

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 684

Calling on the Government of Cameroon and separatist armed groups from the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions to end all violence, respect the human rights of all Cameroonians, and pursue a genuinely inclusive dialogue toward resolving the ongoing civil conflict in Anglophone Cameroon.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

Mr. RISCH (for himself, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. YOUNG, Mr. LANKFORD, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. COONS, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. KAINE) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Calling on the Government of Cameroon and separatist armed groups from the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions to end all violence, respect the human rights of all Cameroonians, and pursue a genuinely inclusive dialogue toward resolving the ongoing civil conflict in Anglophone Cameroon.

Whereas Cameroon is beset with multiple security challenges, including a Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North region, cross-border conflict and criminality by Central African militia groups to the east, and a civil war involving

the Government of Cameroon and Anglophone separatist armed groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions;

Whereas the official actions and policies of the Francophone-dominated Government of Cameroon have repressed English-speaking Cameroonians politically and economically throughout the history of Cameroon, dating back to the reunification of British-administered Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun under a federal system in October 1961;

Whereas Paul Biya, the oldest head of state in Africa, has been the President of Cameroon since 1982, maintaining his grip on power by centralizing authority in the executive, undermining the Constitution of Cameroon, impeding democratic governance through corrupt practices, using security services to repress the opposition, and conducting elections marred by widespread irregularities and allegations of fraud;

Whereas key decentralization reforms enacted in the Constitution of Cameroon in 1996, which mandated the establishment of a decentralized unitary state, “equality of all citizens before the law”, the equal status of French and English as official languages, and the establishment of local authorities with “administrative and financial autonomy”, remain largely unrealized, though an enabling law was adopted in December 2019;

Whereas, throughout his tenure, President Biya has spent extended periods in Europe, pursued government policies exclusively benefitting the Francophone majority in Cameroon, and crippled many parastatals and private enterprises in the Northwest and Southwest regions, further marginalizing English-speaking Cameroonians;

Whereas, in October 2016, English-speaking lawyers, students, and teachers in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon took to the streets to peacefully protest marginalization of English-speaking Cameroonians by the Government of Cameroon in the legal and education systems, as exemplified by the appointment of French-speaking judges and teachers in the Northwest and Southwest regions and the publishing of important legislation solely in the French language;

Whereas those peaceful protests by English-speaking lawyers, students, and teachers were met with excessive force by the police and gendarmerie of Cameroon, which led to gross human rights violations, the arrest of lawyers, teachers, and Anglophone civic leaders, and their detention in the notorious Kondengui prison in Yaoundé;

Whereas, amid broader protests across the Northwest and Southwest regions demanding greater autonomy from the central government of Cameroon, on October 1, 2017, the 56th anniversary of the end of British trusteeship over Southern Cameroons, the Anglophone crisis escalated as separatist armed groups declared independence from Cameroon;

Whereas, in late 2017, Anglophone separatist armed groups escalated attacks, targeting government officials and facilities as well as civilians and traditional leaders seen as sympathetic to the Government of Cameroon and brutally enforcing “ghost town operations” (general strikes) and school boycotts in the Northwest and Southwest regions;

Whereas lengthy government-imposed shutdowns of the internet and social media in the Northwest and Southwest regions, totaling 240 days between 2017 and 2018, had a devastating impact on the economies and educational in-

stitutions in the regions, undermined freedom of expression, prevented the free flow of information related to the conflict, and restricted the ability of local communities to interact and communicate;

Whereas the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon has caused considerable instability and human suffering, with more than 3,000 deaths linked to the conflict, and according to United Nations agencies, approximately 3,000,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance, approximately 60,000 Cameroonian refugees have fled to Nigeria, and approximately 700,000 persons are internally displaced;

Whereas the Department of State 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Cameroon cited “significant” human rights abuses by security forces and separatist armed groups in Cameroon, including unlawful or arbitrary killings, forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, repression of fundamental rights, and violence against women and children;

Whereas the United Nations Children’s Fund estimates that more than 855,000 children are out of school due to the conflict, and the Department of State added Cameroon to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act List in the 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report as a foreign government “identified during the previous year as having governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces, or government-supported armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers”;

Whereas United States citizen Charles Wesco was shot and killed near the town of Bamenda, Cameroon, on October 30, 2018, and, in November 2018, the Department of State stated, “In memory of American missionary

Charles Wesco and all others who have lost their lives in the Anglophone Crisis, we urge all sides to end the violence and enter into broad-based reconciliatory dialogue without preconditions.”;

Whereas, in June 2019, the Government of Switzerland announced that, together with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, it was facilitating a dialogue between the Government of Cameroon and armed opposition groups to support a resolution of the Anglophone crisis;

Whereas, in September 2019, President Biya hastily announced a Major National Dialogue, chaired by Prime Minister Ngute from September 30 to October 4, 2019, in Yaoundé, “to examine the ways and means to respond to the deeply-held aspirations of the populations in the Northwest and Southwest”;

Whereas, though the Major National Dialogue led to some concessions by the Government of Cameroon on broader democratization issues, including the release of some political prisoners, including the leader of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, Maurice Kamto, and some of his associates after nine months of detention, attempts at conflict resolution have failed to bring all parties to the table, as high levels of deaths, brutality, and suffering continue;

Whereas national and international outrage followed the massacre of at least 23 people, including 15 children and 2 pregnant women, by government security forces and allied militia on February 14, 2020, in Ngarbuh, Donga Mantung division, in the Northwest region, and a commission of inquiry established by Cameroonian authorities ultimately led to the arrest and charging of 3 soldiers for murder;

Whereas, on June 5, 2020, amidst increasing concern over attacks on freedom of the press and detention of journalists on politically motivated charges in recent years, Cameroon authorities confirmed that an Anglophone journalist covering the conflict, Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe, known as Wazizi, who was arrested in August 2019 and transferred to a military facility, died in custody shortly after his arrest, an acknowledgment that led to widespread condemnation and calls for an independent inquiry;

Whereas the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) of the Government of Cameroon, which has been accused of torture and extrajudicial killings and implicated in massacres like that of February 14, 2020, has received training and support from the United States, potentially in contravention of legal requirements that “no assistance shall be furnished . . . to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights”;

Whereas, in February 2019, the Department of State announced that it would withhold some security assistance to Cameroon, including equipment and training, citing credible allegations of human rights violations by state security forces and a lack of investigation, accountability, and transparency by the Government of Cameroon in response;

Whereas, on December 26, 2019, the United States terminated the designation of Cameroon as a beneficiary under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (19 U.S.C. 3701 et seq.) because “the Government of Cameroon cur-

rently engages in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights”;

Whereas a European Parliament resolution, passed on April 18, 2019, urged inclusive political dialogue to resolve the Anglophone crisis, called for the conflict to be considered by the United Nations Security Council, and urged the European Union to “use the political leverage provided by development aid and other bilateral programmes to enhance the defense of human rights in Cameroon”;

Whereas France maintains considerable interests in Cameroon, including significant economic and security cooperation, but has not adequately used its influence to stem atrocities committed in the Anglophone regions or support stronger international action to seek resolution to the conflict;

Whereas the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Cameroon stated on January 24, 2019, that “Cameroon can no longer be a forgotten crisis; it needs to be high on our agenda”, and, on June 22, 2020, a group of former world leaders and 5 Nobel Peace Laureates called on the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations Secretary-General, the African Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, and La Francophonie to “ensure that Cameroon’s Anglophone conflict is on the agenda of the forthcoming UN Security Council meeting and all UNOCA sessions before the UNSC”;

Whereas, on May 13, 2019, an Arria-formula meeting on the humanitarian crisis in Cameroon was held for the United Nations Security Council, but a formal meeting on the situation in Cameroon has not yet been placed on the United Nations Security Council agenda;

Whereas, on July 1, 2020, in Resolution 2532 (2020), the United Nations Security Council unanimously underlined its support of the appeal of the United Nations Secretary-General for a global ceasefire in all conflicts as the world battles the COVID–19 pandemic; and

Whereas there is a significant Cameroonian diaspora in the United States, and Cameroon is a longstanding security partner and aid recipient of the United States, participating in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) led by the Department of State and in United States-supported efforts to counter Boko Haram and the Islamic State–West Africa, both of which have mounted terrorist operations in the Far North region of Cameroon since 2014: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) strongly condemns abuses committed by
3 state security forces and armed groups in the North-
4 west and Southwest regions of Cameroon, including
5 extrajudicial killings and detentions, the use of force
6 against civilians and nonviolent protestors, torture,
7 rape, kidnappings, and other forms of violence
8 against women, and violations of the freedoms of
9 press, expression, and assembly;

10 (2) urges all parties to the Anglophone conflict
11 in Cameroon, including political opposition groups,
12 to—

13 (A) conclude and uphold an immediate
14 ceasefire;

1 (B) guarantee unfettered humanitarian ac-
2 cess and assistance to the Northwest and
3 Southwest regions;

4 (C) exercise restraint and ensure that po-
5 litical protests are peaceful; and

6 (D) establish a credible process for an in-
7 clusive dialogue that includes all relevant stake-
8 holders, including from civil society, to achieve
9 a sustainable political solution that respects the
10 rights and freedoms of all of the people of Cam-
11 eroon;

12 (3) affirms that the United States Government
13 continues to hold the Government of Cameroon re-
14 sponsible for safeguarding the safety, security, and
15 constitutional rights of all citizens, regardless of
16 their region of origin or the regions in which they
17 reside, or their religious beliefs or political views;

18 (4) urges the Government of Cameroon to—

19 (A) initiate a credible, inclusive, good-faith
20 effort to end the armed conflict in the North-
21 west and Southwest regions of Cameroon by ad-
22 dressing the root causes of the crisis and griev-
23 ances and seeking nonviolent solutions to re-
24 solve the conflict, including possibly involving
25 an independent mediator in negotiations;

1 (B) follow through on initiatives developed
2 to address the grievances that sparked the con-
3 flict, including the National Commission for the
4 Promotion of Bilingualism and
5 Multiculturalism, the Ministry of Decentraliza-
6 tion and Local Development, and the National
7 Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegra-
8 tion Committee;

9 (C) fully implement recommendations of
10 the Major National Dialogue held in late 2019;

11 (D) respect the rule of law and the con-
12 stitutional rights of all Cameroonians, including
13 members of the political opposition, civil society
14 activists, and journalists;

15 (E) allow for credible, independent, and
16 transparent investigations of all allegations of
17 human rights abuses committed in the North-
18 west and Southwest regions;

19 (F) release all political prisoners and jour-
20 nalists currently detained and immediately stop
21 all arbitrary detention, torture, forced dis-
22 appearances, deaths in custody, and inhumane
23 prison conditions; and

24 (G) work with United States law enforce-
25 ment to thoroughly investigate and prosecute

1 those responsible for the murder of Charles
2 Wesco;

3 (5) urges the Anglophone armed separatist
4 groups to—

5 (A) engage peacefully with government of-
6 ficials to express grievances and engage in non-
7 violent efforts to resolve the conflict, including
8 participation in a credible and inclusive dia-
9 logue, possibly involving an independent medi-
10 ator;

11 (B) immediately cease human rights
12 abuses, including killings of civilians, torture,
13 kidnapping, and extortion;

14 (C) immediately end the school boycott in
15 the Northwest and Southwest regions and at-
16 tacks on schools, teachers, and education offi-
17 cials, and allow for the safe return of all stu-
18 dents to class; and

19 (D) immediately release all kidnapped and
20 detained civilians;

21 (6) urges the Department of State, Department
22 of the Treasury, and United States Agency for
23 International Development, in coordination with
24 other relevant Federal departments and agencies,
25 to—

1 (A) consider imposing targeted sanctions
2 on individual government and separatist leaders
3 “responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture,
4 or other gross violations of internationally rec-
5 ognized human rights”;

6 (B) press the Government of Cameroon to
7 provide unfettered humanitarian access to vul-
8 nerable populations in the Northwest and
9 Southwest regions of Cameroon;

10 (C) support credible efforts to address the
11 root causes of the conflict and to achieve sus-
12 tainable peace and reconciliation and efforts to
13 aid the economic recovery of and fight
14 coronavirus in the Northwest and Southwest re-
15 gions;

16 (D) support humanitarian and develop-
17 ment programming, including to meet imme-
18 diate needs, advance nonviolent conflict resolu-
19 tion and reconciliation, promote economic recov-
20 ery and development, support primary and sec-
21 ondary education, and strengthen democratic
22 processes, including political decentralization,
23 enshrined as a fundamental principle of state
24 governance in the Constitution of Cameroon;

1 (E) continue to limit security assistance to
2 Cameroon and ensure that United States train-
3 ing and equipment is not being used to facili-
4 tate human rights abuses in the Northwest and
5 Southwest regions;

6 (F) prioritize efforts to help develop and
7 sustain effective, professional civilian oversight
8 of law enforcement and security services in
9 Cameroon to ensure they are held accountable
10 for abuses; and

11 (G) engage in an ongoing effort to ensure
12 that the crisis in the Anglophone regions is dis-
13 cussed in international fora, including the
14 United Nations Security Council, that focus on
15 urgent international diplomatic engagement and
16 response; and

17 (7) urges members of the international commu-
18 nity to—

19 (A) join in a strategic collective effort to
20 pressure the Government of Cameroon and sep-
21 aratist armed groups, including through the use
22 of available diplomatic and punitive tools, to im-
23 mediately conclude and uphold a ceasefire, par-
24 ticipate in an inclusive and meaningful dialogue
25 to address the root causes of the conflict and

1 pending grievances, and seek nonviolent solu-
2 tions to the conflict, including by possibly in-
3 volving an independent and credible mediator;

4 (B) mobilize and coordinate funding for
5 local and international organizations to provide
6 humanitarian and development assistance, in-
7 cluding to fight coronavirus, to communities af-
8 fected by the crisis in the Northwest and South-
9 west regions of Cameroon;

10 (C) leverage bilateral relationships to en-
11 courage key partners of Cameroon, particularly
12 France, to help foster a peaceful resolution to
13 the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest re-
14 gions of Cameroon and implement a mutually
15 agreed-upon program to address longstanding
16 grievances and marginalization; and

17 (D) use regional and international fora, in-
18 cluding the African Union, the Economic Com-
19 munity of Central African States, and the
20 United Nations Security Council to discuss the
21 ongoing crisis in the Northwest and Southwest
22 regions of Cameroon and push for a cessation
23 of violence, an expedient resolution, the imple-
24 mentation of a mutually agreed-upon program
25 for addressing the root causes and pending

1 grievances, and the investigation and prosecu-
2 tion of human rights abuses and crimes com-
3 mitted against civilians.

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