

VERIFICATION REPORT

Ngarbuh Massacre, Ntumbaw, Cameroon

Date of publication: December 8, 2020



Date of event: February 14, 2020

Coordinates: 6°17'44.6"N, 10°50'52.7"E

Location: Ngarbuh, Donga-Mantung Division, North-West Region, Cameroon

Team: Database Research Team

Synopsis: Over 20 civilians were reported to be killed in an incident in the small farming village of Ngarbuh, near Ntumbaw in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The burning of multiple buildings was also reported. Geolocation using available evidence and satellite imagery corroborated these reports, specifically identifying a key site. The assessment of all available evidence, including eyewitness accounts, suggests that members of the military of Cameroon, in collaboration with local herdsmen, were responsible for perpetrating the incident.



Cameroon Anglophone Crisis
Database of Atrocities

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1. About the Database

The Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities is the product of an impartial, independent group of researchers and civic leaders, dedicated to recording and investigating human rights abuses committed by all actors during the Anglophone Crisis. Our team includes researchers at University of Toronto, Leiden University, the Edinburgh International Justice Initiative (EIJI), University of California-Berkeley's Human Rights Center Investigations Lab, and Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps, with support from the Anglophone Crisis Monitoring Project, other OSINT verifiers, and the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA).

The Database accepts incidents through an anonymous reporting portal, using Ushahidi software, and also through WhatsApp and email submissions. Researchers work to investigate and verify incidents where the level of evidence permits. This Database is apolitical and will always avoid any partisan interference. It is hosted at University of Toronto (Canada) for reasons of neutrality and cybersecurity.

Contributors to this report:



2. Executive Summary

The Ngaruh Massacre drew significant international attention to the Anglophone Crisis. The Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities, hereafter referred to as 'the Database,' received the first reports of this event on February 14, 2020, the same day it occurred. Immediate efforts were undertaken to attempt to geolocate the incident, while reports continued to be submitted into the Database. In total, 14 individual reports were submitted to the Database relating to the massacre.

The Database team initially identified an approximate search area, using multiple submissions of coordinates. This search area was located south of Ntumbaw, but limited satellite imagery in the days after the event constrained the extent of analysis that could be performed. Planet Labs 3m imagery was consulted but was found to be too imprecise at that time to closely locate the incident sites. Furthermore, widespread crop burning in the area provided further challenges and complicated geospatial analysis. A Human Rights Watch report on February 25, 2020, indicated that they had identified the sites via satellite imagery; however, the imagery was not released. On March 6, 2020, a member of the *New York Times* Visual Investigation team created a Twitter thread showcasing their analysis of satellite imagery, highlighting some of the burned buildings.

The *New York Times* evidence found the site of the incident to be slightly further south than suggested by the coordinates submitted to the Database. The *New York Times* also had higher-resolution satellite imagery than the Database had available at the time.

The Database team undertook a deep review of the *New York Times* satellite imagery evidence, using multiple other sources of satellite data and OSINT methods to compare findings. By reviewing the video footage frame-by-frame and comparing to the site proposed by the *NYT*, the Database found them to be an exact match. Key features that facilitated geolocation included adjacent buildings, patterns of damage and vegetation coverage.

Our analysis supports that Cameroonian military forces, along with local armed Fulani, perpetrated the Ngaruh Massacre. Indeed, the Cameroonian government admitted culpability on April 21, 2020. The military trial for those involved in the incident is set to begin on December 17, 2020.

3. Data Sources

Video and Images

Images and videos used for this investigation were submitted anonymously to the Database, sourced through searches on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter), and found in outputs by Human Rights Watch and the *New York Times*. The images and videos primarily depicted the aftermath of the incident.

Satellite Imagery and Remote Sensing

A wide combination of satellite imagery sources and remote sensing tools were used to assist with this investigation.

1. Google Earth
2. Google Maps
3. Satellite Live
4. Maxar (Imagery from data search)
5. Planet Labs Daily Imagery and Monthly Mosaics
6. Sentinel Hub EO Browser (Including the Wildfire/Burn scripts)
7. EOS – Kompsat 2 Imagery (Bought)

Media Reports and Other Sources

The list of outlets that carried articles about this incident comprises Agence France Presse, Al Jazeera, BBC, Cameroon News Agency, Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Christian Post, Crux Now, CNN, Human Rights Watch, Journal du Cameroun, Mimi Mefo Info, The Africa Report, The East African, The New Humanitarian, the UN, and Voice of America. The full list of articles appears in the References section, and a synthesis of the contents of the articles appears in both the Event Details section and Appendix I. Appendix II provides a comparison between the media reports and the communiqué released by the Joint Commission of Inquiry on the Ngarbuh Massacre.

4. Location

Geolocation of Incident Sites

Reports submitted to the Database provided four different sets of coordinates in the general vicinity of the town of Ntumbaw, which lies to the east of Ndu. Using satellite imagery, these locations were compared to the video and images that existed of the incident sites. No matches were found. Various reports on social media placed the location of Ngarbuh to be south of Ntumbaw, on the border of Donga-Mantung Division and Bui Division in the North-West Region of Cameroon.

Using these reports and the coordinates that were provided via the Database (Figure 1), an estimated search area was created to the south of Ntumbaw (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Map of Ntumbaw showing some of the provided coordinates



Figure 2: Early search area, focused south of Ntumbaw

High-resolution satellite imagery was not readily available in the immediate aftermath of the incident; however, free services provided by Planet Labs and the Sentinel Hub software (Sentinel-2 satellite) offer regularly updated (sometimes daily) imagery. Using false-colour indices on Sentinel Hub, areas of change were identified to the south-east of Ntumbaw, dated to February 14, 2020. These correlated with other burned sites nearby; however, no properties could be identified within these areas. Although this site seemed promising at the time, upon further analysis, these areas were suspected to be burnings associated with agriculture. These large-scale burnings show up relatively clearly on Sentinel-2 imagery. Following further study of the images from Ngarbuh, no large areas of burning on the landscape were identified, which ruled out this site.

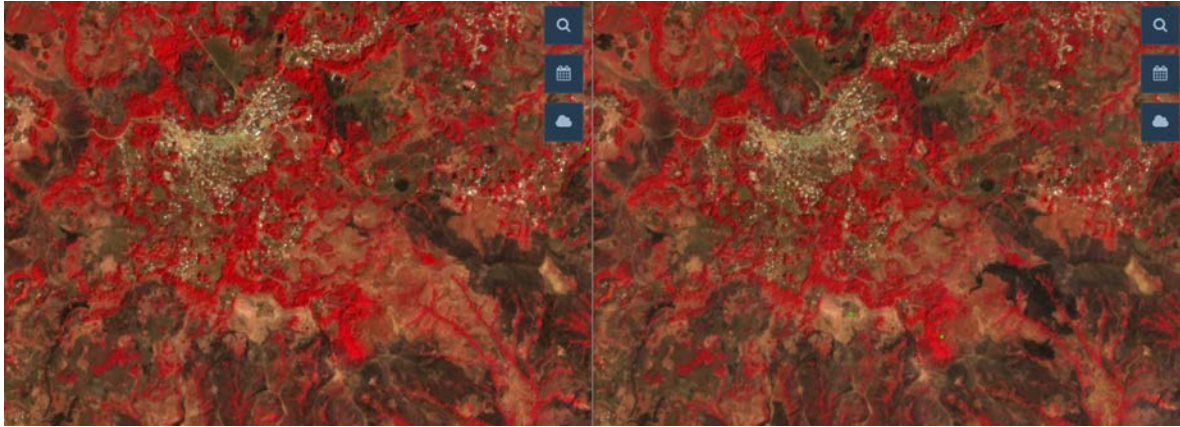


Figure 3: Area of burning identified from the Sentinel Hub platform

Due to the lack of high-resolution imagery, researchers paused their investigation until better imagery became available. The Human Rights Watch report cited satellite imagery evidence, but this imagery was not released. However, this implied that our investigation should bear fruit once high-resolution imagery was available.

The major breakthrough occurred on March 6, 2020, when the *New York Times* Visual Investigations team experts announced on Twitter that they had geolocated the incident, with a thread providing a rough overview of their methods. They did not provide a step-by-step guide to their geolocation, however. Given that the Cameroonian government had denied the incident, the Database decided to reverse-engineer the imagery released by the *New York Times* to identify the site and match it precisely to the video and image evidence provided by witnesses.



Figure 4: Imagery identifying incident sites in Ngarbuh (*New York Times*)

The *New York Times* satellite imagery located five sites in the vicinity of two villages contained within Ngarbuh: Ngarbuh 2 and Ngarbuh 3. No general location imagery was provided, making the identification of even these sites a challenge. Satellite imagery was matched using the distinctive shape of the village to the left. Ngarbuh was found to be 4.25 miles south of the centre of Ntumbaw, and a significant distance from the coordinates that the Database had initially received.



Figure 5: Distance and location of Ngarbuh compared to Ntumbaw

To fact-check the *New York Times* evidence, researchers sourced a comparison image from the Harris Geospatial/Mapbox website, as seen below. The image was captured some time before the incident, making it a highly valuable comparison layer.

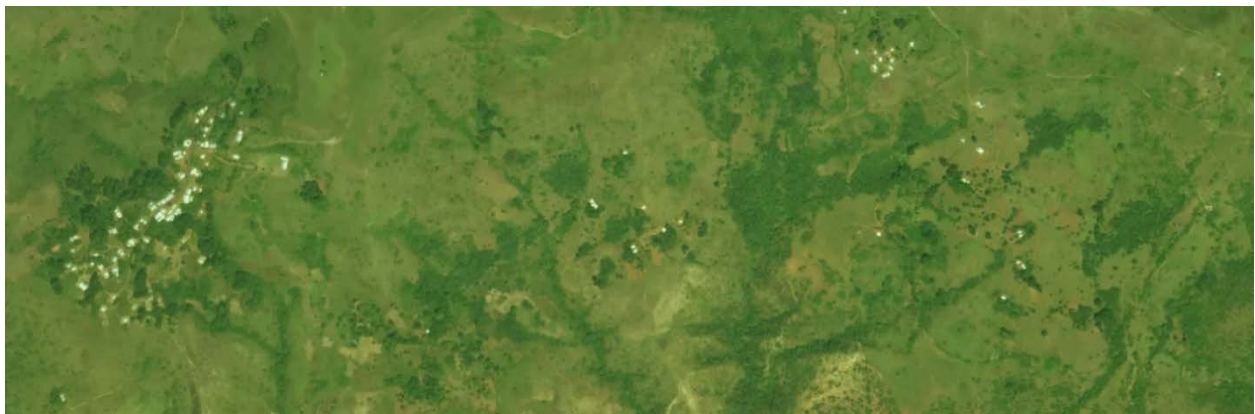


Figure 6: Pre-incident comparison image (Harris Geospatial/Mapbox)

Specifically, the *New York Times* evidence highlighted the northernmost building in Figure 7 as being that shown in the video evidence. By comparing the available satellite evidence with the video and image evidence, we were able to confirm this finding.



Figure 7: Damaged Ngarbuh buildings (*New York Times*)

Firstly, the video evidence was reviewed frame-by-frame, identifying key features that would help geolocate the site. Figures 8 and 9 highlight a pathway (1) that leads away from the property towards trees and vegetation. No other buildings can be seen in Figure 8's video frame. The blue arrow in Figure 9 indicates the perspective from which this frame was taken. Figure 10 helps to demonstrate the damage inside the building. Due to how reflective they are, tin roofs are typically easy to spot via satellite imagery. As a result of this, a damaged tin roof is theoretically also easy to spot, as it will show a change in appearance from before and after the incident. Figure 10 shows extensive damage to the roof at the rear of the property, which fits nicely with the satellite imagery. Figure 11 is even more helpful, as it clearly shows that parts of the roof are intact towards the front of the property, which should be visible on the satellite imagery. Figure 12 provides further valuable evidence. This frame was taken looking directly outside from the entrance of the damaged building. It is possible to see smoldering buildings in the background, identifiable due to the blue-looking smoke that is still being emitted in the background. These buildings are evidently opposite the main burned structure and are adjacent to two intact structures. Tall trees are also visible in the background. The *New York Times* imagery in Figure 7 clearly shows the other burned structures, and most importantly, illustrates that the roof of the burned main structure was largely burned at the back, and is still intact at the front.

From our analysis, it is evident that the geolocation performed by the *New York Times* is entirely accurate, and therefore we can conclusively state that this is the site of the Ngarbuh Massacre. An early account provided by the government of Cameroon suggested that the buildings were destroyed by fire due to a fuel leak and explosion. The *New York Times* analyst on Twitter pointed out that this was highly unlikely, as fire paths were not visible in the video evidence. This is further reinforced by the satellite imagery consulted during the course of this investigation, as a large fire path like that would have been visible in the Sentinel-2 imagery in particular, as seen with crop burnings in the area. As such, the government's assertion is found to be unsupported.

Ngarbuh Evidence
Scene 1
00:05

- Environmental Evidence**
- Note the pathway leading away from the right of the property.
 - Note the lack of other visible buildings.
 - Note the general orientation of the vegetation and trees.



Figure 8: Ngarbuh Evidence Scene 1



Figure 9: Satellite imagery comparison to Figure 8

Ngarbuh Evidence
Scene 2
01:01

Key Evidence
Fire damage to tin roof.
• Note the extensive damage to the roof at the rear of the property.
• This should be clearly visible on satellite imagery.



Figure 10: Ngarbuh Evidence Scene 2

Ngarbuh Evidence
Scene 3
01:39

Key Evidence
Fire damage to tin roof.
• Note how the damage to the roof is largely focused on the rear of the building and should show clearly on satellite imagery.
• The roof at the front of the property is likely to appear relatively intact on satellite imagery.



Figure 11: Ngarbuh Evidence Scene 3

Ngarbuh Evidence
Scene 4
01:48

Environmental Evidence

- Note the general vegetation surrounding the structures.
- Note the tall trees in the area directly behind the structures.

Key Evidence

You can see a smoldering structure here that was evidently also burned down.

- The blue plume is clear against the green vegetation, despite the low quality of the video.
- We should therefore expect to see evidence of other burnt structures adjacent to the two buildings to the right.



Key Evidence

Two additional structures with tin roofs which should show up on satellite imagery.

- Note the perpendicular orientation of the adjacent structures.
- Note the distance from the viewpoint of the video.

Figure 12: Ngarbuh Evidence Scene 4

Geolocation of Grave Sites

Grave Sites

Media reports suggest that up to four mass grave sites were created in Ngarbuh to hold the bodies of the deceased. Three grave sites have been shown in images or video, to varying extents. This leaves one grave site potentially unaccounted for.

Grave Site A

Grave Site A was featured in a photo (Image 1) circulated after the incident, including by *Cameroon News Agency*. The photograph shares familiar features with the landscape of the original Ngarbuh video footage, and further analysis exactly matched these features. A video frame taken from the original Ngarbuh video (Image 2) helps show these matching features. Crucially, the two buildings in the background are identical in orientation and shape. It is therefore possible to conclusively situate Grave Site A as being located just in front of the damaged building shown in the original Ngarbuh video.



Image 1: Grave Site A



Image 2: Matching landscape of Grave Site A from video evidence

Grave Site B

Grave Site B was shown in two photographs around the time of the incident. They show a burned-out, heavily damaged building, and an adjacent mound of dark earth. The position of corrugated tin between the two photos is an exact match; thus, it is clear that the two photos are of the same location. It appears to be a smaller grave site. There are two potential locations of this site, but it has not been possible to conclusively geolocate Grave Site B.

Grave Site C

Another photo circulated a few weeks after the attack, and featured on the Human Rights Watch website, shows a larger grave, surrounded by stones. Due to the limited environmental details visible in the photograph, it has not been possible to geolocate this grave site.

Grave Site D

Grave Site D was unknown until new video footage emerged of a mass burial. As discussed previously, the *New York Times* analysis showed that this video footage originated from Ngarbuh. The Database has been able to geolocate this grave site through close analysis of the video and satellite imagery.

During close analysis of the video, a feature was identified that was also visible in the other new Ngarbuh video: a large log, lying on its side against a rock. Adjacent to this large log was a thinner stake, rising vertically from the earth. While only fleeting, a glimpse of this feature can be seen in both videos. We can thereby confirm that these two videos were taken at the same location; thus, the mass grave must be adjacent to the location shown in greater detail in the other video. This was further reinforced by checking the clothing of the bodies being buried and matching them to the bodies shown in the other video. Some of these bodies were found to be a match. Thus, there is a clear relationship between the locations of the two videos.

Despite these identifiers, locating Grave Site D itself from satellite imagery remained a challenge. Three of the incident sites identified by the *New York Times* were highlighted and then checked against the video footage. To make this possible, researchers drew a rough plan of the environment shown in the video, and then compared it against satellite imagery of the potential site locations. One crucial feature that could be used for identification was the narrowness of the first building in the video. This building was only a few meters wide from the visible entrance, and it was set forward of the second building. The second building was evidently much longer than the first. A tree is visible in the gap between the buildings. From the satellite imagery, this layout matches the burned buildings that can be seen smoking in the original Ngarbuh video. A problem with this theory is the adjacency of two unburned structures in immediate proximity. Neither video showed the angles that would have covered these two properties very well, and they are not clearly visible. From the satellite imagery, it was clear that the grave must be located just outside one of these properties – and that a large portion of the mass grave video was taken from outside this property, facing away from it.

Reviewing the mass grave footage very closely, a consistent, straight-edged shadow is visible in the footage, being cast from behind the camera. Other frames show the shadow to be consistent with that of a building as opposed to that of a tree. This is reinforced by looking at parts of the video footage in forensic detail, which reveals an individual frame in which the camera is pointed towards the very bottom of the building, and small details can be made out including the shape of wall.

We therefore conclude that Grave Site D, as featured in the mass grave video and in the second Ngarbuh video, is located adjacent to the properties seen smoking a short distance away from the original property.



Image 13: Grave Site B



Image 4: Second shot of Grave Site B



Image 5: Grave Site C

5. Date and Time

Of Incident

Articles by international and Cameroonian media, and reports by human rights organizations citing primary interviews with residents and survivors of the incident, indicate that the main part of the massacre in Ngarbuh occurred in the early morning of February 14, 2020.

Of Video Evidence

Based on analysis of the video, it is believed that the incident did indeed take place on February 14, 2020, and no source of evidence has contradicted that information. The first video capturing the aftermath of the incident is believed to have been taken between 7:00 and 11:00 (Cameroon Local Time), based on the available weather and sun information available on that date in the Ngarbuh-Ntumbaw area. The fact that this video was taken early in the day, in the apparent aftermath of the attack after word had spread, supports the idea that the incident occurred in the early hours of the morning on February 14. It is believed that the video showing the burials in mass grave likely occurred later in the day, between 12:00 and 16:00 (Cameroon Local Time).

6. Perpetrators

In the immediate aftermath of the incident, numerous eyewitnesses identified both the military of Cameroon and local Fulani/Mbororo herdsman as being involved in the incident. Numerous news reports also alleged these perpetrators, with a Human Rights Watch report firmly placing the blame on the military of Cameroon. This was initially officially denied by the government of Cameroon.

One prominent individual associated with the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR, an elite section of Cameroon's defence and security forces) offered an explanation that placed the blame on armed separatist actors, suggesting that government forces had turned back from Ngarbuh, and that the incident had in fact been caused by fighting between a group led by non-state armed group "General" No Pity and local separatist fighters in a case of mistaken identity.

Following an investigation, the Cameroonian government's Joint Commission of Inquiry released a communiqué on April 21, 2020, which clearly placed the blame for this incident on government forces and their allies. The report stated that three military servicemen were accompanied by two gendarmes, who then enlisted the support of 17 local vigilantes (widely believed to be Fulani herdsman, as previously mentioned). The names of some of the soldiers involved in the incident are as follows:

- **Major Nyiangono Ze (Charles Eric)**

Major Nyiangono Ze signed off on the operation, although he was reportedly not present during the incident. As the troops involved were under his command, he is to be tried in court as part of the forthcoming trial.

Major Nyiangono Ze attended the prestigious Saint-Cyr Special Military School in France in 2006, and received a diploma of International Relations and Strategy¹. He was promoted to Lieutenant/Second Lieutenant in 2008², and later to Commander of the 52nd Motorized Infantry Battalion (BIM) in 2016.³

- **Baba Guida**

Little is known about Baba Guida; however, a soldier by the name of 'Baba Guida Alim Louma' was recruited by the Cameroonian army as an 'ordinary soldier' in 2011.⁴

- **Gendarme Sanding Sanding Cyrille**

- **Soldier First Class Haranga**

¹ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000818566&categorieLien=id>

² <https://www.barreaucameroun.org/site/pdf/JO%20-%202008%20-%20n%c2%b012.pdf>

³ <https://www.prc.cm/fr/actualites/actes/arretes/1669-arrete-n-0109-cab-pr-du-17-fevrier-2016-portant-nomination-de-responsables-au-ministere-de-la-defense>

⁴ <https://www.camexamen.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Recrutement-armees-2011.pdf>

7. Event Details

This section is created from primary-source accounts recorded in news articles about the Ngarbuh incident. The full list of articles consulted appears in the References and Appendix I.

Ngarbuh is a collection of three villages: Ngarbuh 1, 2, and 3. The massacre appears to have occurred in Ngarbuh 3, which is composed of Fulani homes plus four non-Fulani compounds. Additional damage occurred in Ngarbuh 2. According to primary sources, in the early morning on February 14, 2020, ten to 15 members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and at least 30 armed Fulani attacked the four compounds of Ngarbuh 3, shooting the occupants dead and then “roasting” many of them (i.e., burning their corpses). In the first house, the attackers killed and roasted seven people (Sika’s family). In the second house, the attackers killed and roasted nine people (Kwecheri’s family). In the third house, the attackers killed and roasted two people, a pregnant woman and an old man. In the fourth house, the attackers killed and roasted three people. Witnesses told The New Humanitarian that the “attackers swept through the village, shooting indiscriminately at fleeing men, women, and children. Some victims were shot dead in the street and their corpses set on fire where they fell; others were dragged back into their homes, which were then set alight.”⁵

After the massacre in Ngarbuh 3, the military and Fulani seem to have gone to Ngarbuh 2, where they “rounded up and beat dozens of men, stole cell phones, looted homes, and warned residents that they would return in three days and kill anyone who remained in the village. Any retaliation against Fulani in the area would also be met with death, the attackers told residents.”⁶ Human Rights Watch also said that the military addressed and threatened residents in Ngarbuh 2, “admitting that they had killed children in Ngarbuh 3, and saying that they would do the same in Ngarbuh 2,” if Ngarbuh 2 “continued to shelter separatists.”⁷ A report by The Coalition of Civil Society Human Rights Organizations for Peace in the Anglophone Regions, transcribed in *Mimi Mefo Info*, says: “certain elements of the army implicated in the attack returned to the scene a few hours later to intimidate and proceed to seize the mobile phones of the inhabitants of the said village.”⁸

Overall, the numbers of dead reported range from 21 to 35, with most sources reporting 22-24 people. The United Nations said that 23 people were killed, including 15 children and two pregnant women, one of whom died at the hospital. Of the 15 children, nine were under the age of five.⁹ One source in *Crux Now* emphasized that “the Ngarbuh massacre is peculiar because of the kind of people who were killed: little babies, pregnant women and very old people.”¹⁰ Primary sources in news articles reported between nine and fourteen houses burned.

Although the Cameroonian authorities have suggested that gunfire from non-state armed separatist fighters was coming from the village toward the security forces, and that the two sides exchanged fire,

⁵ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2020/03/03/Cameroon-Ambazonia-Ngarbuh-massacre>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area>

⁸ <https://mimimefoinfos.com/government-has-failed-in-its-international-commitments-to-protect-civilians-coalition-of-social-organisations-on-ngarbuh-massacre/?fbclid=IwAR1nTsr-VpgdWS0g7pJmmbAJJbWgxtHNEXEM4MVsbK-EWpGXfdStUZlrS7k>

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25566&LangID=E>

¹⁰ <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2020/02/cameroon-priest-condemns-army-for-massacre-killing-at-least-22/>

no source reported an exchange of fire. Human Rights Watch explicitly stated: “[W]itnesses and residents with whom Human Rights Watch spoke said that there was no confrontation between armed separatists and security forces, that they heard no explosions, and that the killings were deliberate.”¹¹ Additionally, while the Cameroonian Joint Commission of Inquiry communiqué reported 18 killed (five armed separatist fighters, three women, ten children), no primary source mentioned any separatist fighters as having been massacred, and instead suggest that all those killed were civilians.

8. Conclusion

Our analysis supports existing accounts that conclude that the Ngarbuh Massacre took place on the early morning of February 14, 2020. Researchers believe that the first video capturing the aftermath of the incident was taken between 7:00 and 11:00 (Cameroon Local Time) on February 14, 2020, and that the video showing the burials in mass graves likely occurred later in the day, between 12:00 and 16:00 (Cameroon Local Time) on February 14, 2020.

Our analysis shows that damage was spread across a number of properties in the settlements of Ngarbuh 1, 2, and 3. Better satellite imagery would likely reveal further damage, but this was not available at the time. The distance between the damaged sites undermines any defence that it was a ‘accidental’ event. Instead, our analysis suggests that the attacks were deliberate. Furthermore, evidence showed bodies of deceased individuals at a number of the sites associated with the incident, highlighting that the killings were not limited to one location. Instead, the killing was widespread and indiscriminate, and many women and children are clearly visible in the evidence. Our analysis has also geolocated the estimated locations of at least two mass grave sites from the incident at Ngarbuh.

Our analysis supports that Cameroonian military forces, along with local armed Fulani, perpetrated the Ngarbuh Massacre. Indeed, the Cameroonian government admitted culpability on April 21, 2020. The military trial for those involved in the incident is set to begin on December 17, 2020.

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area>

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Media Reports on the Ngarbuh Massacre

This section synthesizes and triangulates primary-source accounts recorded in news articles about the Ngarbuh incident. The full list of articles consulted appears in References; however, the list of individual news sources is: Agence France Presse (AFP), Al Jazeera, BBC, Cameroon News Agency (CNA), Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), Christian Post, Crux Now, CNN, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Journal du Cameroun, Mimi Mefo Info (MMI), The Africa Report, The East African, The New Humanitarian (TNH), the UN, and Voice of America (VOA).

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of primary-source accounts of what happened, where and when it happened, and why it happened, as represented in Cameroonian and international news articles published about the Ngarbuh massacre.

Background

A source in CNA (Feb 22) describes Ngarbuh as a collection of three neighbourhoods belonging to Ntumbaw Village: Ngarbuh 1, 2, and 3. The source reports that the massacre took place at Ngarbuh 3, with some damage at Ngarbuh 2.

HRW (Feb 25) reports that at 23:00 on February 13, 2020, ten to 15 members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and at least 30 armed Fulani entered Ngarbuh 1 on foot, where they looted homes. “Some of these forces then continued to the Ngarbuh 2 neighbourhood, looting homes and beating civilians.”

Day of Incident: Attack on Ngarbuh 3

On February 14, 2020, soldiers and Fulani massacred civilians and burned homes in Ngarbuh 3. This February 14 incident is now known as the ‘Ngarbuh massacre.’ All primary sources represented in the news articles agree that the massacre in Ngarbuh 3 occurred on February 14, 2020.

A source in MMI (Feb 15) says that the soldiers camped in a hamlet called Chii, near Ngarbuh, the night before the attack. There, they met Fulani herdsman and other state-sponsored militias and passed through Fiiru (south of Ngar) before entering Ngar at 03:00 when they began burning and killing.

Primary sources quoted in MMI (Feb 15), HRW (Feb 25), and TNH (Mar 3) report the start time of the attack in Ngarbuh 3 as 03:00, 04:00, 05:00, and “as early as 6am” (MMI, Feb 14).

According to a source in CNA (Feb 22), Ngarbuh 3 has a population of 36 people, and is composed mostly of Fulani homes, plus four other compounds containing “about eight homes.” The first compound the attackers entered was “an isolated building with many occupants.”

HRW (Feb 25) sources state that in the first house, the attackers “killed seven people, including five children, all from the same family.” TNH (Mar 3) similarly reports a house of seven people killed. CNA sources say that six of the seven shot dead in this compound were then “completely roasted” (Feb 22).

MMI (Feb 19) republished a list—originally compiled by CNA—of the victims’ names. The seven family members killed in the first compound are listed as: Sika Ibrahim (age 45, father); Sika Assana (pregnant

mother); Sika Yasimiratou (age 12, class 6); Sika Amsa (age 9, class 4); Sika Alima (age 7, class 3); Sika Yamsi (age 6, class 3); Sika Soliatou (age 5, class 1).

A source in CNA (Feb 15) suggests the same: “A man I know so well who is called Seka was killed inside his house, including his 5 children and pregnant wife. They also killed a woman who is a neighbor and all her grandchildren.”

The compound of Gladys Kwitchere was the second to be targeted, according to HRW (Feb 25) and CNA (Feb 22), although the report by TNH (Mar 3) suggests that this was the first compound to be targeted. Multiple sources report that the attackers killed all nine members of the family living in that compound. According to TNH, the first victim was Gladys Kwitchere, a woman in her 50s, as she emerged from her house. The attackers then “entered her home and killed her daughter and five of her grandchildren, who were all under the age of 18 and one of whom was just five months old,” and then killed her two other grandchildren who had fled the house into thick brush nearby. “Both their bodies, in the brush, and the house were then set alight.” According to CNA (Feb 22), this compound includes three houses and a barn, and two of the houses were burned there.

The victims of this family are listed in MMI (Feb 19) as: Kwecheri Gladys; Janet Ya’a (age 45); Shey Diana (age 15, class 6); Shey Midian (age 13, class 6); Shey Jude (age 9, class 3); Shey Cynthia (age 6, class 2); Shey Tracy (age 5, class 1); Mary Angel (age 4, Government Nursery School); Berinyuy (5 months old). CNA says that the photo circulated on social media of children killed were those from Kwecheri Gladys’s family.

According to HRW sources (Feb 25), in the third house, “military and armed Fulani killed two people, including a pregnant woman.” CNA (Feb 22) also reports that “a pregnant woman and an old man were killed and completely roasted” in a third compound. A source in MMI (Feb 19) who was checking livestock and heard gunshots “would late come back to find his pregnant wife and his father killed and completely roasted, the blood-stained compound testified to him that the victims were killed outside and thrown back into the house.”

The victims are listed in MMI (Feb 19) as: Pa Abdulai Sunjo (age 80); Muamshatu (age 30).

In the fourth house, HRW (Feb 25) sources say, military and Fulani “killed three people, including a child. A woman living in the house was severely wounded but survived. A relative of the victims said he found the sole survivor with machete wounds all over her body.” CNA (Feb 22) similarly writes that in a fourth compound (containing one house and one barn), three were killed and roasted.

The victims are listed in MMI (Feb 19) as Pa Alidu Bah (age 75); Kinyui (age 60); Mubela (age 7).

Witnesses told TNH (Mar 3) that the “attackers swept through the village, shooting indiscriminately at fleeing men, women, and children. Some victims were shot dead in the street and their corpses set on fire where they fell; others were dragged back into their homes, which were then set alight.”

Attack on Ngarbuh 2

According to TNH (Mar 3), HRW (Feb 25), and CNA (Feb 22), following the Ngarbuh 3 massacre, the military and Fulani moved on to Ngarbuh 2.

CNA (Feb 22) reports that the military razed one of the isolated houses on the way from Ngarbuh 3 to Ngarbuh 2, but that “[t]he occupants had already escaped by the time the militia got there.” Twelve HRW witnesses “described how security forces and armed Fulani pillaged homes in Ngarbuh 1 and in Ngarbuh 2, forced people outside, and beat them” (Feb 25).

In Ngarbuh 2, TNH (Mar 3) reports that the attackers “rounded up and beat dozens of men, stole cell phones, looted homes, and warned residents that they would return in three days and kill anyone who remained in the village. Any retaliation against Fulani in the area would also be met with death, the attackers told residents.”

Sources in HRW (Feb 25) said that the military and armed Fulani pillaged all homes in Ngarbuh 2 and pulled residents out of their homes to gather in the village square near the market: “Some people were tied up with ropes. We were forced to the ground on our bellies. We could not raise our heads. When you looked up, they would beat you with machetes...We were eventually released.”

According to an interview by AFP (published in Yahoo News on Feb 17) with a resident of Ntumbo, “People phoned us to say that soldiers had come and smashed down doors, opened fire on people and set homes on fire...People took shelter in the centre of the village. There was about 800 of them.” It is unclear whether the source was referring to Ngarbuh 1, 2, or 3.

As transcribed in MMI (Feb 21), a report by The Coalition of Civil Society Human Rights Organizations for Peace in the Anglophone Regions states: “After the massacre, the villagers say they received an alert they said came from the village chief of Ntumbuw [sic]...who relayed the threats of some soldiers, telling them that they had three days (72 hours) to leave the villages. otherwise, they would have expected the worst.”

HRW (Feb 25) similarly says that “after the killings, the military addressed residents in Ngarbuh 2, warning that their village would be destroyed if they continued to shelter separatists. During and after this speech, soldiers threatened people, admitting that they had killed children in Ngarbuh 3, and saying that they would do the same in Ngarbuh 2.” As transcribed in MMI (Feb 21), the Coalition report maintains that “certain elements of the army implicated in the attack returned to the scene a few hours later to intimidate and proceed to seize the mobile phones of the inhabitants of the said village.” James Nunan of the UN, as quoted in BBC (Feb 17), said: “Whichever group has done this has threatened that there will be more violence ahead.”

Victims

The numbers of dead reported range from 21 to 35, with most sources reporting 22-24 people. Sources in CNA (Feb 15), Al Jazeera (Feb 17), VOA (Feb 18), MMI (Feb 15), Crux Now (Feb 18), UN (Feb 18), HRW (Feb 25), and TNH (Mar 3) all report between 22 and 24 dead. The UN (Feb 18) says that 23 people were killed, including 15 children and two pregnant women, one of whom died at the hospital. Of the 15 children, nine were under the age of five. On February 15, MMI published that of 23 killed and wounded, 14 were killed and roasted; nine were killed but not roasted; 14 were children (11 girls and three boys) and seven were adults (three men and four women, including a pregnant woman); and two were wounded—one of which was the pregnant woman who other sources say later died at the hospital (see below).

A head teacher from a local government nursery and primary school cited in The East African (Feb 20) said that two of the children killed, age five, were pupils in his school.

Those reporting more than 24 dead include primary sources from the neighbouring Saan Village (“27 dead and more missing”) in MMI on February 15; CHRDA (“at least 27 dead”) on February 16; churches in the area (“at least 29 dead”) in VOA on February 16; and a resident who phoned AFP (“35 bodies recovered”) on February 17.

Multiple reports describe a pregnant woman who was severely injured in the attack and hospitalized, where she lost her baby and, later, her life. MMI (Feb 15) says she was hacked with a knife several times as she escaped and “was later brought to the Bansa Baptist Hospital in Kumbo where she was operated upon and her already dead baby removed.” The UN (Feb 18) describes two pregnant women among the victims, one of whom died of her injuries in the hospital. TNH (Mar 3) reported a pregnant woman who had lost her baby due to wounds and was receiving treatment in a hospital. Another source told MMI that “a pregnant woman was stabbed as well, she was rushed to the hospital, but she could not make it as she was pierced in the stomach” (Feb 14). According to the CNA list republished in MMI (Feb 19), this woman was Shuka (age 30).

Finally, sources report one boy wounded: “‘They shot another boy and we are trying to get him to Nso land for treatment, it is an emergency,’ a source told CNA on phone” (Feb 15). According to the CNA list republished in MMI (Feb 19), this boy was Justine (age 18).

Most sources mentioned that children and pregnant women were among the dead. One source in Crux Now (Feb 18) emphasized that “the Ngarbuh massacre is peculiar because of the kind of people who were killed: little babies, pregnant women and very old people.”

Burial

Two primary sources—one in Al Jazeera (Feb 17) and one in TNH (Mar 3)—said that the bodies were buried in four mass graves in four compounds. The source in Al Jazeera “said he helped bury 21 bodies in ‘four graves in four different compounds’ with the help of an associate” (Feb 17).

Houses Burned

MMI (Feb 15) reports that 13 houses were razed in Ngarbuh 3, across four neighbourhoods (Ngarbuh, Buh, Fiiru, and Mbam), along with one house razed in between Ngarbuh 3 and Ngarbuh 2. One eyewitness in Al Jazeera (Feb 17) spoke of nine houses burned, “and an unknown number of villagers displaced.” A local UN official quoted in MMI (Feb 17) said nine houses were burned down, although the attack primarily focused on two houses. VOA (Feb 16) cited the local Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches who said during their services that 14 houses were torched.

Perpetrators

All primary sources represented in the news articles said that the Cameroonian military, along with “armed Fulani” (HRW, Feb 25), or “state-sponsored militias” (MMI, Feb 15), perpetrated the attack, with one exception, as published in MMI (Feb 20): “In other interviews granted by some inhabitants of the village in the presence of the military [i.e., with Cameroonian military listening to the interviews], they all point accusing fingers on ambazonia boys for causing the havoc. ‘I was hiding and I saw the boys looting goods from my compound and later set ablaze the building. I could not talk for fear of attack’ one villager testified.”

According to the UN report (Feb 18), “[w]itnesses said some 40 armed men, including members of the security and defence forces, attacked the village of Ngarbuh.” Aid workers interviewed by AFP

(published in Yahoo News on Feb 17) said that witnesses similarly described “between 40 and 50 armed men—some wearing army uniform and some wearing masks.” HRW sources said the attacking group was composed of between 10 and fifteen members of Cameroon security forces and approximately 30 “ethnic Fulani men who wore civilian clothes and were armed with machetes, clubs, and hunting guns” (Feb 25).

The transcription in MMI of the Coalition report (Feb 21) offered a name of the person leading the mission of military and Fulani that they conclude after a fact-finding mission attacked Ngarbuh: “According to eyewitnesses and survivors, the joint mission was headed by the former combatant who led the armed group to Ngarbuh, a resident in Ndu town, Nfor Marcel called “Bullet” alongside two others [sic] ex-combatants around him. He ran away from work (fight), more than a year and joined the National Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Committee (NDDRC).”

Exchange of Fire

Although the Cameroonian authorities have suggested that gunfire from non-state armed separatist fighters was coming from the village toward the security forces, and that the two sides exchanged fire, no source reported an exchange of fire. HRW (Feb 25) explicitly stated: “[W]itnesses and residents with whom Human Rights Watch spoke said that there was no confrontation between armed separatists and security forces, that they heard no explosions, and that the killings were deliberate.”

Motives

Several sources, including some in MMI (Feb 14) and BBC (Feb 17), expressed shock at the massacre and said they “cannot tell what prompted the killing.” On February 17, the UN’s James Nunan told the BBC: “The people we’ve spoken to are extremely traumatised and didn’t expect this.”

Primary sources in Journal du Cameroun (Feb 17), VOA (Feb 18), CNN (Feb 17), HRW (Feb 25), and TNH (Mar 3) said that the attack was collective punishment for the community’s alleged support of separatist fighters, or an operation against separatist fighters hiding in or near the community.

HRW sources say that the military threatened residents that they would destroy Ngarbuh 2 if villagers “continued to shelter separatists” (Feb 25). A 45-year-old woman quoted by HRW (Feb 25) said, “The military broke into my house...They said my children were Amba fighters [separatists] and they searched for guns. They found none, but they beat me and said: ‘We have already killed children in Ngarbuh 3, so we can kill you too.’”

Also in HRW (Feb 25), a source suggested the attackers sought money as they pillaged homes in Ngarbuh 2. “A 32-year-old woman said that soldiers threatened to kill her if she did not give them money. ‘They kept beating me with the back of their guns and asking for money,’ she said.”

One source quoted in MMI (Mar 7) described the level of engagement of separatist fighters in the area as follows: “Ambazonia boys occasionally come to the quarter. When they come, they give instructions like respecting Monday traditional ghost town and calling for a school boycott. But before the killings on the 14th of February, it has been over a month that separatists have not come to Ngarbuh.”

Army spokesperson Commander Cyrille Atonfack told TNH: “The military were there for security operations, and they had information about the headquarters of terrorist secessionists [being in the village]” (Mar 3).

One source in CNA (Feb 15) mentioned that the military had invaded the Ntumbaw Palace one week before the Ngarbuh massacre, during the local polls on February 9, and forced people to vote. “They have created a military control post around the Ntumbaw Palace,” CNA wrote.

Alleged Murder of Source

Following the attack, one man alleged to have given his witness statement to the UN was killed. According to MMI (Feb 29), his name was Mallam Danjuma (known locally as ‘DJ’), and he was a resident of Kumbo.

MMI (Feb 29) and Journal du Cameroun (Mar 2) reported that his body was found mutilated in Kikaikelaki in Bui Division, “an area considered to be one of the strongholds of separatist fighters in that region. According to some unofficial sources, Mallam Danjuma became a potential target after he granted an interview to the United Nations on what allegedly happened in Ngarbuh village” (Journal du Cameroun, Mar 2).

An eyewitness source interviewed in MMI (Mar 7) says that other survivors “fear government’s reprisals if he identifies those giving clear facts and testimonies of the killings.”

Appendix 2: Comparison with Joint Commission of Inquiry Communiqué

The communiqué issued by the Joint Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Cameroon government characterizes the Ngarbuh incident with these key points:

- the village of Ngarbuh was a regrouping place and “logistics pole” for the supply of arms, ammunition, and fuel for armed separatist groups
- the separatist fighters abused the local population (rape, assaults, etc.)
- the government thereby authorized a reconnaissance mission
- three servicemen and two gendarmes left Ntumbaw at 22:00 on February 13, 2020, enlisted 17 local vigilante members along the way, and reached Ngarbuh on February 14, 2020
- the reconnaissance team split up—some went to Ngarbuh 2 and some went to Ngarbuh 3
- in Ngarbuh 3, the reconnaissance team launched an attack
- in “an exchange of gunfire,” five separatist fighters were killed, along with three civilian women and ten civilian children
- the servicemen panicked and caused fires to hide the facts

The primary sources are in line with the communiqué about the date and time of the incident; the presence of security forces and vigilante group members; and the burnings of bodies and homes. However, the primary sources differ from the communiqué in terms of the presence of arms, fuel, and separatist fighters; the number of security forces and vigilante group members involved; the geographic scope of the attack; and the number of civilian casualties.

The primary sources do not mention that Ngarbuh was a logistics pole for the supply of arms, ammunition, or fuel for armed separatist groups. One primary source stated that “Ambazonia boys occasionally come to the quarter. When they come, they give instructions like respecting Monday traditional ghost town and calling for a school boycott” (MMI on Mar 7). However, the source said that separatist fighters had not been to Ngarbuh for “over a month” before the massacre. Finally, the source said that “[n]o one sells fuel in Ngarbuh...people there are mainly farmers that have nothing to do with

fuel” (MMI on Mar 7).

Multiple primary sources describe a combination of state forces and armed Fulani as the perpetrators; however, the sources suggest there were 40 to 50. For instance, HRW (Feb 25) said that the attacking group was composed of ten to 15 members of Cameroon security forces, including members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), and approximately 30 armed Fulani.

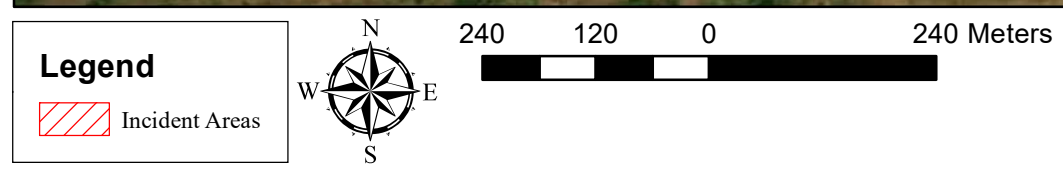
Multiple primary sources, including HRW (Feb 25) and TNH (Mar 3), mentioned violence perpetrated by soldiers and Fulani in Ngarbuh 2, as well as Ngarbuh 3. While the communiqué says that the reconnaissance team split up, with some members going to Ngarbuh 2 and others going to Ngarbuh 3, it does not indicate any violence in Ngarbuh 2.

The communiqué also describes “an exchange of gunfire.” No primary source suggested there was an exchange of gunfire. HRW (Feb 25) wrote explicitly that “witnesses and residents with whom Human Rights Watch spoke said that there was no confrontation between armed separatists and security forces, that they heard no explosions, and that the killings were deliberate.”

The numbers of dead reported by news sources range from 21 to 35, with most sources reporting 22-24 people. Primary sources in CNA (Feb 15), Al Jazeera (Feb 17), VOA (Feb 18), MMI (Feb 15), Crux Now (Feb 18), UN (Feb 18), HRW (Feb 25), and TNH (Mar 3) all report between 22 and 24 dead. This contrasts with the communiqué’s finding of 18 dead.

The communiqué says that five of the dead were armed separatist fighters, three were women, and ten were children. In contrast, no primary source mentioned any separatist fighters as having been massacred, and instead suggest that all those killed were civilians. The UN (Feb 18) says that of the 23 they reported killed, 15 were children. MMI (Feb 15) published that four women and three men were killed in the attack, in addition to 14 children.

Multiple primary sources report that the attackers set houses on fire and burned the bodies of some of those killed. This is in keeping with the communiqué’s finding that the “panic-stricken” servicemen, “with help of some members of the vigilante committee, tried to conceal the facts by causing fires” (Communiqué, page 3).



Ngarbuh Incident Figure 1: Site Overview
Incident Located at Ngarbuh, Donga-Mantung/Bui Division, Northwest Region, Cameroon.
Coordinates: 6°17'47.1"N 10°49'50.5"E



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Legend

 Damaged Buildings







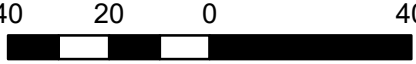
Ngarbuh Incident Figure 2: Incident Area 1 & 2
Incident Located at Ngarbuh, Donga-Mantung/Bui Division, Northwest Region, Cameroon.
Coordinates: 6°17'47.1"N 10°49'50.5"E



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Legend

-  Video Viewpoints
-  Mass Graves
-  Damaged Buildings

40 20 0 40 Meters

Ngarbuh Incident Figure 3: Incident Area 3
 Incident Located at Ngarbuh, Donga-Mantung/Bui Division, Northwest Region, Cameroon.
 Coordinates: 6°17'47.1"N 10°49'50.5"E