War Is Getting Worse, FP, 2 December 2021, [url](#)

¹² Maxwell Bone, R., Cameroon's Forgotten Civil War Is Getting Worse, FP 2 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³ AI, With or against us: the population caught between the army, armed separatists and militias in north-west Cameroon, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p.61; Afrique XXI, Au Cameroun, une guerre qui ne dit pas son nom, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴ University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23 - From January 2021 to April 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁵ ACAPS, Cameroon - The education crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions, 19 February 2021, [url](#), p.7

¹⁶ CHRDA, CHRDA welcomes the release of Kongnso Antoinette Gohla and calls on the Cameroon government to release other victims of human rights violations and hold the perpetrators accountable, 18 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Mimi Mefo Info, Ambazonian 'General' No Pity Promises "Havoc" After Soldiers Arrest Family, 3 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸ USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁹ University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23 - From January 2021 to April 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 11



The report on Human Rights practices published by the US Department of State (USDOS) covering 2022 states that Cameroon authorities obstructed the right to fair trial and access to defence of individuals who have been charged as alleged accomplices of separatists.²⁰ AI noted the existence of ‘gross irregularities’ in proceedings against alleged separatists.²¹ Charges of terrorism have been raised by the government to incriminate separatist supporters²² and both anti-terrorism law and counter-terrorism measures have been increasingly used in response to the conflict in the Anglophone region.²³

2. Situation of women and their treatment by the state in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) described Cameroon as a patriarchal society with ‘institutional gender inequality, discrimination and social exclusion’.²⁴

Since 2016, when a series of protests initiated by lawyers, students and teachers asking for ‘two-state federation that would protect the Anglophone legal and educational systems from being subsumed by their Francophone counterparts’,²⁵ the conflict between armed separatist groups and the Cameroonian government had a ‘profound and often devastating impact’ on women from the Anglophone regions.²⁶ Sources mentioned gender-based violence (GBV), displacement, and dispossession, understood as land or property grabbing, as major issues in the Northwest and Southwest regions.²⁷

UN OCHA indicated that 8,668 GBV cases were reported between January and October 2022 of which ‘about 90 per cent of the survivors are females’. Those cases related to emotional abuse, denial of resources/opportunities, physical assault, sexual assault, rape and forced marriages.²⁸

General strikes, lockdowns and curfews imposed by Anglophone civil society leaders to protest the imposition of Francophone practices in the regions increased the risk of

²⁰ USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 13-14

²¹ AI, With or against us: the population caught between the army, armed separatists and militias in north-west Cameroon, 4 July 2023, [url](#), p.41

²² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, March 2023, [url](#); AI, Cameroon: More than a hundred detainees from Anglophone regions and opposition party languishing in jail for speaking out, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

²³ University of Oxford, Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23 - From January 2021 to April 2023, 15 June 2023, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴ UN OCHA, Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, March 2023, [url](#), p. 65

²⁵ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p.i

²⁷ CCID, The Impact of the Anglophone Crisis on Gender Equality in Cameroon, Journal of International Women's Studies, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; UN OCHA, Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 66-67; International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, 23 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-23

²⁸ UN OCHA, Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, March 2023, [url](#), p. 66



domestic or sexual violence and restricted or denied access to medical care and life-saving services.²⁹ The study published in June 2023 by the Community Centre for Integrated Development (CCID), a non-profit organisation based in the South West Region of Cameroon, on the impact of the Anglophone crisis on gender equality in Cameroon showed a direct relationship between the increase of violence in society and cases of rape occurring more regularly.³⁰ Fighters on both sides, separatists and government forces, often consider women as spies or as a source of information and use rape ‘as a tool to punish and hurt communities.’ However, given the stigmatisation of rape many victims do not report incidents.³¹

Physical assault is often committed by both parties when women are relatives or related with boys and men who are members of armed groups.³² UN OCHA stated that ‘wives of separatist fighters have been arrested and tortured, while separatist groups have tortured girls for dating men from the Government forces. Emotional violence also takes the form of harassing women for allowing their sons to join NSAGs [non-State armed groups]’.³³

The International Crisis Group considered displacement as the ‘most significant impact of the conflict on women’. 60 % of Cameroonians displaced by the Anglophone conflict are women and children ‘living at risk of abuse’ since the government has rejected several UN and NGOs requests for the establishment of IDP camps.³⁴

Sources reported that women were subjected to sexual abuse and harassment at checkpoints ‘by armed men’.³⁵ In its 2022 report on human rights practices, USDOS mentioned that unaccompanied women were frequently harassed when travelling alone.³⁶

USDOS reported that ‘government security forces engaged in commercial sex with women in the Southwest Region divisions of Ndian, Buea, Ekona, and Muyuka, using food insecurity and their authority as leverage’.³⁷

Concerning single women in Cameroon, information on their situation in the Northwest and Southwest of Cameroon was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this response. However, the following information may be relevant.

²⁹ International Crisis Group, *Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict*, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 21; UN OCHA, *Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 66

³⁰ CCID, *The Impact of the Anglophone Crisis on Gender Equality in Cameroon*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, June 2023, [url](#), p. 8

³¹ International Crisis Group, *Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict*, 23 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 21-22

³² UN OCHA, *Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 58

³³ UN OCHA, *Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023*, March 2023, [url](#), p. 58

³⁴ International Crisis Group, *Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict*, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19

³⁵ International Crisis Group, *Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict*, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22; CCID, *The Impact of the Anglophone Crisis on Gender Equality in Cameroon*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9

³⁶ USDOS, *2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon*, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 28.

³⁷ USDOS, *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cameroon*, 15 June 2023, [url](#)



A local NGO interviewed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) described the situation and treatment of single women under different aspects of life, such as housing, income, education, health care, and support services. According to this source, being a single mother was ‘culturally and socially humiliating’, especially for teenagers and unmarried heads of household. The same source explained that one of the main challenges for single women in relocating to another city in Cameroon was finding a place to stay while looking for a job and ‘some have reported sleeping on the streets’. Furthermore, property owners were reluctant to rent houses to single women because they doubted their economic stability. The Cameroonian government offered no support for relocation and women had to rely on families, acquaintances or NGOs. The COVID-19 pandemic was also a negative impact on the economic and psychological status of single women, as many lost their jobs or their income was reduced.³⁸ The International Crisis Group explained that ‘single, divorced or widowed, have low social status’. For instance, they ‘face significant traditional and administrative barriers to economic independence’ with limited access to the job market, land property and capital.³⁹ Fair Planet, an NGO researching on human rights and environmental justice, reported that in Cameroon, including in the North-West region, women’s land ownership ‘remains taboo’ as customary laws ‘greatly restrict’ their right to own a property.⁴⁰

For more information on the situation of women in Yaoundé and Douala, it is possible to consult the [EUAA COI Query Response, Cameroon, Situation of Single Women in Yaoundé and Douala, 26 January 2022](#)

³⁸ Canada, IRB, Cameroon: Situation and treatment of single women and women who head their own households, including their ability to live on their own and access housing, income, education, health care, and support services, particularly in Douala and Yaoundé; impact of COVID-19 (2020–May 2022), 8 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ International Crisis Group, Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁰ Fair Planet, Cameroon: Women’s Land Rights Remain in Limbo, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

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