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THE WORLD IN PAGES

THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS: FRACTURED BY LANGUAGE



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FROM THE FOUNDERS

We are proud to present the latest publication of The World in Pages Magazine. This edition was edited by Benjamin Bacchoo and Esha Soni, who guided the issue through its research, writing and editing to bring you 'The Anglophone Crisis: Fractured by Language.'

In Cameroon, a dispute that began in 2016 with lawyers and teachers in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions has grown into a violent conflict that continues today. What started as protests over language, education and the legal system has left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. Yet it remains one of the least discussed crises in Africa.

At the heart of this issue is a simple question. How does a divide in language become a divide in nation? Cameroon's Anglophone minority has long felt sidelined within a largely French-speaking state. We examine the colonial history behind that divide, the grievances that turned into armed conflict, and the human cost for the people caught in between.

We thank everyone who contributed to this issue. As you turn these pages, we hope you come away with a clearer understanding of a crisis too often overlooked, and that it fuels the curiosity that lives deep within you.



Videep Agarwal



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THE EDITORS



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INTRODUCTION



Source: African Arguments



Source: The International Crisis Group



Source: BBC

Perhaps one of the most present remnants of Africa's colonial history is the arbitrary imposition of borders that seem to bear little resemblance to ethnic or linguistic boundaries.

In Western Africa is the Republic of Cameroon. Whilst many countries in Africa gained their independence from one nation, Cameroon gained its independence from both the French Republic and the United Kingdom. This has entailed a colonial legacy that is different across regions within the country, with the former French-controlled Cameroon having a lingua franca of French, whilst the former British-controlled Cameroon has a lingua franca of English. This has translated into a bilingual state that has a Francophone (Cameroonians who speak French) majority and an Anglophone (Cameroonians who speak English) minority.

INTRODUCTION



Source: African Arguments

Starting in 2016, the protracted Anglophone Crisis (or Ambazonia War) continues to wage on. In this edition, we aim to explore the conflict in Western Cameroon and to see its causes. The legacy of colonialism, a failure of unity and a divided state. But also to look at the consequences of such a conflict: the death tolls, wounded and refugees. This is a conflict that is rarely highlighted internationally. What began as protests over dissatisfaction with linguistic tensions has turned into an armed conflict.

Since the unification of Cameroon between the former British Southern Cameroons and the former French Cameroons, there has been an uneasy tension that dates back to the remnant of colonial borders, and has pushed through into the modern day. This is a topic that brings themes of not only colonial legacy but a division of cultural division, ethnic tensions and a failure of unity, which is not unique to this issue alone. Failure of peacekeeping, of resolution and of humanitarian crisis paints a portrait that is both painful and prevalent.

THE ROOTS OF THE DIVIDE

THE ROOTS OF THE DIVIDE

Modern Cameroonian history (and borders for that matter) traces back to the colonisation of the country by Germany. This began much like a majority of African colonisation during the late nineteenth century, during the scramble for Africa. In 1884, a German protectorate was established over the region. Kamerun. Agricultural exploitation soon ensued, as did the usage of forced labour in the construction of infrastructure. However, this came to a screeching halt during the First World War, in which Kamerun was invaded by British and French forces. Following the conflict, the colony was partitioned between the French and British as League of Nations mandates: de facto colonies, with a promise of eventual independence. In 1960, the French Cameroon became independent. A year later, the British Cameroons held referendums in each to decide which country the now United Nations Trust Territory would join. The North joined Nigeria, which it and its southern counterpart had been de facto part of since British rule. However, the South joined Cameroon for religious and ethnic reasons.



Source: Britannica



Source: BBC

THE ROOTS OF THE DIVIDE

The two regions had distinct differences. Beyond the most notable difference of language, the two regions had a different cultures. Legal frameworks were different, using wholly different legal systems. Education was notably different. The culture of administration by the colonial government was hugely different: the British had a lot more self-government than the French, for example.

At first, the two regions formed the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Bilingualism was recognised. Autonomy was granted to the English-speaking, former British, western Cameroon. Ahmadou Ahidjo, who led the country, was French-aligned, however. This led to civil war to soon break out across the country. Emergency powers were declared, and the country soon fell down the slippery slope of autocracy. A one-party state was established, and the country was under the president.



Source: Britannica

THE ROOTS OF THE DIVIDE



Source: Habari Network

This federal system, in which the English and French-speaking regions had a degree of autonomy from each other, though united (with the Prime Minister of English-speaking West Cameroon being Vice President), came to an abrupt stop. In 1972, a referendum was held across the country for a new constitution. Perhaps dubious results, the state was nevertheless transformed from the federal model into a new unitary state. Under Adhijo's new constitution, more power was given to the role of president. Autonomy was stripped, and the English-speaking population (a quarter of the total population) now found itself a minority in a country speaking French. This system stripped the Anglopone population of their power given to them by the constitution.

A decade later, beaurocrat and prime minister Paul Biya was appointed president of the United Republic of Cameroon. A temporary measure, as Adhijo was ill. However, as time passed, a schism formed between the two autocrats of the country. Adhijo was forced into exile. Biya was elected president. A coup attempt to take back control by Abhijo failed. The country was now firmly under new governance. Though political reforms were attempted, many of them have not actually been implemented. Biya has remained an autocrat to this day.

THE ROOTS OF THE DIVIDE



Source: Scoot West Africa

In recent years, there has been strife in the country. Border disputes with Nigeria have led to clashes and near-conflict in the 1980s. Political violence has been seen among many citizens opposing President Biya. Boko Haram had spread over the border, leaving much violence in the last decade. However, the most recent and pressing issue has been the Anglophone Crisis.



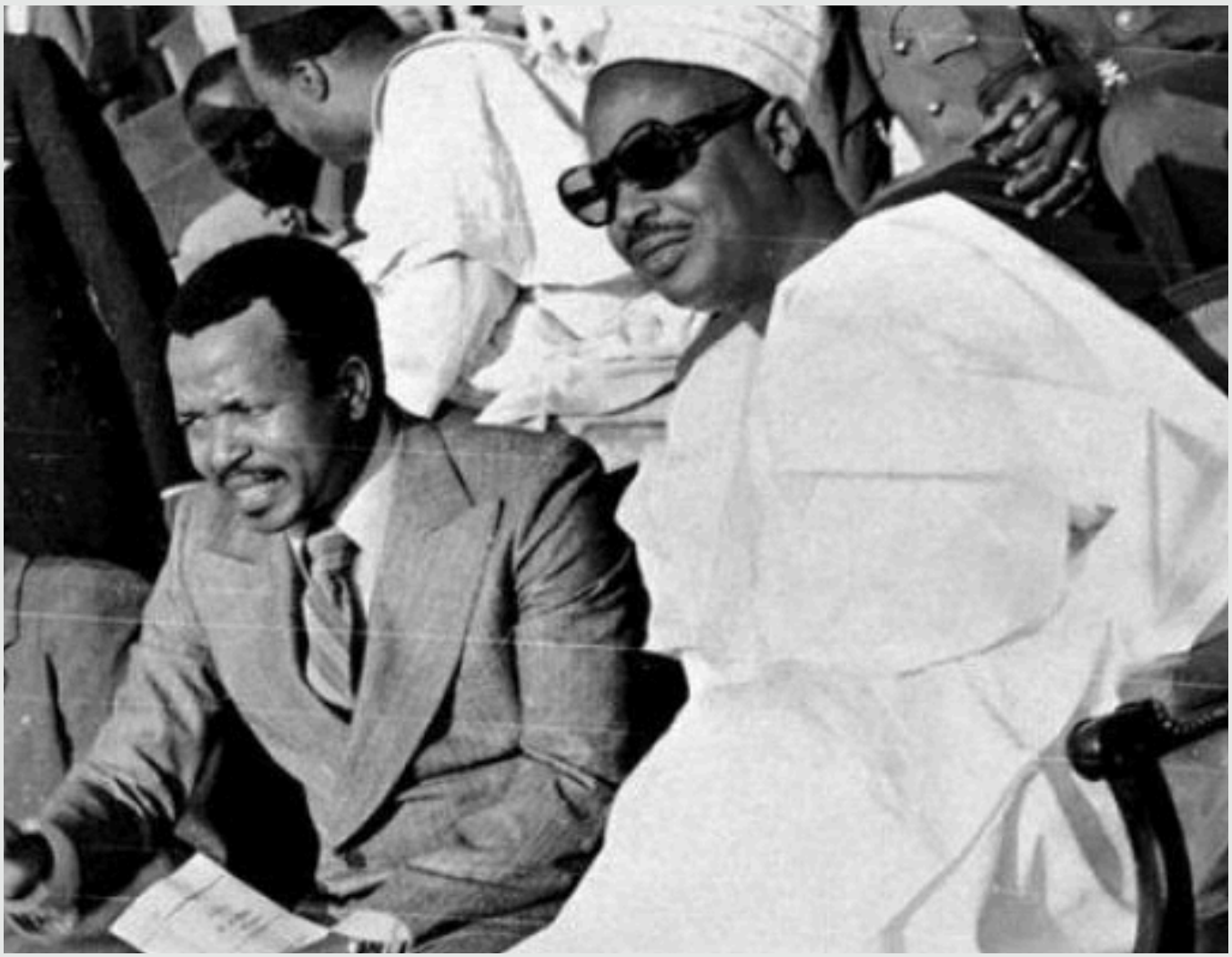
Source: France24

SPARKS OF THE CONFLICT

SPARKS OF THE CONFLICT

The Anglophone Crisis did not spring out of nowhere. Tensions go back as far as the establishment of a unitary state. Much of the government is Francophone. In 1984, the name of the country was reverted to the name dating back before West Cameroon joined the nation. Self-government during colonial times mentioned in the constitution, was removed, leaving many Anglophones feeling annexed rather than joining the country.

West Cameroon's culture has been slowly degraded. Its legal system is different from that of the Francophone region: that being civil law stemming from the French Republic and common law stemming from the United Kingdom.



Source: MIMI Mefo Info

SPARKS OF THE CONFLICT

There was a growing resentment towards the autocratic government, which, even before the establishment of the unitary state, was violating autonomy in West Cameroon. This has led to many movements pushing for separation or federation. Little political representation has been afforded to the Anglophone minority due to the heavy centralisation of Abuja and Biya.

In October of 2016, Anglophone lawyers went on strike to protest against the appointment of Francophone judges in the Anglophone region of Francophone judges who use civil law as opposed to the common law practised by Anglophones.

Peaceful protests in major cities in the Anglophone region were met with security forces firing tear gas. Teachers soon joined the protests regarding language usage in schools. Schools were quickly shut down across the region.

The government responded that it was very much pushing for further unity in the country. A heavy response from President Biya was put forth in his New Year's Message. In the Angloophe region in January, an internet blockage was put in place.

In September the next year, further protests broke out, this time instead of autonomy, urging for the independence of West Cameroon. People hoisted the flag of Amazonia, the name of the Anglophone region, in the regional capital of Buea. A few weeks later independence of Ambazonia was declared by separatists. The government sent in troops, and the Anglophone crisis had begun. Fighting broke out quickly.

FAULT LINES

FAULT LINES

Amazonia's unilateral independence was declared on the 1st of October 2017, the anniversary of the day that the region had originally joined Cameroon. At first, the method of choice was not through conflict; however, after the military swept through Amazonia, this changed. In December war was officially declared by the government.



Source: Jamestown Foundation

FAULT LINES

Militias and other self-defence groups were created, which engaged in guerrilla warfare with government forces in the region. Many united to form the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), however, there are still many other groups that are autonomous. They have had a fair bit of support from the diaspora community overseas, who have helped in funding as well as protesting.



Source: Grey Dyamics



Source: International Crisis Group

Boycotts were used by civilians. Ghost days were set up in which total boycotts of society were implemented to test control and as a symbolic way of disdain for the government. Overwhelming forces were the method of choice by the government. Reports have come up of violence against civilian populations being used. Villages that allegedly harboured separatists have been burnt. Collective punishment towards civilians who had engaged in any anti-government activity. Arbitrary arrests towards anyone suspected of separatism have led to greater fear.

FAULT LINES

This is not to say that such violence has been one-sided. Extrajudicial violence and harm to civilians has been inflicted by both sides. This has translated into the displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Tactics used by separatists include ambushes in which military patrols were attacked or convoys hit. State symbols such as offices, customs posts and administrators have been targeted, with some Cameroonian administrators being kidnapped or assassinated, leaving many rural areas without governance. In the early months of 2018, the ADF were successful in capturing towns, which translated into a large-scale offensive being implemented by the armed forces of Cameroon.



Source: Vatican News



Source: Human Rights Watch

THE HUMAN COST

THE HUMAN COST



Source: The International Crisis Group

With over 5 million individuals impacted, the anglophone conflict has been a direct violation of people's rights and lives. Casualties, displacement, disruption and abuse are just some of the civil tragedies that hinder the futures of the millions of Cameroonians impacted. What began as peaceful protests back in 2016, quickly escalated into armed conflict, creating instability in the country especially in th Anglophone (North and South west regions) of Cameroon. Now hundreds of thousands of Cameroonians have nowhere to call home as they are displaced both within the Nation and out of it. What were once villages and towns have turned into nothing but rubble, leaving around one million individuals in search of shelter as they wander through their country stripped of inalienable rights such as food, water, shelter and education.

THE HUMAN COST



Source: Business Cameroon



Source: Global Crisis Network



Some live in the bushes of forests, secluded from humanity, others in broken buildings or urban slums. Not only have they had to leave their memories behind but also any sense of financial security as they can no longer rely on the jobs they had. Over 700,000 have been internally displaced while others have crossed into neighboring countries like Nigeria by trekking through forest and rivers, with close to no possessions and simple hopes for a better future.

THE HUMAN COST



Source: Vision Times

The Anglophone regions of Cameroon contribute to around 20% of Cameroon's GDP through their involvement in Agriculture, and oil. In 2017, shortly after the escalation of the conflict, Cameroon saw a 30% drop in industrial service performance, a 5.3% fall in exports, 3.4% decline in consumption and a 10.2% drop in investments in the Anglophone regions relative to its previous years. The statistics paint a picture of how Cameroon has started its journey backward as its residents are slowly stripped of their livelihoods. Additionally, along with the destruction of jobs, the war has destroyed assets worth around 64 millions USD, and businesses struggle as some employers have to shut down their firms.

THE HUMAN COST

Job losses were estimated at 6500 in the formal sector and 8000 in the informal sector, the government is also paying the price as their tax revenue has gone down by almost 6 billion CFA.

This data was collected through the previous years, and it probable the numbers keep increasing as no adequate action has been taken to ensure for the deescalation of this conflict, and the country continues to find itself in financial struggle.



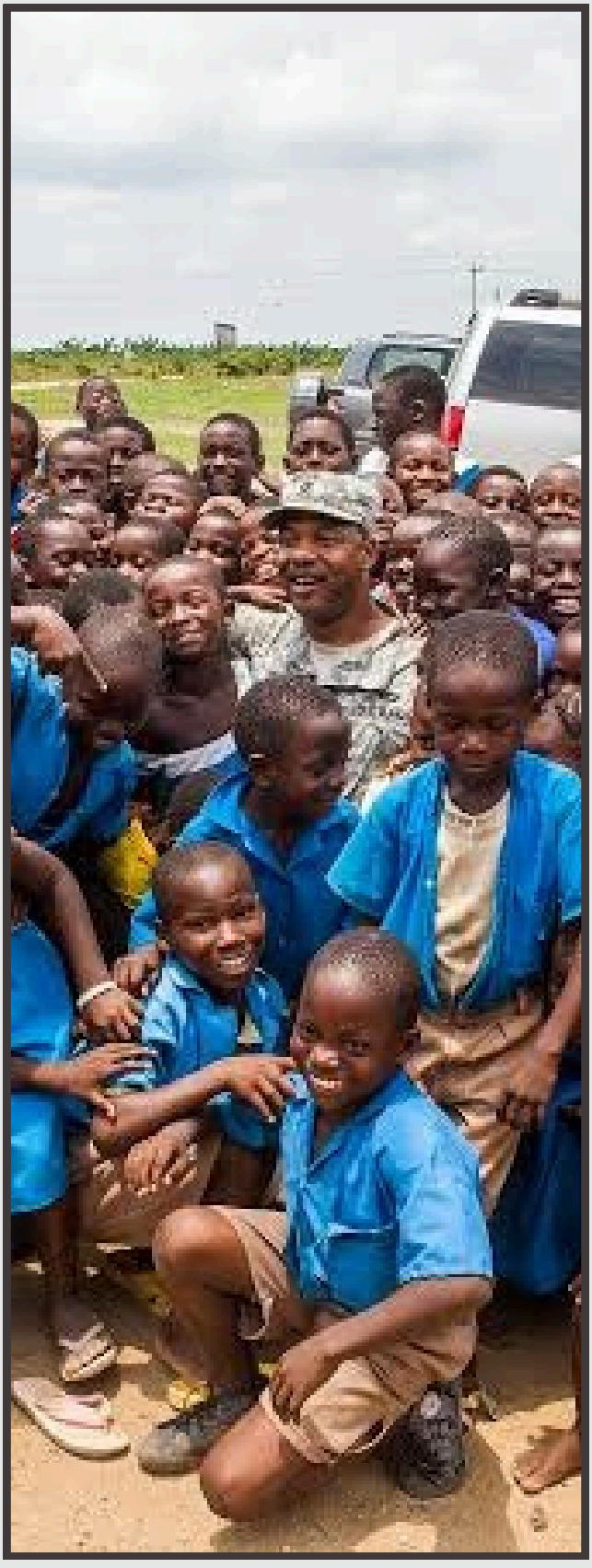
Source: Business Cameroon



Source: Cemac Eco Finance

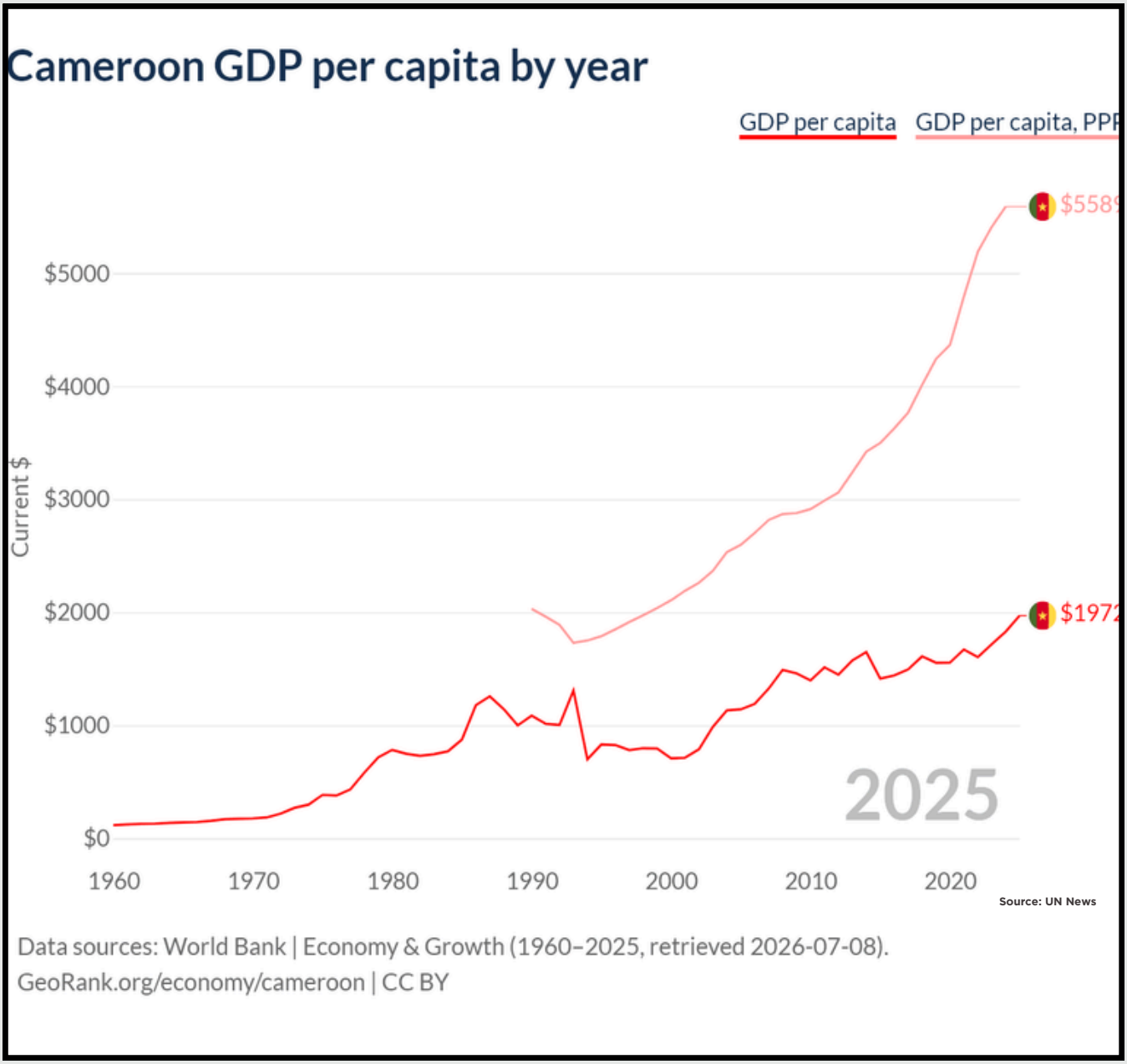
THE HUMAN COST

The transformation of linguistic tensions into conflict has deprived over 600,000 children of adequate education as more than half of schools in the Anglophone regions were closed by 2023. Furthermore, in the initial stages of the conflict secondary school enrollment saw a decline of 98.6%, seeing as peace has yet to be achieved, children, especially in the affected regions are not gaining access to their basic right of education which ultimately jeopardises not only their futures but also that of their nation. Along with education, healthcare has also been gravely impacted as only 34% of health facilities remained fully operational through the conflict and the cost of damage has hindered the ability to go back to normal. The conflict has proven to be socioeconomic as it continues to impact major components of Cameron, including health, education, agriculture and overall infrastructure in a region that was previously productive.



Source: Borgen Magazine

THE HUMAN COST



The world bank predicts for economic development to backtrack as the GDP is predicted to fall by 9% and household welfare by 5%. However, there is another, prominent cost that lies within the conflict and it is that of human lives. The loss of livelihoods, and a future is what is faced by the hundred of thousands impacted by the crisis, which is why as the world slowly progresses, Cameroon and its people are getting left behind.

GOVERNMENT AND ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS

GOVERNMENT & ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS



Source: Military Africa

To the central government, the Anglophone crisis is viewed as a security threat. President Pual Biya is adamant that Cameroon must remain "one and indivisible", and views this conflict as an obstacle. Government officials label the separatist movements as "acts of terrorism", framing their actions as criminal as a political movement while exercising their freedom of speech. In response, the government has deployed the military to suppress the armed groups which has been one of the main inductors of the violence that has created civilian casualties and displacement.



Source: BBC

GOVERNMENT & ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS

In 2019, the government held “national dialouge”, but was boycotted by various Anglophone leaders which led to even more instability in the conflict and labelled the affected regions in “special status”, which was viewed as inadequate. The lack of engagement in genuine dialogue with adequate representatives has created tension and further amplified the conflict. Violence still persists between the government and separatist groups, creating a humanitarian emergency. The government’s reluctance of adequate engagement and settling with the Anglophone representatives along with its continuance use of force has prevented the conflict from deescalating. External support and efforts have been rejected due to the government’s persistence against third party involvement, increasing the challenge to achieve peace.

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Source: ACI Africa

GOVERNMENT & ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS

The anglophone population has faced systematic marginalization, lack of cultural representation and exclusion under the dominance of Francophone ruling. To them, independence under the Ambazonian state is key; various representatives and activists stand with this viewpoint. One of them is the previous president of Ambazonia, Julias Ayuk Tabe who was arrested in Nigeria in 2018 and sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court along with a 428 Million dollar fine, and respite from an order by the UN and Nigerian court to release him he remains in prison, but still continues his activism calling the fight for independence “existential and non-negotiable".



Source: HRW



Source: Foreign Policy

GOVERNMENT & ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS

Southern Cameroonians (from the anglophone region), are facing penalties just because of who they are, a clear representation of the discrimination that has gravely impacted the peace of Cameroon. Another example of this discrimination, is another Ambazonian figure; Abdul Karim Ali, who has been detained since August of 2022 under the counts of terrorism as he remains in harsh conditions while describing the state of Cameroon as an “incomplete decolonization”. Countless other Ambazonians stand amongst the same viewpoints in a fight for freedom and autonomy, waiting for a place that they can feel safe in and call their own. However in this fight, the groups have also deterred to force, and the clash with the government has led to the loss of lives, and created instability which has harmed the nation's ability to develop and the lives of their citizens to progress.



Source: Cameroon Intelligence Report

GOVERNMENT & ANGLOPHONE POSITIONS

The crisis has become a matter of unity versus separatism, creating the question of what Cameroon holds for its future. Both sides are at opposite ends of the spectrum Pual Biya and the rest of the central government continue to remain adamant on the maintenance of a unitary state , as they believe it is “non negotiable” for national unity.



Source: African Arguments



Source: The Guardian

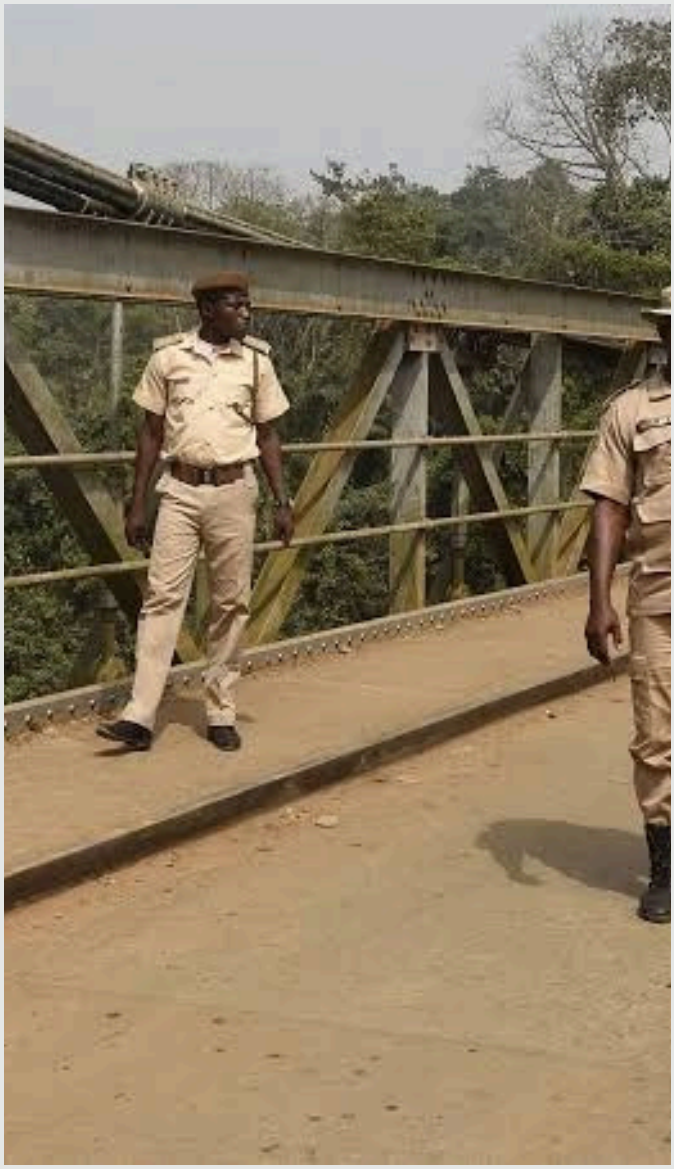
Whereas Anglophones believe that the “unitary state” is the cause of their marginalisation, and call upon a federal structure that retrieves the autonomy they had from 1961, others also believe that the federal agreement is not enough and demand full secession into an independent state called “Amazonia”.

National talks are not held effectively as the Ambazonian representatives view them as unequal and under government control. The unresolved tension continues to persist as the divide between citizens, language, values and ideologies continues to grow.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Nigeria has taken almost 70,000 Cameroonians in need of a home, these refugees have been mostly women and children who have crossed the border and situated themselves mainly in its Cross River, Bunue and Taraba states. The country has proven to be extremely supportive as it has allocated 100 hectares of land for the refugees to build farms and donated approximately 2.3 Millions USD for them to start new lives. It has also been said Ambazonian separatists have crossed the border on multiple occasions for firearms deals as well as recruitment for their groups from these refugees. Additionally some Nigerian officers have also been said to support the separatist groups and provide them arms deals. However in 2019 the Nigerian government pledged to stop the trafficking of firearms across the borders.



Source: Bloomberg



Source: The Guardian

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE



Source: Council on Foreign Relations

While it has provided support to the refugees, the government has maintained diplomacy in order of its own separatist problems. In 2018 Nigerian forces allegedly detained and arrested Ambazonian leaders including Julius Tabe to cameroon where they were sentenced to life imprisonment. However along with the UN the Nigerian courts have called for their release, but have been ignored. The AU (African Union), has acknowledged the humanitarian violations but has had to take a stance that aligns with it's principle of non-interference and territorial integrity so has encouraged dialogue and human rights but has not actively deployed any officials or led missions. The UN has also taken a human rights encouraged approach as its organisations provide support to the displaced populations and condemn human rights abuses from both groups. In 2019, it was taken to the security council but major powers who benefit from the francophone government opposed strong interference so the UN has provided aid, monitoring and has also called for dialogue.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

France, being a strong supporter of the Francophone government, has opposed separatist groups and has emphasized the need for dialogue to preserve Cameroon's unity, it has applauded the government for its initiatives and stated that the conflict can only be solved politically. The Amazonian groups have speculated that France has assisted the Cameroonian military groups , which they have since denied.



Source: The Guardian

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The US has documented human rights abuses, where in , 2018, American missionary Charles Wesco was killed by gunfire while visiting Cameroon



Source: CFR



Source: The New York Times

His family believe he was targeting the government claims he was simply caught in crossfire. In 2019 it did cut the military aid 117 million USD, currently it remains in a non-interference stand point but as the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to Cameroon in 2024. Other nations have called upon for dialogue and condemned the violence with some imposing sanctions, while others provide aid, and act as mediators. Multiple mediation attempts have been made by nations such as Switzerland in 2019 and Canada in 2022, however due to lack of trust and inclusivity as well the Cameroon government standpoint of not negotiating with "terrorists", effect has yer to me made and stagnated progress as without a third party there to monitor, communication is lacking and the conflict continues to heighten.

MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

The government takes control over traditional media, so it is often journalists are arrested and not able to publish what is truly going on in the country. Reporting from the regions of conflict has become close to impossible because of the government's control and some of the only outlets that function in the country just represent the government, take their stand and have a clear bias as they also call separatists terrorists, the portray the violence from the government military operations as peace efforts.



Source: Civicus Monitor

MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

Mancho Bibixy Tse was a journalist who helped launch the famous “coffin revolution” protest in Ambazonia and was arrested and is still serving his 15 year sentence in prison. He continues to protest behind the bars, stating he has “no regrets” and hopes to pass on his legacy to future generations. Another journalist, Samuel Wazizi was arrested in 2019 for his criticism of the government's handling of the anglophone crisis, he was also speculated to be in contact with the separatist groups. He later died under government detention. These are just 2 of the thousands jeopardised by censorship in Cameroon, which has not allowed for transparency and prevents from releasing the gravity of the conflict.



Source: LRWC

MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

In the 21st century, social media has become a platform for victims to turn to for support as they use it, share live footage, and gain support and funds while finding ways to oppose the censorship. While, it has led to the spread of misinformation which makes it hard to denote what is true, it has become one of the only platforms of expression. The government later restricted internet access in Anglophone regions, so now they are almost completely silenced and are not able to exercise their human right of freedom of speech.



Source: HRW



Source: Al Jazeera

Source: Human Rights Watch

MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

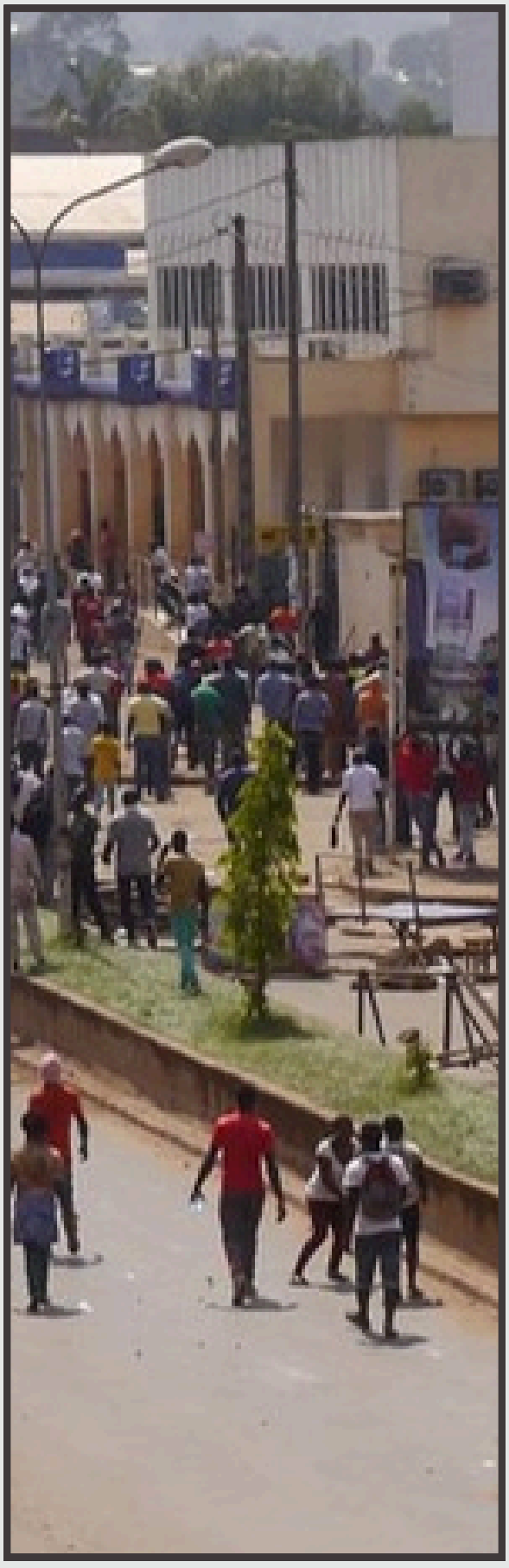


Source: Wikipedia

Nevertheless, Anglophone populations that have migrated use platforms to call for independence and peace while journalists in safer zones and promote peace in journalism. Despite the prominent censorship some media outlets (BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Human rights watch) have published reports exposing the infringement of human rights the war has caused.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

WHAT LIES AHEAD



Source: International Crisis Group

Deep rooted from colonial tensions, the anglophone crisis is more than a militant conflict, to resolve it other major factors such as structure, policy, and culture need to be addressed. Currently, both sides stand on opposite ends of a spectrum, but in order for peace they must reach a compromise. One of the most urgent steps is dialogue, right now the rejection of mediation and lack of open mindedness from both sides have stagnated progress and suppressed any possibility for growth. In order to have productive dialogue it is to be ensured that all stakeholders including separatist leaders, exiled activists, all political parties, mediators and citizen representation are involved. It needs to be done equitably without control from either side.



Source: Nationalia

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE INT'L EFFORTS

Weak governance is a cause, thus a reform is needed for stability. This requires true autonomy and inclusion for minorities that protect their language, education and justice systems while still maintaining unity. It is also vital that censorship is stopped, and prisoners who are imprisoned due to unethical reasons must be released while offenders are prosecuted. While all these measures are necessary they are extremely challenging to put into place due to the refusal of communication between both sides, corruption, and violence. While third parties support with aid, most remain at an un-involvement stand point, where there is not much pressure for change. Poverty continues to spread as violence deepens.



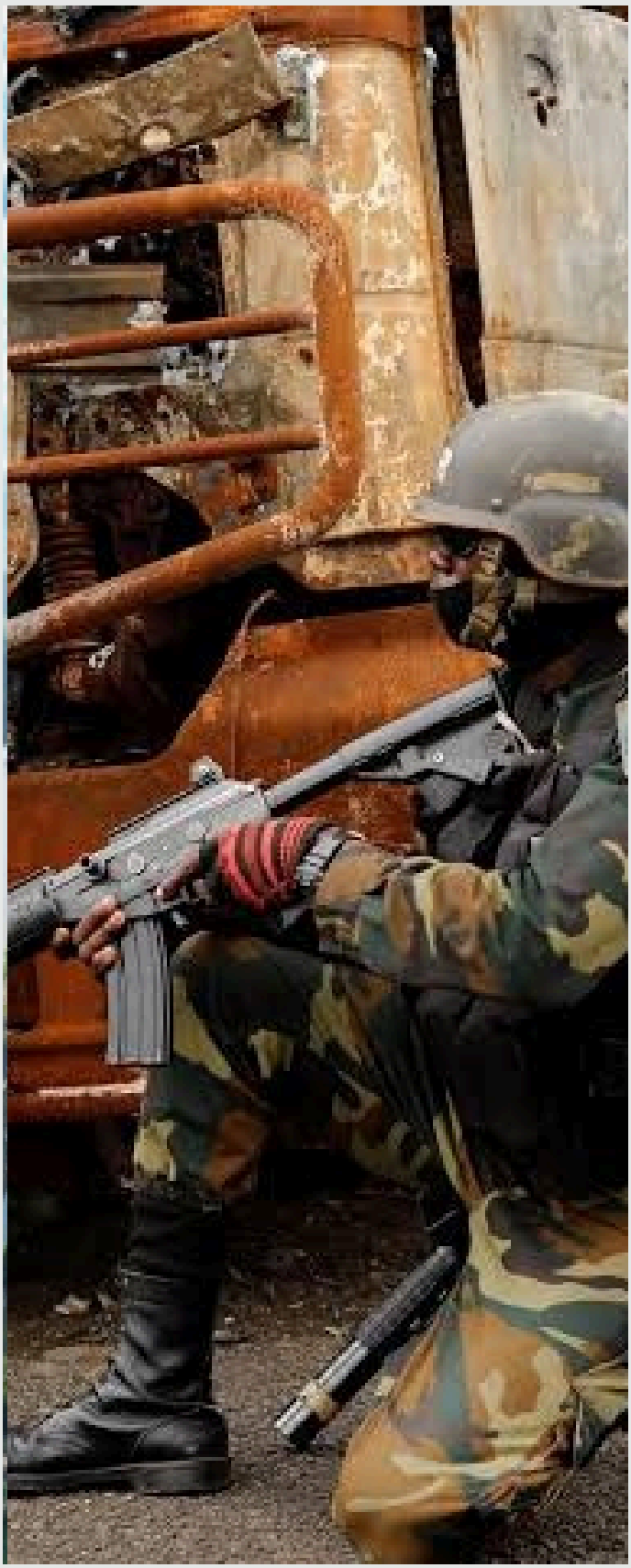
Source: International Crisis Group

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE INT'L EFFORTS

Nevertheless, progress is required. So while in the future fighting may continue, it is necessary for it to be less, as small steps are the only for systematic change. It is imperative that both sides recognize the need for diplomacy, open mindedness and reach a compromise that allows for the preservation of their people's lives and the development of their nation.



Source: Crux Now



Source: AlJazeera

THE BOTTOM LINE

The anglophone crisis is in need of recognition. Censorship and lack of involvement are the reasons this conflict remains in the shadows of the instability the world faces. However, lives are still lost in Cameroon everyday because what began as peaceful protests for recognition escalated into a war that has stripped millions of their lives, due to casualties, displacement, economic strain and lack of access to their human rights. While aid is being donated, it is not enough for the struggling Cameroonians, who are left victims in need of a miracle as they hope for better futures.

Tensions from post colonial times still pertain no matter how much time has passed, linguistic barriers have truly shaped the issues of modern Cameroon as Anglophones are fighting for autonomy and representation, while the government and Francophone regions are fighting for unity among their nation. On opposing sides, the two are unable to reach a compromise, leaving a humanitarian crisis in between. The future generations are unable to access education as schools in the Anglophone region remain closed. As the anglophones are scattered across the country unable to access what they need to live the lives that they deserve.

The failure of compromisation through dialogue has left its repercussions and the conflict has been escalating day by day. Ultimately Cameroon is reaching its breaking point and is in need for an emergent reform. The communities must find a way to co-exist peacefully, and a journey to a peaceful future where children can go to school, parents do not have to worry about finding a stable place to live and gunshots are no longer what take up the silence. Additionally it is imperative that no one remains voiceless and that the justice system lives up to its name. Cameroon needs to reach a point where it protects it citizens no matter what language they speak, so everyone has a nation they can truly call their home.

GLOSSARY

Anglophone: An English-speaking person. In Cameroon, it refers to the English-speaking minority in the Northwest and Southwest regions..

Francophone: A French-speaking person. In Cameroon, it refers to the French-speaking majority.

Unitary state: A country governed as a single unit, with most power held by the central government.

Federation. A system where power is shared between a central government and regional governments, each with its own authority.

Autonomy: The right of a region or group to govern itself on certain matters.

Secession. The formal withdrawal of a region from a country in order to become independent

Ambazonia: The name separatists give to the independent state they want to create in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. No government recognises it.

Common law. A legal system based on judges' decisions and precedent. It was inherited from Britain and is used in Anglophone Cameroon

Civil law. A legal system based on written codes and statutes. It was inherited from France and is used in Francophone Cameroon.

League of Nations mandate. Territory placed under the administration of a member state after the First World War, with the aim of eventual independence. Britain and France each administered part of former German Kamerun this way.

Internally displaced person. Someone forced to flee their home who remains within their own country.

Refugee. Someone forced to leave their country because of conflict or persecution and who has crossed an international border.

Censorship. The suppression of speech, media or information by a government or other authority.

Non-interference. The principle that states and international bodies should not intervene in another country's internal affairs.

Definitions taken from Oxford Languages (unless otherwise specified)

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