

**WPPJ Remarks During the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) Dialogue Event**  
**“Cameroon on the Brink: Envisioning a Way Forward for Southern Cameroons - A Global Solidarity Dialogue” February 11, 2021**

Let me begin by first extending my sincere gratitude to Dr. Leslie of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and to Ms. Shadia Marhaban, Mediators without Borders for graciously hosting, promoting, and facilitating this dialogue.

I have the unusual position to speak on behalf of the countless, faceless, and currently front-line victims many now dead, displaced, or in prisons who by far, comprise women and children under the banner: Women for Permanent Peace and Justice.

I begin my reflections today on the first anniversary of the Ngarbuh massacres of February 14, 2020, when the Israeli trained and U.S equipped Battalion Rapide d'Intervention of the Republic of Cameroon, locally known as BIR, burnt the Shey and Sika families in their homes as they slept. When the carnage was over, 33 people had been killed including 13 children and a pregnant woman. Rene Sadi, the Republic of Cameroon communications minister first denied all involvement and later claimed the military was there for only reconnaissance operations, then collateral damage. The killings were a deliberate and intended to punish the local population and anyone believed to collaborate with the restorationists. After strenuously denying its responsibility, the Cameroon government was finally forced to admit that its soldiers were responsible.

I begin here to note that from the beginning of the war till date, the international community including news outlets and human rights groups have FIXED the death toll in Southern Cameroons to 3,000 or just over. Their count has never changed since then!

Then there was Kumba Massacres on October 24, 2020.

And then Mauta on January 10, 2021. Just two days before, on January 8, the Minister of Armed Forces, Esomba, of the Republic of Cameroon, had issued a communique announcing the deployment of additional military into the Southwest region to clear the area of terrorists.

In just the few weeks of 2021, there have been the Meta Quarters execution of school children and the burning down of the Mbalangui village near Kumba. Before all these killings, there were Menka-pinyin March 25, 2018, Mutengene and Munyenge September 10, 2019, Bali massacres on November 22nd, 2018, The world has remained oblivious to all of them! We saw the burning of Mami Appia, the execution of Baby Martha in Muyuka, and execution of Julius Akum in Bamenda just to list a few crimes against humanity.

We had hoped the Ngarbuh massacres would be the red line of the international community for both the armed groups and the military of Mr. Biya to cease all hostilities or face real and actionable consequences. Alas, that would not be the case. Women and children received statements and thoughts and prayers round the clock on Social media. The killings continued.

It took a knee on George Floyd's neck to launch the greatest worldwide movement to end police brutality, discrimination, xenophobia, and antisemitism. It took MLK in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to bring

civil rights to the fore. It took 400 years to end slavery. Should we take 20 years to end this war by Paul Biya who continues to commit crimes with impunity against humanity?

I am optimistic despite these bleak statistics.

We have seen conferences across the Atlantic being organized on just one Senate Res. 684. We have gathered here in close collaboration in solidarity with the suffering people of SC to figure a way forward. We heard the opening salvo from US Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, on the war in Cameroon. Just recently, the Secretary of State for the Vatican, Cardinal Parolin was in Bamenda, the epicenter of the war, auspiciously for religious purposes, but in the end calling for peace and reconciliation. But can there really be peace without justice? The Church can no longer fail to act or claim as it did in other instances that it did not know.

WPPJ launched a global campaign calling on the Holy Father to take an active role in finding the way forward out of the crisis. We are happy to report that the petition along with our appeal was hand delivered. It is now left to be seen if the words of men of God will be one with their actions.

### **HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW.**

Last year, UNSG, Antonio Guterres, listed Cameroon among the top 5 crises in the world in desperate need of a ceasefire to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019 the Swiss agreed to mediate to end the crisis. To date, President Biya has refused to heed the call to end hostilities or to meet the restorationist groups in ACT (Ambazonia Coalition Team) for talks.

### **ROOT CAUSES**

The cause of the war is La Republique du Cameroun's continuing attempt to perpetuate its annexation, colonization and illegal occupation of the Southern Cameroons by military force.

Cameroon achieved independence on January 1, 1960 without the British Southern Cameroons (BSC) being a part of its territory. On that day, under the principle of intangibility of frontiers, its boundaries became frozen in international law. Cameroon has also undertaken in United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) instruments to confine its sovereignty to the territory she inherited at independence, which of course does not include the Southern Cameroon.

The British Southern Cameroons (BSC), with its own international boundaries, Premier, elected government, bicameral parliament, and all state structures and apparatus, was a UN Trust Territory under the Administration of Great Britain. At the time of its decolonization in 1961, the UN gave it only two choices: to achieve independence in association with Cameroon or with Nigeria. This required a UN-organized plebiscite. Prior to the Plebiscite held on February 11, 1961, Cameroon and the BSC reached a signed agreement that should the plebiscite go in favor of achieving independence in association with Cameroon, the two countries would form a federation of two states equal in status. The plebiscite went in favor of achieving independence in association with Cameroon. In keeping with its promise of independence to the BSC, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of BSC independence in Res. 1608(XV) of April 21, 1961 and set the date of independence to be 1 October 1961.

However, despite the fact that the plebiscite was in favor of BSC associating with Cameroon and despite the UNGA vote on BSC independence, the association in a federation never took place. Cameroon repudiated the signed agreements; amended its internal law and imposed it as the federal constitution on the BSC. The people of the BSC were never given any opportunity to endorse or vote on the constitution that was going to bind them. This constitution itself was adopted unilaterally by French Cameroon's parliament one month before the BSC ceased to be a UN Trust Territory. Article 47 of the unilateral constitution prohibited a change in the federal structure of the country. In 1972, Cameroon abolished the federation and imposed a United Republic of Cameroon and declared the two countries "one and indivisible". In 1984, Cameroon once again abolished the United Republic of Cameroon and renamed the two countries, "Republique du Cameroun", the name by which she obtained independence.

In the Paris Peace Forum of November 2019, President Paul Biya confessed that Cameroon's policy in all these years has been the total assimilation of the peoples of the Southern Cameroons. To confirm the annexation, Cameroon calls this war between the two partners, its internal affair! This is the case of two countries that were supposed to be joined legally as equals but one partner has annexed the other and denied it all possibilities of being heard.

In 2016 lawyers and teachers went on strike to protest the enforcement of assimilation which took the form of flooding their schools with French teachers who did not understand a word of English and the courts with Francophone magistrates who did not practice Common Law. The lawyers were beaten up and their robes seized. The government convened talks with the representatives of teachers and lawyers, but when the talks failed, their unions were banned and they were promptly arrested, charged with secession, and thrown in jail. On October 1, 2017, the people of the Southern Cameroons declared the restoration of their independence. On November 30th of the same year, Cameroon declared its war of enforcing its annexation on the people of the SC.

## **WHAT WPPJ SEEKS**

The US, Vatican, France, Switzerland, Britain, and African regional states can change the trajectory of this war if they choose. They just have to implement what they have already resolved on paper, namely, impose sanctions on those promoting the war or refusing to engage in 3<sup>rd</sup> party talks.

It should be noted that all the states mentioned have acted when much less or same was at stake.

Yemen is considered **the world's worst humanitarian crisis** with over 80% of its people in dire need.

Southern Cameroons is considered **the world's most neglected crisis** with over 4M in dire need of humanitarian assistance, 1M displaced, 400 villages burnt down, 8 out of 10 school age children out of school. While Yemeni got to the Stockholm agreement just 3 years into their war, the international community holds conferences, issues statements, and offers thoughts and prayers to the people of the Southern Cameroons under assault. Currently, the new Biden Administration is considering revoking the sale of killer aircraft to Saudi Arabia; however, France, Canada, and the US have replenished President Biya's war chest to the tune of millions of dollars. We are told it is

to combat the pandemic. But look at the women and children dying; little there to see for the aid or debt forgiveness from the international community.

The international community cannot become robotic to issue statements, make state visits, or hold conferences. What distinguishes countries is what they do with their words on paper. U.S. took a small step last year when the Trump Administration removed Cameroon from the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, AGOA, and defunded part of its military support. In the months since the global pandemic, the slush fund for President Biya has been replenished in the name of fighting COVID-19. France has moved to forgive some of its debts while also replenishing the government coffers to the tune of millions of dollars.

In poor countries, people tolerate this. They are told to just pray for peace and reconcile. Presidents hold power for life; the state has turned into an instrument of murder. Women for Permanent Peace believe that only through just solutions can there be peace. WPPJ is impatient and we believe those silent or complicit in what is happening to the people of SC stand with murderers against the oppressed.

WPPJ is appealing to the international community to:

1. Ask current UNSC members to take concrete steps at finding lasting peace by supporting third-part mediation, especially the Swiss-led peace process.
  - a. In the short-term there must be unambiguous assurance that Biya is engaged. A tweet by the former Swiss Former President, Mrs. Simonetta Somaruga is not enough. Some within the Biya government want this process slowed to a crawl in the belief that with time, they can have an outright military victory.
2. Leverage Senate Resolution 684 to:
  - a. Impose targeted economic and financial sanctions urgently against Cameroon and its officials, including all who perpetrate horrendous crimes against innocent civilians.
  - b. Get other stakeholders such as the African Union and the Central African States involved;
  - c. Deny spoilers the opportunity to thwart peace for nefarious gains.
  - d. Pressure President Macron of France to unambiguously accept, and positively support third party mediation, and cause Paul Biya to do same.
3. Take a firm position that it will not recognize an outcome based on violence, a position consistent with its denunciation of violence and peace born out of just solutions.
4. Support a resolution for an independent internationally mandated fact-finding mission to investigate the atrocity crimes.
5. Support the deployment of UN Peacekeepers to end the violence, allowing the return of IDPs, refugees, and establishment of safe schools for our children.

## **FINAL APPEAL TO SOUTHERN CAMEROONIANS:**

To all those who are leaders in their various movements and groups: The fate of the Southern Cameroons/Ambazonia is in your hands. How soon we end the war will depend on your actions. While all conflicts in collaboration are about the erosion of trust, we must build up relationships and put the suffering people foremost. Too many cooks end up spoiling the soup.