

## Joint letter

H.E Solomon Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

CC:

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Chairman of the African Union

Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union Commission

We, a coalition of 65 organizations, write to you in your capacity as the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (The Commission), to encourage you to urgently address the deteriorating human rights situation in Cameroon.

Over the past three years, Cameroon's Anglophone regions have been embroiled in a cycle of violence that has claimed [3000](#) lives, forced [half a million people](#) to flee their homes and left over [700,000 children out of school](#).

The crisis in the North-West and South-West regions began in late 2016, when teachers, lawyers, students and activists, who had long complained of their regions' perceived marginalization by the central government, took to the streets to demand more recognition of their political, social, and cultural rights. The [brutal response of the government forces](#), who killed peaceful protesters, arrested leaders and journalists, banned civil society groups and blocked the internet, escalated the crisis. Since then, numerous separatist groups have emerged calling for the independence of the Anglophone regions and embracing the armed struggle.

Government forces and armed separatists have both been responsible for serious human rights abuses. Security forces have [killed civilians](#), [burned dozens of villages](#), arbitrarily arrested and [tortured](#) hundreds of alleged armed separatists. Armed separatists have also [targeted civilians](#), [kidnapped](#) hundreds of people, [tortured and killed perceived opponents](#), while using intimidation and violence to keep [children and their teachers out of school](#).

At its 62nd Ordinary Session, held from 25 April to 9 May 2018, the Commission adopted [Resolution 395 \(LXII\) 2018](#) condemning human rights abuses committed in Cameroon's Anglophone regions since October 2016 and calling for impartial and independent investigations to be conducted in order to bring perpetrators to justice.

On September 10, 2019 amid increasing violence and following sustained international pressure, President Paul Biya called for a [national dialogue](#) to address the Anglophone crisis. The dialogue ended on October 4 with several proposals made, including the adoption of a special status for the two Anglophone regions. In separate moves, President Biya also decided to [drop all charges](#) against hundreds of people arrested in the unrest in the North-West and South-West as well as political opponents, including Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) leader [Maurice Kamto](#), a political prisoner.

We, the undersigned organisations, welcome the release of hundreds of political actors and other detainees in Cameroon and urge that jailed journalists and other activists are also freed. We also express deep concern about the lack of discussions on serious human rights abuses during the dialogue. The final report of the dialogue did not include any language or recommendations on abuse and accountability for serious crimes committed by government forces and armed separatists. [None of the commissions established](#) in the framework of the national dialogue was mandated to examine human rights issues, and there was no prior consultation with the victims of the human rights abuses in the Anglophone regions before the dialogue.

Cameroon, a member of the African Union since 1963, is a [party](#) to important regional instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which sets out member states obligations' to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

In accordance with article 58 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which foresees the Commission referring cases of serious human rights violations to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, we call upon you and the Commission to:

- Refer serious and systematic human rights violations in Cameroon to the next Assembly of Heads of State and Governments scheduled to take place 30 and 31 January 2020;
- Provide a briefing to the Peace and Security Council;
- Establish and carry out a fact-finding mission into all allegations of human rights abuses committed in the Anglophone regions since late 2016 and recommend future steps to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice;
- Call upon the African Union to create the position of a special envoy on Cameroon who reports directly to the African Union Peace and Security Council. Beyond acting as a liaison between the Cameroonian government and the African Union, this envoy should inquire into and rapidly report on civilian protection needs and challenges.

The Commission has recommended and conducted fact-finding missions in similar situations and its decisions have built important principles that could be applied to Cameroon.

As the search for a long-lasting solution to the crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon continues, the Commission should make accountability for human rights violations a priority of its strategy and intervention. This would be an important signal of the Commission's commitment to justice and accountability for violations of human rights norms.

Yours sincerely,

Action des Chrétiens pour l'abolition de la Torture (ACAT France)

Action des Chrétiens pour l'abolition de la Torture au Tchad (ACAT Tchad)

Action des Chrétiens pour l'abolition de la Torture (ACAT Burundi)

Africa Heights Foundation

Africa International Criminal Justice Network

African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)

African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET)

Association pour le Développement Intégré et la Solidarité Interactive (ADISI-Cameroun)

Association pour l'enseignement coranique et la protection des enfants mouhadjirine (AECPEM)  
Tchad

Cameroon Women's Peace Movement (CAWOPEM)

Center for Human Rights, University of Pretoria

Centre de Documentation et de Formation sur les Droits de l'Homme (CDFDH-Togo)

Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) Malawi

Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA)

Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation Malawi

Cercle des Educateurs Solidaires Des Quartiers Réunis de Maroua (CESOQUAR)

Changement Social Benin

Chapter Four Uganda

Cleen Foundation

Coalition Burkinabe des DDH

Coalition Ivoirienne des DDH

Coalition Malienne pour la CPI

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

Concerned Nigerians

Confédération des organisations de victimes de la crise Ivoirienne

Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)

Defend Defenders

Foundation for Justice and Development Initiatives (FJDI)

FORSC-Forum pour le Renforcement de la société civile Burundi

Freedom of Expression Hub (FOE-HUB)

Girl Child Africa, Nigeria

Human Rights Agenda Network

Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone

Human Rights Institute of South Africa

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA)

Institute for Security Studies (ISS)

International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)

Justice Access Point Uganda

Justice and Peace Bamenda

Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)

Kenyan Coalition for HRDs

Lawyers Alert

Ligue Tunisienne des droits de l'homme

Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP)

Le Club des amis du droit du Congo (CAD)

Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All (NewSETA)

North East Youth Initiative for Development (NEYIF)

Nigerian Coalition for the ICC

Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme - Cameroun (NDH Cameroun)

Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network

Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU)

POS Foundation

Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) Senegal

Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale (REDHAC)

Réseau Dynamique Citoyenne

Réseau Ouest Africain des DDH

Shalupe Foundation DRC

SOS Torture/Burundi

Southern Africa HRDs Network

Sudan Coalition for the ICC

The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ Kenya)

Un Monde Avenir

Victims' Support Initiative (VSI)