

REF N°140-CA/SG/26***SUBJECT: CHILDREN MUST GO BACK TO SCHOOL: EDUCATION MUST NOT BE USED AS A WEAPON OF WAR***

Conscience Africaine (CA) and the Community Initiative for Peace, Social Cohesion and Development Association (CIPSCDA) wish to bring to the attention of national and international communities as follows:

- 1. That today, 7 September 2026, marks the official resumption of the 2026/2027 academic year in Cameroon. However, the situation remains significantly different in the conflict-affected North-West and South-West Regions, where an approximately two-week lockdown imposed by armed separatist groups has sought to frustrate the effective resumption of schools.*
- 2. That the imposition of lockdowns and repeated calls for school boycotts have, for years, been used by some armed separatist groups as a means of advancing political objectives and exerting control over communities, thereby seriously affecting children's access to education.*
- 3. That the right to education is a fundamental human right guaranteed under various international and regional human rights instruments, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which form part of the human-rights framework applicable in Cameroon by virtue of the Preamble and Article 45 of the Constitution of Cameroon.*
- 4. That the protection of the right to education imposes responsibilities on the State and all relevant actors to ensure that children are able to access education without discrimination, intimidation, violence or other unlawful interference.*
- 5. That since the outbreak of the armed conflict in the North-West and South-West Regions in late 2016, thousands of children have been deprived of education following widespread school closures, attacks and threats against schools, teachers, students and other education personnel, as well as persistent calls for school boycotts by armed separatist groups.*
- 6. That repeated threats and insecurity have also compelled many parents and guardians to keep their children at home out of fear for their safety, thereby depriving children of their fundamental right to education and exposing them to prolonged educational disruption and increased vulnerability.*
- 7. That over the years, some schools, particularly in urban centres, have gradually reopened as a result of sustained advocacy by civil society organisations, efforts by the Government of Cameroon, religious authorities and other education stakeholders, as well as the resilience of communities determined to restore access to education.*

8. *That some armed separatist groups have subsequently tolerated or accepted the operation of certain community schools, particularly in some peripheral communities, while continuing to oppose the operation of government schools and institutions, contributing to an uneven and fragile return to education across the two regions.*
9. *That although the number of functioning schools and children attending classes has gradually increased, particularly in some urban centres, a significant number of schools remain closed or non-operational, while many children continue to remain out of school, especially in more affected and peripheral communities.*
10. *That education must never be used as a weapon of war, a means of coercion, or an instrument for advancing political grievances, and children should never be made to bear the consequences of political disagreements or armed conflict.*
11. *That for the past six years, Conscience Africaine and CIPSCDA have jointly conducted an annual one-month Back-to-School Advocacy Campaign, beginning approximately two weeks before school resumption and continuing for two weeks after resumption, to promote children's right to education and encourage parents and guardians to safely return their children to school.*
12. *That the 2026 campaign commenced on 21 August 2026 and will run until 21 September 2026, using social media advocacy, information flyers, written messages, short videos, television and radio programmes, and other public awareness activities to promote education, encourage school reopening and discourage parents from keeping their children out of school because of fear or intimidation.*
13. *That whatever the circumstances of the ongoing conflict, children must not be sacrificed to political objectives, and education must remain protected, schools must remain safe spaces, and children must be allowed to learn without fear, threats or intimidation.*

In view of the above, Conscience Africaine and its partner, CIPSCDA, condemn in the strongest possible terms the continued calls for school boycotts by separatist groups, as well as the use of education as a weapon of war or as a means of expressing political opinions in the conflict-affected North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

1. *That armed separatist groups should immediately end lockdowns, school boycotts, threats, intimidation, attacks and all other acts intended to prevent children from accessing education or discourage parents from sending their children to school.*
2. *That the Government of Cameroon should strengthen the protection of schools, teachers, students and other education personnel, particularly in conflict-affected communities, while ensuring that security measures respect human rights and do not themselves create additional risks for civilians.*

3. That the Government and education authorities should accelerate the safe reopening and rehabilitation of closed schools, particularly in underserved rural and peripheral communities, and ensure the availability of qualified teachers, learning materials and basic educational infrastructure.
4. That parents and guardians should prioritise the education and safety of their children and, where reasonably safe conditions exist, encourage and support their children to return to school.
5. That humanitarian organisations, civil society organisations, religious and traditional authorities, community leaders and other education stakeholders should intensify coordinated advocacy and community engagement to promote the protection of education and facilitate the safe return of children to school.
6. That national and international authorities should continue to monitor, document and respond to violations affecting schools, children, teachers and education personnel, and ensure accountability for perpetrators in accordance with applicable national and international law.
7. That all parties and actors involved in the conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law concerning the protection of children and educational institutions.
8. That while the measures and advocacy efforts outlined above are important and necessary responses to some of the immediate and temporary effects of the more than nine-year armed conflict, particularly its devastating impact on education, they cannot constitute a permanent solution to the crisis.
9. That we firmly believe that a lasting and sustainable political solution to the conflict remains essential to permanently ending the violence, restoring normalcy and creating an environment in which children can effectively attend school and all schools can fully resume operations without fear, threats, intimidation or other forms of insecurity.
10. That Conscience Africaine and CIPSCDA reaffirm their commitment to advocating for every child's right to education and call on all stakeholders to make the 2026/2027 academic year a turning point in protecting education in the North-West and South-West Regions.

Done at Douala, this 7th day of September 2026.

Signed

Amadu TARNTEH

Executive Secretary

Conscience Africaine (C.A)