

April 2022

CAWOPEM Statement: 106th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on promoting respect for diversity, inclusion, tolerance, unity and opening civic space within the framework of combating and countering racial discrimination.

Speaker: Nicoline Nwenushi Wazeh

Ms. Chairperson in light of Cameroon's review, the Cameroon Women's Peace Movement (CAWOPEM) and the International Service for Human Rights are calling on Cameroon to better protect the Anglophone minority. Indeed, socially vulnerable groups within this minority such as women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and human rights defenders are often the victims of threats, intimidation, reprisal, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as summary execution.

We are worried about the devastating effects of the ongoing Anglophone crisis on the civilian population. We would like to point out the lack of political will and institutional weaknesses to halt attacks targeting ethnic minorities, both by non-state actors and state officials in the exercise of their functions.

We are convinced that for this crisis to end and to properly combat racial discrimination, Cameroon must give due consideration to the bilingual and bijural systems of Cameroon, to its multi ethnicity and open its civic space for human rights defenders and other civil society actors. This is an undeniable precondition to promote inclusion, diversity, tolerance and unity.

Cameroonian human rights defenders play a pivotal role in ensuring the rights of minorities, indigenous people and migrants. Yet they are themselves too often exposed to attacks, threats, intimidation, reprisal and harassment. The Cameroonian government has failed to fulfill its obligation to provide human rights defenders with a conducive and enabling working environment.

We would like to underline that the failure to protect human rights defenders is also echoed in the concerns expressed by the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the independent expert on minority issues during her mission to Cameroon.

Within this context, we strongly encourage the Committee to call on Cameroon government to:

- call for a ceasefire to end the Anglophone crisis,
- desist from any oppressive measures against ethnic minorities and human rights defenders,
- Ensure the rights of minority groups, women, migrants, indigenous people are protected at all time, especially in times of conflict;
- protect and prevent them from attacks by non- state armed groups;
- Allow the conduct of an independent inquiry into human rights violations committed by security forces and non-state actors against linguistic minorities,
- Ensure that deep-rooted and long-standing Anglophone grievances are genuinely addressed,

- Effectively implement the official policy of bilingualism, especially in employment, education and judicial procedures with clear benchmarks and deadlines for effective monitoring and evaluation
- Clearly state the content of the special status granted to the North West and South West regions as an outcome of the Major National Dialogue with clear benchmarks and deadlines to monitor and evaluate implementation;
- Legislate and establish a mechanism to protect human rights defenders with due consideration to the special needs of WHRDs;
- Undertake a census to map out ethnic composition in the country.

I thank you.