



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Cameroon - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Wednesday 23 January 2019

Information on the position of Ghost Towns in the southern Cameroon situation

In October 2018 *Reuters* notes that:

“The secessionist movement began in reaction to a government clampdown on peaceful protests calling for an end to the marginalization of Cameroon’s English-speaking minority. Police killed civilians, sparking further protests. The army burned villages and killed unarmed civilians, residents told Reuters, forcing thousands to flee to French-speaking regions or neighboring Nigeria. Ghost towns are all that remain of once vibrant cities in those regions” (Reuters (22 October 2018) *Biya wins Cameroon election to extend 36-year rule*).

BBC News in November 2018 states that:

“The separatists also impose what they call "ghost towns". They are typically observed on Mondays when nothing functions - markets, courts and offices are shut, and vehicles remain parked” (BBC News (15 November 2018) *Cameroon conflict: 'We live in fear in Bamenda'*, p.4).

A report by *Amnesty International* in June 2018 states:

“Since late 2016, Cameroon's Anglophone regions – whose grievances date back to the early 1960s - have endured turmoil and violence in what has become a human rights crisis. In October and November of 2016, protests and strikes were organized by groups including teachers, lawyers and students in opposition to what they viewed as the further marginalization of the Anglophone minority. Lawyers took to the streets to demand the translation into English of legal texts, and protest against the appointment of French-speaking judges unfamiliar with the Common Law system. Teachers went on strike to condemn the appointment of French-speaking staff in schools and universities. Thousands of ordinary people, including students, joined these demonstrations to express solidarity and to air other grievances. Although largely – but not always - peaceful in nature, these initial protests were met with fierce and sustained repression from the Cameroonian authorities and security forces. The security forces arrested hundreds of people, including human rights defenders, journalists and activists. The authorities banned civil society organizations, suspended the internet and cut phone lines for about six months in 2017. Security forces were responsible for the killing of at least 10 peaceful protesters between October 2016 and February 2017. Anglophone activist groups responded using civil disobedience tactics, including school boycotts and "ghost town" protests” (Amnesty International (10 June 2018) *A turn for the worse: Violence and human rights violations in Anglophone Cameroon'*, p.3).

In September 2018 the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* notes in a document that:

“Violence in the region escalated in September 2017...coinciding with the Biya government's banning of the two civil society groups involved in coordinating the peaceful protests, the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC)...Also in 2017, Anglophone activists associated with CASC organized "Operation Ghost Town" which called for Anglophones to keep their children out of school, and included a boycott of businesses on certain days; these boycotts have become flashpoints for conflict since implemented...” (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (21 September 2018) *Picking a Fight: The Rise of Armed Separatists in Cameroon*).

A report issued in July 2018 by *Human Rights Watch* notes that:

“Cameroon’s legal and educational systems became flashpoints for Anglophone activists. In late 2016, Anglophone lawyers and teachers went on strike in the South-West and North-West regions to protest the deployment of francophone magistrates and teachers to the area. In early January 2017, as activists called for more demonstrations in the North-West and South-West regions, members of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), agreed to meet with the government to urge the release of protesters arrested during a violently-repressed demonstration in Bamenda on December 8, 2016.²⁰ Yet, as the talks were ongoing, the Consortium accused the government of shooting four unarmed youth and declared “ghost towns” – in which businesses are encouraged to remain closed – on January 16 and 17...” (Human Rights Watch (19 July 2018) *“These Killings Can Be Stopped”, Government and Separatist Groups Abuses in Cameroon’s Anglophone Regions*, p.15).

This document also states that:

“While the ghost town protests continued throughout 2017, violence did not escalate substantially until the middle of the year...” (ibid, p.16).

A report issued in November 2018 by the *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* points out that:

“Between October and November 2016, administrative disputes turned into political demands in North-West and South-West regions. The resulting socio-political crisis has consequences for the civilian population due to the closure of schools, ghost town movement, the decline of economic activities, and armed violence resulting in numerous displacements of people (refugees in Nigeria and people internally displaced)” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (30 November 2018) *Cameroon: North-West and South-West Crisis, Situation Report N1. As of 30th November, 2018*, p.6).

This document also states that:

“The political situation in the two regions remains tense and the Ghost Town movement declared for Mondays continues to be observed” (ibid, p.2).

References

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (21 September 2018) *Picking a Fight: The Rise of Armed Separatists in Cameroon*

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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