



COALITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY-HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS FOR PEACE IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGIONS AND OTHER AFFECTED REGIONS

STATEMENT N°08/2024

PROTECTING EDUCATION, PROMOTING PEACE ; SCHOOL IS NOT A WEAPON OF WAR. CHILDREN MUST GO TO SCHOOL IN THE NOSO

The **Coalition of Civil Society-Human Rights organizations for Peace in the Anglophone Regions, and other affected Regions** (The Coalition), wishes to bring to:

THE ATTENTION OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY THE FOLLOWING FACTS:

1. That since the ongoing armed conflict in Anglophone regions of Cameroon escalated early 2017, thousands of children dropped out of School either due to high rate of insecurity, calls for boycott of School, systematic threats from Separatists, attacks perpetrated on children going to School, School infrastructures, Teachers and other education stakeholders etc.
2. That many pupils/students, teachers and other education stakeholders were killed, others kidnapped and school infrastructures set ablaze either allegedly by Armed Separatists, Unknown armed men and/or Security forces.
3. That as time went on Human Rights Organizations working in the crisis zones, Religious authorities, Government, political actors, opinion holders etc. intensified advocacy campaigns against school boycott and praying on belligerents to respect International Human Rights and Humanitarian laws by allowing children to freely exercise their fundamental rights to education.
4. That in 2017, the *International Crisis Group* reported that the conflict in Cameroon Anglophone regions led to the closure of over 4000 schools, resulting in around 700 000 children being denied access to education. In addition, the UN estimated that two out of every three schools in the Northwest and Southwest regions were closed definitely. UNICEF on its part reported that nearly 900 000 children in the Northwest and Southwest regions were impacted by the crisis and unable to access education.
5. That due to the intensive advocacy, some leaders of Separatist groups started shifting from their initial positions with regards to school boycott with some calling off or reducing the rate of calls for school boycott. Since then, there were slight improvements in the number of children going back to school. Though threats for their attacks persisted from some Separatist groups insisting children shall only be permitted to go to school under certain conditions and among those were that only Community, Mission and Lay Private schools shall be operational, no child shall be permitted to attend any school operated by the government, no child going to school shall be permitted to put on uniform etc.
6. That in 2023 the *International Crisis group* and other International organizations reported that 54% of schools remained closed in the 2022/2023 Academic year, around 200 000 school aged children displaced and most of them remains out of school. Again 1.4 million school aged children in need of Humanitarian assistance in education in 2023 added the International Organizations.

7. That as the 2024/2025 academic year approaches, there have been intensive calls for lockdown and systematic attacks perpetrated by Arm groups. These are mainly to create fear in the mind of parents and therefore prevent them from sending children to school.

8. That through videos, press releases, voice messages and flyers circulating on different social media platforms, Separatists have threatened to violate the rights to education by calling for lockdown between September 7th and October 2nd 2024.

9. That on the 24th of August 2024, three (03) Police Officers were shot to deaths and their weapons taken away at a check point in Buea South-West region and on the 2nd of September 2024, other attacks were perpetrated in Buea (South-West) and Bamenda (Northwest regions) in which three (03) civilians were killed, one (01) severely injured and a taxi and a motorcycle set ablaze either by armed Separatists who claimed responsibility like the cases in Buea alleging the attacks were in attempts to implement lockdown or by Unknown gun men like the case in Bamenda. And on the 4th of September 2024, alleged armed Separatists attacked and killed two persons including the pastor MBACKWA ALFRED; the Principal of SAINT PAUL'S COLLEGE, the Reverend KILLIAN was kidnapped at Nkwen (Bamenda, Northwest region) by alleged Separatists and taken to an unknown destination where his whereabouts remains unknown.

10. That there has not been any official reaction from the Government of Cameroon or any local administrative authority on the said incidents. But in a Press statement from the US EMBASSY to Cameroon dated 3rd of September 2024 and published on Facebook and X accounts stating *"the Embassy condemns all forms of violence against civilians, and we are deeply concerned by recent incidents and threats in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions, as we have been throughout the crisis. Moreover, as classes resume in the coming days, we cannot forget that every child has a right to an education. Schools are sanctuaries for learning, and children must not be prevented from attending classes. We reaffirm the need for peaceful approaches to address complex political and security issues"*.

11. That in a 3 minutes 13 seconds video circulating online from JOSE AVELINO BETTENCOURT, the APOSTOLIC NUNCIO to Cameroon *"adds his voice to countless Cameroonians from all works of life, from North to South from Est to West, not least from the Catholic Bishops of Cameroon who works tirelessly to build the future. The Apostolic Noncio added Nelson Mandela once said educating all our children must be one of our most urgent priorities, we all know that education more than anything else improves our chances of building better life. POPE FRANCIS reminds us that the mission of schools and teachers is to develop an understanding of all that is true, good and beautiful, difference violence is never justified, only peace is the way of the future. He concluded by saying this month of September please let the children attend school, and together let us work for peace"*.

12. That using school as weapon of war or means of expressing their political opinions is prohibited by different international and Regional Human rights instruments like THE United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child, International Humanitarian Law, Un Security Council Resolution 2225, African Charter On The Rights And Welfare Of The Child etc.

13. That the Republic of Cameroon is indeed a State party to the aforementioned laws and Conventions and must respond clearly and obligatorily to the human rights abuses and violations being perpetrated in the conflict Anglophone regions with IMPUNITY.

THAT IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE, THE COALITION:

1. Condemns in STRONGEST TERMS, the recent attacks perpetrated by armed Separatists as well as attempts to prevent children from exercising their fundamental rights to education.

2. Pray an IMMEDIATE and INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION is open by the competent judicial authority to ensure perpetrators are identified, arrested and prosecuted accordingly for these heinous and barbaric acts.
3. Pleads on parties to guarantee protection and absolute security as recommended by different International Human Rights and Humanitarian law to ensure the smooth and effective back to school 2024/2025 Academic year in all parts of Anglophone regions.
4. Strongly recommends that the Cameroon Government should immediately establish a protection mechanism to guarantee adequate security and protection for children going to school, Teachers or staffs, school infrastructures and vulnerable civilians in general.
5. Call on the International Community and other friendly partners to the State of Cameroon to persuade the Government to seek a PACIFIC MEANS of resolving the more than 7 years old armed conflict in Anglophone regions of the Country.
6. Reminds the warring parties perpetrating these atrocities and denying children their basic rights to education in Anglophone regions of Cameroon that they shall be held accountable for all their crimes, sooner or later.
7. Lastly, continuous to pray on the Government of Cameroon to end the reign of IMPUNITY in these conflict zones and ensure perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses are answerable for their acts.

For the Coalition
signed:

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