

DECLARATION OF « CAMEROON ADVOCACY »

DECLARATION ON THREATS BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS OF DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CAMEROON.

1- Context

Since 2014, Cameroon has experienced an unprecedented security and social crisis, with the Islamist sect Boko Haram, incursions by Central African rebels and the so-called Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West regions. If the attacks of Boko Haram in the northern part has to date several thousands of deaths and hundreds of displaced people, the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions produces practically the same effects, but with the peculiarity that 'It is a peaceful claim which has today turned into an armed conflict between the regular forces and the independentist armed groups. In addition to the armed battle on the ground, the government and national and international civil society organizations are waging a media battle. The latter accused the former of mismanagement of the crisis which caused the massacre of several thousand people, the former accusing the latter of complicity with external forces with the aim of destabilizing Cameroon.

Civil society organizations that play their part according to their missions, are each time caught in the grip of the protagonists on the ground whose government is threatening to arrest and shut down.

In the same vein, media have been attacked by the government. The latter attempted maneuvers sometimes behind the scenes to intimidate journalists or to warn the promoters of these media. Several times, some media have been closed like HOT COCOA in Bamenda in 2017, or refused by the government to deal with issues or organize debates on the English-speaking crisis.

2- Facts

Whenever a report is published, in particular on the situation of human rights violations, the Government does not hesitate to step up to the plate to describe NGOs and human rights associations as "enemies of the fatherland "wanting to" destabilize the country ".

On October 1st, 2017, during the escalation of security forces in the North West and South West regions, civil society organizations and international NGOs, the Catholic

Church claimed that there had been 100 deaths, "The government had cried out for the destabilization of the institutions of the Republic".

On July 11, 2018, REDHAC made a statement regarding a video showing men in uniform summarily executing women and children. This was immediately denied by the government spokesman who dealt with the case of fake news aimed at destabilizing the country, a video which will subsequently be authenticated, prompting the Government to reverse its remarks.

On August 9, 2019, it is in Douala, in the services of the governor of the Littoral Region that the Cameroonian Minister of territorial administration declared:

"I once again ask those responsible for these television channels which knowingly organize, I say knowingly, these debates which aim to undermine government action, undermine the morale of the defense and security forces, and to bring a blow to this project of the great opportunities of the Head of State, to rectify the situation before it is late. I tell you once again, for those who are used to moderating these debates every week. Because these are deliberate debates and we know for what purpose these debates are organized "

The Minister of Territorial Administration had openly pointed to civil society in these terms.

"The administrative authorities have pointed out to me some non-governmental organizations which for some time have shown irresponsible behavior. The leaders of these NGOs occupy the media spaces. I asked the governor, the administrative authorities to make sure that these behavioral deviations are no longer accepted ".

Last case dated March 09, 2020, the exit of the Minister of Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji was in a rant of which he has the secret, and in an outrageous way noted that: "Human Rights Watch NGOs, "Amnesty International", "International Crisis Group", "OCHA", "REDHAC", and many others, are engaged in a conspiratorial approach against Cameroon and against the Defense and Security Forces ". The Minister accused the NGOs of having "received 5 billion CFA francs occult networks inside and outside of Cameroon" to:

- Destabilize the institutions of the Republic;
- Regularly disseminate in certain media in their pay and in social networks, truncated information to discredit the management of the crisis in the North West and the South West by the Government ..."

The CSOs signatory of this declaration reserve the rights to prosecute Mr. ATANGA NJI for defamation in court.

They emphasize:

- That the past and especially the most recent outings of the Minister of territorial administration are nothing but a diversion to divert attention from the humanitarian crisis (Far North, North West and South West regions) and serious and systemic violations of human rights in the North West and South West regions.

- That the government has always been in the logic of repression, reprisals and attacks against human rights defenders, national, regional and international CSO, the mechanisms of the African Commission on Human Rights, the special procedures of United Nations and UN agencies. The government's latest statement to the Geneva Human Rights Council attacking OCHA, HRW and MSF is a case in point.

They recall below, the threats and other attacks of which they have already been victims.

Retaliation

- On March 26, 2020, a fire in part of the REDHAC offices which housed the archives, documentation, research and donations of books intended for the documentation and research center. The complaint was filed and no investigation opened to date;

- On September 29, 2019, the manager of New SETA was detained for several hours at Yaoundé airport while he was returning from a trip to Kenya;

- In 2017, the illegal and fanciful blocking of funds from NDH-Cameroon through Afriland First Bank;

- The blocking of ADISI-Cameroon Association funds by SCB-Cameroon without valid legal reason in January 2020,

- Anonymous calls from journalists and CSO officials.

Threats

- Anonymous threatening and intimidating calls received by Coalition members;
- Attempt to kidnap the director of NDH Cameroon;
- Damage to the physical integrity and destruction of the car of the Coordinator of the NGO Un Monde Avenir;

- Intimidation, threats of journalist Serge Alain Ottou of Equinoxe Tv, for giving the floor to Calibri Calibro on February 26, 2020;

- Intimidation, threats of Equinox TV journalist, Mr. Noufele Cédric for having treated information impartially about the Ngarbuh massacres;

- August 16, 2019: interview between the former Divisional Officer of Wouri Mr. MACHE Bertrand and Mrs. Maximilienne Ngo Mbe accompanied by Lawyer Alice Nkom of REDHAC on the instruction of the Minister of Territorial Administration to obtain silence from REDHAC;

- August 28, 2019: physical assault accompanied by sexual touching and threats of the director of REDHAC.

The civil society organizations signatory to this declaration stress that these recurrent threats by Minister Atanga Nji are in violation of international instruments duly ratified by the State of Cameroon, in particular:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Munich Charter
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

They recall that at the United Nations World Summit in 2005, all heads of state and government affirmed the responsibility to protect people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The responsibility to protect rests on three pillars.

- 1- The responsibility of each State to protect its populations,
- 2- The responsibility of the international community to help States protect their populations,
- 3- The responsibility of the international community to protect when, manifestly, a State fails to protect its population.

Civil society organizations call on the government of Cameroon:

- To ensure the protection and security of human rights defenders by adopting a law on "protection and security of defenders and journalists";
- To accept an independent international commission of inquiry on serious human rights crimes made up of national and international actors in the North-West, South-West and North regions.
- Continue the process of dialogue by setting up a truth, justice and reconciliation commission.
- Let us call on the responsibility of the international community to act, and more particularly the African Union and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union which declared this year as a mythical year for silencing arms in Africa.

Copy:

- To the African Commission on Human Rights
- To the United Nations Council for Human Rights
- At the United Nations Center for Human Rights in Central Africa
- To the National Human Rights Commission
- To the Special Rapporteur on reprisals
- To the Special Rapporteur for the defense of human rights in Africa

About "**CAMEROON ADVOCACY**"

It is a coalition of all Cameroonian civil society organizations working on human rights issues in the context of the various conflicts that are going through Cameroon. Its work is mainly based on advocacy for a return to peace, particularly in the English-speaking regions.

Done in Cameroon on March 17, 2020

THE PETITIONERS:

- ❖ NewSeta, Yaoundé
- ❖ Un Monde Avenir, Douala;
- ❖ CHRDA, Buéa;
- ❖ REDHAC, Douala;
- ❖ NDH, Yaoundé;
- ❖ Reach Out, Buéa;
- ❖ Justice and Peace, Bamenda
- ❖ Global Initiative for Digital Inclusion and Communication (GIDICom), Bamenda
- ❖ Coalition Burkinabé des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CBDDH), Burkina Faso
- ❖ Coalition Togolaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CTDDH), Togo
- ❖ Coalition des défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme du Bénin, Benin
- ❖ Public Interest Law Center (PILC), Tchad
- ❖ Defend Defender, Kampala