

## Baseline Research: Education in Crisis in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon

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*“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”*

Solidarity and Development Initiative (SODEI) is a UK registered non-profit organisation working to inspire and empower young people in Cameroon, by increasing their chances to succeed through creative and innovative methods of learning.

Our vision is a society where children and young people have equal access to education and opportunities, where they can confidently participate as agents of change and development while making positive contributions to decision-making in their homes, communities, and nation.

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# Statement of Research

## Integrity

SODEI is a not-for-profit organisation operating in Cameroon since 2018. The purpose of this paper/research is to provide an overview of the current state of education for children and young persons in Cameroon outlining and explaining different factors which affect the right to education. This research is in no way a political statement and should not be misconstrued to mean support or condemnation of any organisation or government. To arrive at the conclusions we make in this paper, we have consulted and duly cited books, articles, news reports and organisational reports relevant to the subject of the report. To illustrate our observations we have exercised honesty, care, accountability, and respect for all parties (subjects) involved. Should anyone have comments or questions about the ethics involved in this research or the veracity of the statements made herein, please contact SODEI directly.

# Executive Summary

The Anglophone regions of Cameroon have since late 2016 witnessed a sociopolitical crisis which has deteriorated overtime and led to violent clashes between armed forces, loss of lives and property, internal displacement and a growing climate of fear and incertitude. The current crisis has its roots in grievances which date back to the early 1960s. Recent events have led to the escalation of violence and armed confrontations between government forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). Much of this violence is targeted at local communities and, in particular, at schools, with pupils and teachers frequently facing attacks. The atrocities that have been perpetrated during these attacks have directly affected the areas in which SODEI works and operates. Schools have been regularly attacked by armed groups, and tragically this has led to the loss of lives and the horrific traumatising of many children and teachers.

NSAGs fighting the government adopted a school boycott/disruption strategy since 2017 to apply pressure on government. This was accompanied by Monday ‘ghost-towns’ and other spontaneous calls for ‘lockdowns’, especially on commemorated national days, sometimes lasting for several days. The school boycott strategy has had a severe impact on children’s ability to attend school and learn. Currently, there is disagreement as to whether there has been a shift from the boycott strategy. There have been no formal declarations from recognized non-state actors or groups involved. Calls for a return to normal functioning of schools from some individual actors have been challenged by other individual actors and groups. Meanwhile, schools and school pupils/students have continued to be subjects of attack and violence as of November 2020.

Defiance of calls for school boycott and other lockdown measures have led to repercussions. Students, teachers, and infrastructures of schools accused of ‘violating the boycott’ have been targeted. In addition, confrontations between NSAGs and state security forces around the vicinity of schools have sometimes led to casualties and caused trauma to pupils and students. Such instances have led to the suspension of school activities for several weeks, affecting many schools within the vicinity of the confrontation and beyond. This has caused many to question the presence of security forces around schools as a security measure.

In addition to the threat of or direct acts of violence leading to school disruptions, other factors such as social media misinformation, false alarms and panic have led to the further disruption of

school activities. The response from the Cameroonian government and external international institutions to the school crisis have been questioned. Many have blamed the government for not living up to its commitments to ensure a conducive learning environment, despite endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration in September 2018. UNICEF reported that as of January 2020, nearly 900,000 children in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon are impacted by the crisis and in accessing education. On its part, the reaction by the international community has not been robust enough in terms of condemnation and action to ensure that the right to education is upheld. The Norwegian Refugee Council has referred to the crisis in Cameroon as one of the most neglected in the world.

This research seeks to identify and provide an overview of all the converging factors leading to disruption of school activities, outline a timeline of school attacks, and provide an educational needs assessment for children of school going age in the Anglophone regions. It provides a brief background to what is now known as the Anglophone crisis, a timeline on attacks in schools and other factors including, social media misinformation, false alarms and panic, leading to further disruption of school activities. The report also captures the wider sociopolitical context and events that have a direct or indirect impact on the school crisis in the Anglophone regions, including national celebrations, the 2018 presidential and municipal elections, the impact of COVID-19, the Boko Haram crisis in the North, and the crisis in Central African Republic, which has spillover effects into the country. The report includes an educational needs assessment for the affected Anglophone regions and establishes that because of the violence and disruption, many have sought educational alternatives through informal learning methods, as well as relocating to neighbouring towns in the French-speaking parts of the country, or to other relatively safe urban areas of the Anglophone regions. The report primarily relies on secondary research, focusing on scholarly articles, relevant articles from reputable and unbiased news sources, press releases and other reports from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

SODEI exists to champion and empower children and young people through extending educational opportunities, encouraging civic engagement and nurturing youth participation. We believe unconditionally in the rights of children and young people to self-expression, equal opportunities and, most importantly, access to education. Furthermore, we believe in the importance of education as a universal right not only to improve and protect the lives of young people, but also to increase

the potential of any society for growth, stability and equality. In the light of these values, we are compelled to publicly declare our condemnation of any barriers to education and self-development that may affect children living in conflict zones or areas in which education has been targeted by violence and persecution. We would also like to extend our deepest sympathies, solidarity and support to those affected and their families.

As part of the international Safe Schools Declaration, Cameroon as a nation has a responsibility to ensure that safe access to education can be provided to every child. The atrocities perpetrated in recent years are violations of all human rights, and the rights of the child to safety, security, and education.



# 1. Introduction

Since September 2016, sociopolitical tensions have rocked the Northwest and Southwest regions, the two English-speaking (Anglophone) regions of Cameroon, in what is now known as the ‘Anglophone Crisis’. The Anglophone Crisis has its roots in the colonial heritage of Cameroon and events that date back to the early 1960s. The current crisis was prompted by strike actions launched by teachers and lawyers protesting what they described as infringement on their inherited Anglo-Saxon colonial systems of justice and education. The situation however escalated rapidly when security forces applied excessive force to quell the protests. What followed was violence and armed confrontation between government forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) which were formed as a result of what was perceived as excess repression on the part of the government, resulting in the loss of lives and heightened insecurity. This equally caused thousands to flee into neighbouring Nigeria, thousands more internally displaced, and loss of livelihood, among other unfortunate consequences. According to latest estimates, almost 3,000 people have been killed and over half a million displaced since 2017.<sup>1</sup>

The multiple NSAGs fighting the government adopted a school boycott strategy, Monday ‘ghost-towns’<sup>2</sup> and other spontaneous calls for shutdown of all activities in the regions, sometimes lasting several days and having a huge impact on children’s ability to attend school and learn.<sup>3</sup> Schools have been prime targets of arson and other attacks, while teachers and students have been victims of violence, assaults, kidnaping, maiming, and in extreme situations, cold-blooded killing.<sup>4</sup> International human rights organisations and crisis monitors such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group have all reported grave attacks against teachers and students, and arson attacks on school infrastructures since the start of the

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020: Cameroon events 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/cameroon>

<sup>2</sup> Since the onset of the crisis in the English-speaking regions, Monday has been used as a day of protest or boycott to send a message to authorities. On this day every business, public and private institutions including schools remain shut down in nearly all the towns and villages of the two regions.

<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group (October 19, 2017) Cameroon’s Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/130-cameroon-worsening-anglophone-crisis-calls-strong-measures>

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International (2018), A turn for the worse: Violence and human rights violations in Anglophone Cameroon. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/>

crisis.<sup>5</sup> The targeting of school infrastructure, teachers and pupils/students has created an environment of fear and prevented many parents from sending their children to school. Some have sought alternatives to formal education, some have fled to neighbouring French-speaking regions or relatively safe urban areas of the restive regions, while others have defied the ban on schools and the environment of insecurity and risked tragic consequences.

Besides the education ban and the resulting insecurity, other factors including false alarms and social media misinformation have led to further disruption of school activities. Despite the reported increase in school attendance as of January 2020, over 70% of children have been unable to attend school mostly due to parent's fear for their safety as the crisis persists.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this research is to provide relevant, contextual information which explains Cameroon's unique demographics, history, and educational needs given the current social, political, and humanitarian events impacting the country, specifically in the Northwest and Southwest Anglophone regions.

## 2. Methodology

This report primarily relies on secondary research, focusing on scholarly articles, relevant articles from reputable and unbiased news sources, press releases, and other reports from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This focus on reputable and unbiased resources provides a key strength to this report, as the goal is to provide readers with an objective report on the humanitarian crisis currently impacting the regions. The key weakness of this report is the lack of primary data for analysis and the reliance on secondary sources to assess the impact and needs presented by the crisis. The authors decided against primary data collection such as the exact number and location of operating schools in the region, due both to the difficulty in obtaining such information given the crisis, and the potential safety risk publishing those details could present.

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<sup>5</sup> See HRW Report 2020 cited in note 1, see also Amnesty International (2018) cited in note 4

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 - January 2020. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/unicef-cameroon-humanitarian-situation-report-no-1-january-2020>

## **Key Terms**

The authors have opted to use the term of Non-State Armed Groups, or NSAGs, to refer to those armed groups that are not affiliated with the current ruling, governmental bodies of Cameroon. Often referred to as separatists in the Northwest and Southwest regions, some of the more well-known NSAGs include the Ambazonia Defence Force, the Tigers of Ambazonia, Seven Karta, Southern Cameroons Defence Force, and the Lebialem Red Dragons.

## **Geographic Scope**

This research is focused on the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, also known as the Anglophone territories or Southern Cameroons. Some NSAGs refer to these regions as Ambazonia, in reference to the independence they declared from the Republic of Cameroon on October 1, 2017. The Cameroonian government refuses to acknowledge this declaration. The resulting conflict is known as the Anglophone Crisis.

## **Other Research Structures**

Although most educational systems are negatively impacted by the current humanitarian crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, the educational needs assessment included in this report is focused on primary and secondary education, for children between the ages of 3 and 17 years old. It is pertinent to note that children over the age of 18 are facing similar struggles to access secondary education in those areas most negatively impacted by the crisis.

# 3. Brief Overview of Social and Political Events Currently Impacting Cameroon

## 3.1. Anglophone Crisis

### 3.1.1. Brief History

What is today known as the ‘Anglophone problem’ has its roots in Cameroon’s colonial history and heritage.<sup>7</sup> Upon the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 by a British and French alliance, both countries proceeded to divide the country into two unequal parts in a treaty signed in London. While France took control of the bigger portion of the country, Britain occupied two disconnected portions referred to as British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons, which together made up one-fifth of the territory. At the close of the WWI, a League of Nations Mandate was granted to the territories to be administered by the two powers, followed by a trusteeship agreement under the same powers in 1946 after the creation of the United Nations (Ngoh, 1996).

The French and British established parallel administrative, educational, and legal systems in their controlled parts of the territory, each reflecting the practices in both colonizing countries. While the French established the Civil Law system in the French part of Cameroon, the British set up the Common Law system in their part; the Anglo-Saxon system of education was applied in the British occupied territory, while the French system was applied in the French occupied part. On October 1, 1961, in a UN plebiscite, British Southern Cameroon voted for independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon, which had gained independence from France in 1960 to become the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In May 1972, in a referendum the country voted to become a unitary state and by a presidential decree of 1984, the name of the country was changed from United Republic of Cameroon to Republic of Cameroon (Konings and Nyamjoh, 1997). These complex historical developments are still at the centre of present-day challenges leading to the current crisis.

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<sup>7</sup> Relief web (July, 2017) *The Anglophone Dilemma in Cameroon*  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/anglophone-dilemma-cameroon>

The reference to the Anglophone problem in Cameroon has come to be understood as the political, social, and economic marginalisation of the people of former British Southern Cameroons since it acceded to independence by joining the majority former French Cameroon in 1961 (Kouega, 2018). The crux of the problem has been repeatedly traced back to the controversies surrounding the reunification process that saw the collapse of the federal system.<sup>8</sup> The failure to harmonise or sustain the two parallel systems, alongside economic and administrative marginalisation only worsened the problem. For decades, the Anglophones have complained of unfair representation in government affairs, marginalisation resulting from the unequal and ineffective application of bilingualism, the dominance of the French language, excessive centralisation, and the lack of development in the Anglophone areas, all of which put them at a disadvantage in competing for resources and opportunities (Kouega, 2018).

The early 1990s saw the emergence of multi-party politics in Cameroon and the rise of the Anglophone opposition. The convening of a first All Anglophones Conference in April 1993 and the establishment of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) were significant events that marked the awakening of the Anglophone political consciousness. The SCNC proceeded with a diplomatic campaign for recognition of the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons at various levels including the United Nations and the African Union (Konings and Nyamjoh, 1997).

The origin of the ongoing Anglophone Crisis can be traced to a ‘sit-in strike’ initiated by lawyers in the two English-speaking regions on October 11, 2016 and a subsequent strike by teachers in these regions a month later. The strike actions were aimed at protesting against the perceived assimilation of the Anglophone education and legal traditions inherited from the British former colonial masters into the dominant Francophone system. This came after the teachers’ and the lawyers’ trade unions petitioned the government to address their grievances without success.<sup>9</sup> Almost a month later, on November 8, 2016, after security forces were accused of applying excessive force in quelling the earlier protests, lawyers mobilised for a second time adding a

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<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads’, Africa Report N°250 | 2 August 2017

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

demand for the return to a federal system and together with the teachers' trade union went ahead to establish the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC, "the Consortium").<sup>10</sup> Wider protests soon broke across the entire Anglophone regions, first as a direct result of the repression tactics used by the armed forces against protesters and then more globally against the perceived marginalisation of the Anglophones, leading to the birth of a secessionist movement which morphed into a complex socio-political crisis.

### **3.1.2. 'Ghost Town Days', National Holidays and other Commemorations**

Part of the strategy of the NSAGs fighting for recognition has been to impose lockdowns or Monday 'ghost town' commonly called 'Country Sundays'. This practice was later extended to national holidays such as February 11, May 20, and other commemorative days such as October 1. Operation Ghost Towns came into force earlier on at the start of the crisis when the Consortium imposed a two-day lockdown to protest security forces use of violence to quell a protest on the January 13, 2017.<sup>11</sup> "Country Sundays take place every Monday and on national holidays or commemoration days. Anyone not adhering to the movement faces harassment and threats."<sup>12</sup>

Operation Ghost Town proved successful as there was strict adherence. On such days, there would be little or no activity in almost all towns and villages in the Northwest and Southwest regions. All businesses, private and public offices remain closed and public transportation comes to a halt. In fact, these two regions become so quiet with no movements detected, especially during the early hours of the day into the afternoon, the reason for the appellation 'Ghost Town'.<sup>13</sup> With the arrest of the leaders of the Consortium, more ghost towns were declared. Sensing their arrest was eminent, the Consortium declared: "...more peaceful ghost towns from Monday to Wednesday every week...for a period of one month" in order to "tell the world our plight and suffering".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Mbom Sixtus, Cameroon: Activists call for month of 'ghost towns' moments before arrests and internet shutdown. African Arguments, January 18, 2017, <https://africanarguments.org/2017/01/18/cameroon-anglophone-activists-call-for-month-of-ghost-towns-before-arrests-and-internet-shutdown/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

Having recorded success, operational ghost town was quickly transformed into one of the main tools to challenge government authority. Mondays were declared ghost town days. This was also extended to spontaneous declarations of ghost towns on national holidays such as May 20 - Cameroon's national day; February 11 - the national youth day; and October 1 - the day considered to be the Independence Day of the British Southern Cameroons, with a very significant symbolic meaning to independence supporters.<sup>15</sup> Schools were significantly impacted by operation ghost town as even schools that managed to find ways around the boycott to continue operating, were closed on Mondays because of the threats of violence on such days.

As people became tired of observing ghost towns after the grueling impact it had on their lives and means of subsistence, they became reluctant in respecting them. Ghost Towns continued to be enforced through NSAGs using threats, attacks, arson on the properties of alleged defaulters, and kidnapping for ransom.

## **3.2. Other Socio-political Events currently impacting education in Cameroon**

### **3.2.1. The Boko Haram Insurgency**

The name Boko Haram literally translates that western education and values are taboo. The terrorist group Boko Haram started its terror operations in northern Nigeria which eventually spilled into neighbouring countries like Cameroon. The Boko Haram is a terrorist group which seeks the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria. Their activities include armed attacks on populations, looting, kidnapping, and suicide bombing amongst others. Between 2014 and 2016, the Boko Haram recruited both children and adults as suicide bombers and carried out over 400 attacks and 50 suicide bombings,<sup>16</sup>the latest reported on January 8, 2021 in northern Cameroon (Anadolu Agency, 2021). As a result of the terrors and heightened insecurity caused by their activities, education, like many other essential services, were and continue to be greatly affected in Cameroon's northern regions, especially in the Far North Region of Cameroon.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid Note 8

<sup>16</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Education Under Attack 2018 - Cameroon, 11 May 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5be94314a.html>,

Since their aim was to destroy the influence of western education, it is not surprising that Boko Haram attacks are characterized by the burning of schools, destruction of classrooms, killing and wounding of children.<sup>17</sup> Thousands of children in northern Cameroon, including many refugees from neighboring Nigeria were not able to go to school because of cross-border attacks by Boko Haram.<sup>18</sup> After being out of school for several months, for many children, the priority is not only to get an education, but the necessity of psychosocial follow up and assistance to manage the trauma they have had to experience.<sup>19</sup>

Internally displaced and refugee families have faced financial difficulties in their new refuge, considering they had lost their means of livelihood and could not afford school fees amongst other needs. Others, particularly the families of girls, avoid school due to the high risk of abduction,<sup>20</sup> especially after the Chibok incident where about 276 schoolgirls were abducted by the Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria in 2014, prompting a global outrage and several campaigns to #BringBackOurGirls on social media. Till date, some of these girls remain in the custody of Boko Haram<sup>21</sup>. Attacks on school structures and staff not only affects the right to education but also increases the risk for some children to be forcibly recruited by armed groups.<sup>22</sup>

The state of education in the Far North Region of Cameroon was rendered even more precarious by a crisis which met with an already strained education infrastructure. A report by the Friedrich-Erbert-Stiftung Institute Cameroon in 2017 indicated that the literacy rate of persons over 15 years of age stood at 40.1 % in the Far North as against the 74.3 % average<sup>23</sup>. The attack on education

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Nfor, M.K, . Boko Haram attacks spark education crisis in Cameroon. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2015/05/12/boko-haram-attacks-spark-education-crisis-cameroon>,

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Plan International. "Whole generation's education devastated by Boko Haram", (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://plan-international.org/whole-generations-education-devastated-boko-haram>

<sup>21</sup> Al Jazeera. (2019). Nigeria's Chibok schoolgirls: Five years on, 112 still missing. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/14/nigerias-chibok-schoolgirls-five-years-on-112-still-missing>.

<sup>22</sup> ibid Note 23

<sup>23</sup> Ntuda Ebode et al, "The Boko Haram conflict in Cameroon: Why is peace so elusive?". (2017). FES Peace and Security Series No. 21



did not only affect the Cameroonian children in the attacked regions but also the refugee children coming from neighboring Nigeria who had fled to Cameroon due to the Boko Haram insurgency.

Upon his visit to Minawao camp in Northern Cameroon, Filippo Grandi, the head for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 2016 said: “I am convinced that education is the most important investment that we have to make in the Lake Chad region now and in the future to avoid a repeat of the events and of the horrible abuses of the last years.”<sup>24</sup> The education needs of the affected populations have so far been supported by various governmental, non-governmental and international efforts and initiatives. As much as their efforts must be applauded, the lack of trained teaching staff, learning material, school structures and overcrowded classrooms still pose a threat to the right to education.

### **3.2.2. Central African Republic refugees**

Sharing a border with the Central African Republic (CAR) to the east facilitated an influx of refugees into Cameroon. Since 2013, the CAR has been experiencing a civil war, with large parts of the territory controlled by armed groups who kidnap, kill, terrorize steal from and forcibly recruit civilians to further their agendas. Cameroon hosts the largest number of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) with more than 310,000 refugees in need of assistance as of October 2020.<sup>25</sup> Most of the refugees have settled in the East and Adamawa regions, with some others in the North region and urban areas like Yaoundé and Douala. Though refugees from the CAR live in designated camps, a lot of them have integrated local communities, thereby increasing the pressure on access to basic services, such as healthcare or education, and local resources, such as firewood, water, or land.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Caux, H. (2016). UNHCR chief visits Cameroon refugee camp and launches appeal. Retrieved from <http://kora.unhcr.org/unhcr-chief-visits-cameroon-refugee-camp-launches-appeal/>

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, Operations portal: Refugee Situations, (October, 2020). Retrieved from <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>

<sup>26</sup> European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Facts and figures Cameroon, (October 2020). Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/cameroon\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/cameroon_en)

According to the UNHCR, the major concerns for the refugees from the CAR are health, education, and protection (especially when it comes to obtaining identification documentation), protection of children, responding to and preventing gender-based violence, and attaining acceptable standards for humanitarian assistance.<sup>27</sup> Lack of financial resources for about 70% of refugees from the CAR has also exacerbated issues like food insecurity and access to treatment for diseases which are rampant in refugee populations.<sup>28</sup>

Access to education is grossly affected by the limited absorption capacity in the existing schools, lack of schools, and qualified staff. Some 60% of the newly arrived refugees are children of school age, many of whom had not been attending school before leaving the CAR.<sup>29</sup> The strategy of integrating refugee children into the national education system is working efficiently. The access of refugee children to public and sometimes private primary schools, colleges and high schools in Cameroon is unhindered by the authorities. The challenge is the absorption capacity. Gradually, classrooms are built and advocacy for the assignment of trained teachers continues.<sup>30</sup> Due to funding and logistical constraints, the ability to respond to the growing needs of refugee populations is greatly limited.

### **3.2.3. 2018 Municipal and Presidential Elections**

Aside from external and internal humanitarian crises which have strained access to education, the general political atmosphere has played a decisive role in increasing tensions within the country. The climate during the last Presidential and Municipal elections in Cameroon was especially characterized with lots of socio-political tensions and security concerns. For the first time in a while, Cameroonians experienced a novelty in the course of their politics when an opposition figure Maurice Kamto – the closest contender to President Biya who according to official sources secured 14% of the vote – claimed he had won the elections, causing additional tensions to an

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<sup>27</sup> Aperçu de la Réponse À La Situation des Réfugiés Centrafricains. [Fact sheet] UNHCR Cameroon. Cameroun. (2018). Retrieved from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/63744>  
Ibid note 28

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, Central African Republic Regional Refugee Response Plan January - December 2015, (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/54c251f39.html>

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR & WFP Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) Central African refugees (CAR) and host population living in the East, Adamawa, North Regions of Cameroon 2019

already charged electoral process. These contested results led to a lengthy appeal process before the newly created Constitutional Council, a process which animated and fascinated Cameroonians who were witnessing this process for the first time.

Deutsche Welle, an international press, reported that legislative and municipal elections in Cameroon were marked by low voter turnout especially in the anglophone regions,<sup>31</sup> one of the points raised and defended vociferously by Kamto's team before the Constitutional Council to contest President Biya's Landslide victory. In January 2019 opposition leader Kamto was arrested for sedition, insurrection and incitement to violence following a rally organized by his party, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC). The rally which had been banned by administrative authorities ended in violence with several arrests made. The municipal elections took place under similar conditions on February 9, 2019, after being postponed twice. These elections were also marked by voter abstention and violence. The political climate since the elections has been defined with almost consistent outbursts from the opposition, calls to strike with an equally intense repressive response from the government.<sup>32</sup>

#### **3.2.4. COVID- 19**

Covid-19 was officially declared a pandemic in March of 2020. The pandemic increased humanitarian needs and further strained an already fragile health system in Cameroon like in many other sub-Saharan countries. The pandemic not only had serious effects on health but worsened access to other social services especially for the most vulnerable. However, at 24,752 cases, 443 deaths and 23, 344 recovered reported as of December 2020,<sup>33</sup> one can say that Cameroon is handling the pandemic well. Healthwise the situation seems under control with a low infection and spread rate. Apart from public health, the most apparently affected public sector is education.

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<sup>31</sup> Deutsche Welle, Cameroon elections: Polls overshadowed by boycott, separatist violence. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-elections-polls-overshadowed-by-boycott-separatist-violence/a-52314795>

<sup>32</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Cameroon. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Worldometer. (2020, December). <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/cameroon/>

The school year 20/21 began in October of 2020 after pupils and students had been out of school for almost 6 months. Concerns currently center on the quality of education that will be obtained, health security and food security. Although United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that both the North-West and South-West regions recorded the highest rate of school attendance since 2017, there were still concerns about the neglect of safety measures in schools.<sup>34</sup> For people living in situations of vulnerability, requiring social and economic support, the coronavirus is an additional crisis that they have to face and adapt to<sup>35</sup> both now and in the future.

## **4. Access to Education for School Age Children**

### **4.1. Educational Needs Assessment (Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon)**

NSAGs have imposed a boycott on education in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, utilizing threats, abduction, and violence to prevent children from attending school. Government security forces are alleged to have committed human rights violations as well, including the destruction of school buildings. This reality has cultivated an environment of fear, one that prevents many parents from sending their children to school. Some have sought alternatives to formal education, others have fled the region, while others still have defied the ban by the NSAGs and risked tragic consequences.

UNICEF first began reporting on humanitarian needs in the Northwest and Southwest regions in January 2019, after establishing a field office in Buea to bring support to the region.<sup>36</sup> In mid-2019, UNICEF estimated that at least 74 schools had been destroyed in the two regions since the crisis began in late 2016.<sup>37</sup> By November 2019, the organisation estimated that 90% of public primary schools (more than 4,100) and 77% of public secondary schools (744) were closed, despite the

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<sup>34</sup> UNOCHA, CAMEROON: COVID 19 Emergency Situation Report No. 09. Cameroon. 2020

<sup>35</sup> Plan International, Impact of Covid-19 on youth in the Lake Chad Region. (2020)

<sup>36</sup> Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 09 (Rep.). (2020). UNICEF.

Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report (Rep.). (2019). UNICEF.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF. (2019, June 21). Geneva Palais briefing note on the situation for children in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-situation-children-north-west-and-south-west-regions>

new school year starting just a few months prior.<sup>38</sup> In October 2020, at least 140 of these schools reopened for the new school year, but about 20 had reclosed in the Northwest region alone a few weeks later.<sup>39</sup> The result is that, as of January 2020, nearly 900,000 children in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon have been impacted by the crisis and do not have access to education, which is nearly double the original number reported in January 2019 (466,000).<sup>40</sup> Many of these students have not received formal education since the crisis began 4 years ago, and the number of impacted children continues to increase.

This continued disruption of children’s education in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon will have long lasting consequences on their development, and on the development of their communities. Education and development are intrinsically linked: schools and formal educational settings are pivotal in “helping individuals achieve their own economic and social and cultural objectives and helping society to be better protected, better served by its leaders and more equitable in important ways... Schooling helps children develop creatively and emotionally and acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary for responsible, active and productive citizenship” (Colclough 2004). Formal educational settings provide not only the cognitive development children need to thrive, but the emotional and social development that will equip them with the tools to participate effectively in their community. Without education, “Poverty will remain intractable, disadvantage will continue to be transmitted across the generations, and economic growth will be compromised by shortages of knowledge and skill in the work force” (Lewin and Akyeampong 2009).

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<sup>38</sup> UNICEF. (2019, November 5). More than 855,000 children remain out of school in North-West and South-West Cameroon [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-855000-children-remain-out-school-north-west-and-south-west-cameroon>

<sup>39</sup> Kindzeka, M. (2020, November 5). Cameroon Teachers, Students Abandon Schools After Attacks. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-teachers-students-abandon-schools-after-attacks>

<sup>40</sup> Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report (Rep.). (2019). UNICEF.

Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 09 (Rep.). (2020). UNICEF.

## 4.2. School Disruption and Closures in the Northwest and Southwest regions

### 4.2.1. Anglophone Crisis Protests (School Closures and Attacks)

To date, NSAG's have refused to abide by calls to bring the boycott on schools, originally proposed to apply pressure to the government, to an end. Less than a year after their initial implementation in 2016, the boycotts were seen as counterproductive in August 2017. NSAGs have resorted to intimidation, abductions, arson, and violence to enforce a ban on education.<sup>41</sup> Proponents of education, including principals, teachers, parents, and school children seeking to learn, are perceived as enemies to the NSAG's cause and are as subject to attack as the governmental forces they fight against. Figure 1 below briefly describes some of the attacks on schools, school officials, and children as a result of the conflict. Between February 2017 and May 2018, at least 42 schools were attacked, two principals kidnapped, and three teachers killed.<sup>42</sup> Between January 2018 and June 2019, more than 300 students and teachers were abducted.<sup>43</sup> More than 260 separate security incidents were committed between January 2018 and September 2018, including armed conflicts between NSAGs and governmental security forces, kidnappings and violence against civilians by NSAGs, and the destruction of private property by both sides (Amnesty International, 2018). On October 24, 2020, at least 7 children were killed and 13 injured while they attended school at Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba in the Southwest region; they were between 9 and 12 years.<sup>44</sup> Not only does the violence show little sign of abatement, the recent attacks perpetrated in late 2020 also suggest that the nature and the severity of these acts are becoming increasingly heinous.

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<sup>41</sup> Cameroon: Gunmen Massacre School Children. (2020, November 02). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/02/cameroon-gunmen-massacre-school-children>

<sup>42</sup> Cameroon: A Turn for the Worse: Violence and Human Rights Violations in Anglophone Cameroon [Scholarly project]. (2018, June 12). Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/>

<sup>43</sup> UNICEF. (2019, June 21). Geneva Palais briefing note on the situation for children in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-situation-children-north-west-and-south-west-regions>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid Note 41

**Figure 1: Sample of School Attacks in Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon**

- August 13, 2017: Arson attack on Baptist Comprehensive High School in Bamenda
- September 22, 2017: IED detonated at a teacher's training school in Limbe; one security guard injured.
- October 20, 2017: IED found outside of a secondary school in Bamenda; safely detonated before injury could occur.
- November 4, 2017: Four schools burned down in Jakiri, including Jakiri Bilingual High School
- January 30, 2018: Teacher assaulted at Government Primary School in Ntungfe, Northwest region.
- February 1, 2018: Principal assaulted at Baptist Comprehensive High School, Njinikejem, Northwest region.
- May 25, 2018: Principal of Government High School Bolifamba Mile 17-Buea, Southwest region, kidnapped.<sup>7</sup> Released on May 31, unharmed.
- May 25, 2018: Principal of Cameroon Baptist Academy Yoke-Muyuka, Fako Division, Southwest region, kidnapped. Released on May 29 with machete wounds.
- October 17, 2017: Arson attack on Catholic Primary School in Menji, Southwest region.
- November 5, 2018: 79 students kidnapped from Presbyterian Secondary School in Bamenda.
- November 24, 2017: Arson attack on Government Bilingual High School in Menji, Southwest region.
- February 16, 2019: 170 students kidnapped from a boarding school in Kumbo, Northwest region. Students were released the following day.
- March 20, 2019: Approximately 15 students kidnapped from the University of Buea.
- November 20, 2019: 20 children and one teacher kidnapped from the Lord's Bilingual Academy in Kumba, Southwest region. All were rescued or escaped.
- December 14, 2019: 6 children and one teacher kidnapped near Nkwen, Northwest region, on their way home from school. All were released several days later.
- January 30, 2020: Student kidnapped from a secondary school in Buea, maimed before being released a few days later.
- May 17, 2020: Teacher from University of Bamenda, Northwest region, killed.
- October 24, 2020: At least 4 children killed, and more than a dozen injured, during a school attack at Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba, Southwest region. Later reports specify 7 or 8 children killed and at least 13 injured.
- November 3, 2020: Twelve teachers kidnapped from a school in Kumbo, Northwest region, in front of their students.<sup>20</sup> One escaped, and the others released a few days later.
- November 4, 2020: Teachers and students at Kulu Memorial College were stripped, tortured, and forced to leave the school, and the building set on fire in Limbe, Southwest region.
- November 18, 2020: Two teachers, and one principal, kidnapped from Firm Foundation College in Bamenda, Northwest region.

#### 4.2.2. Military Use of Schools

In addition to closing educational facilities, schools have been used by parties to the conflict as bases, barracks, fighting ground and places of detention in contravention to international law that guarantees the right to education, life, liberty and security, the protection of civilians and civilian objects; and against the spirit of the Safe Schools Declaration which Cameroon endorsed in September 2018.<sup>45</sup> According to the Safe Schools Declaration:

“Where educational facilities are used for military purposes it can increase the risk of the recruitment and use of children by armed actors or may leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation. In particular, it may increase the likelihood that education institutions are attacked”.<sup>46</sup>

The use of schools for military purposes poses a threat to the safety of teachers and students, creates an environment of fear and poses a serious psychological impact which interferes with pupils/students’ ability to learn. This has been seen as an interference with the right to education.<sup>47</sup> Human rights organisations and conflict monitors such as HRW have found many instances of schools being occupied and used for military purposes. In their World Report 2020, HRW uncovered cases of occupation and use of educational facilities by NSAGs:

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<sup>45</sup> Reliefweb (September 11, 2018) Cameroon is 81st Country to Endorse Safe Schools Declaration. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-81st-country-endorse-safe-schools-declaration>

“The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political agreement that outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attack and restrict use of schools and universities for military purposes. It seeks to ensure the continuity of safe education during armed conflict. The Declaration was opened for countries to endorse at the First International Conference on Safe Schools in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015.” (<https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>). 106 states have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, as of November 2020.

The Safe Schools Declaration holds that:

- Every boy and girl has the right to an education without fear of violence or attack.
- Every teacher, professor, and school administrator should be able to teach and research in conditions of safety, security, and dignity.
- Every school should be a protected space for students to learn, and fulfil their potential, even during war.
- Every university should be a safe place for students and academics and to foster critical and independent thinking, and to harness knowledge (<https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>)

<sup>46</sup> Safe School Declaration (2015) [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_safe\\_schools\\_declaration-final.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_safe_schools_declaration-final.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch (May 19, 2019) Protecting Schools from Military Use. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/27/protecting-schools-military-use/law-policy-and-military-doctrine>



“Human Rights Watch authenticated a video showing armed separatists in mid-May torturing a man in an abandoned school in Bali village, North-West region. The school has been closed since mid-2017 due to violence and the separatists’ enforced boycott of education. Armed separatists have used schools as bases, deploying fighters and weapons and holding people hostage in and near them”.<sup>48</sup>

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified other cases of NSAGs’ use of schools in 2019 in the Northwest region. According to the GCPEA, the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkeley, verified the state military burning of a school in Eka village in Widikum on January 3, 2019, alleged to have been used by NSAGs. Also, in May 2019, HRW reported the use of an abandoned school in Bali, Mezam Division in the Northwest region.<sup>49</sup>

There were also reports of the presence of security forces around schools in the Anglophone regions, especially at the beginning of the academic year 2017/2018, supposedly to ensure security.<sup>50</sup> GCPEA reported a case of military use that resulted in attack on a school in the Southwest region. The incident occurred in St Joseph College Sasse, Buea on September 18, 2018, where it was reported that armed men attacked state security forces stationed near the school, leading to the closure of about six other schools in and around Buea.<sup>51</sup> The stationing of security forces in and around schools can expose pupils/students and make them vulnerable to exploitation. This was the case in September 2018 when in an incident in Sacred Heart College in Nkwen Bamenda, in the Northwest region, a military officer stationed in the school to guard students videotaped a group of young boys in their dormitory dancing for him in an indecent manner while he sat and watched. This incident led to a reaction from the authorities, with the governor of the

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<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/cameroon>

<sup>49</sup> GCPEA: Education Under Attack (2020). Retrieved from [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2020\\_full.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> GCPEA: Education Under Attack (2018). Retrieved from [http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_eua\\_2018\\_full.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_eua_2018_full.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid note 54

region Adolphe Lele L’Afrique quoted saying that the soldier who videotaped the students dancing in “an indecent and morally wayward manner” was identified, apprehended, and sanctioned.<sup>52</sup>

The Safe Schools Declaration emphasises the importance of continuing education and the need for protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of conflict. The lack of adequate measures to ensure safety in schools in the restive regions even after the Cameroon government’s endorsement of the Safe School Declaration is has raised questions. The Ministry of Education and NGOs have called for the need to adhere to the Safe Schools Declaration.<sup>53</sup>

### **4.3. Reactions to School Disruptions and Closures**

#### **4.3.1. Reactions: International Condemnation of Attacks**

The violent attack at Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba evoked national and international condemnation (see Figure 2, below). The United Nations Secretary-General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, HRW, the Catholic Church, the US Embassy Yaoundé, the French Ambassador to Cameroon, the High Commission of Canada in Cameroon, the African Union, the Global Campaign for Peace and Justice, and the Organization of World Peace are among a few of the national and international organisations that have strongly condemned the attack in Cameroon, referring to the attack as brutal, horrific, vile and merciless, barbaric, brazen, abominable, and wicked.<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, offered prayers and expressed sorrow and confusion over the murders:

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<sup>52</sup> Cameroon News Agency (September 2018): Sacred Heart College Saga: Authorities To Sanction Soldier For Videotaping Teens Dancing Like Pornstars. Retrieved from: <https://cameroonnewsagency.com/sacred-heart-college-saga-authorities-to-sanction-soldier-for-videotaping-teens-dancing-like-porn-stars/>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, GCPEA (2020) note 54

<sup>54</sup> Clarke, K. (2020, November 12). Devastated Families In Cameroon Grieve For Children Slaughtered In School Massacre. Retrieved from <https://theowp.org/devastated-families-in-cameroon-grieve-for-children-slaughtered-in-school-massacre/>

Tih, F. (2020, October 10). Cameroon: National mourning for school attack victims. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/cameroon-national-mourning-for-school-attack-victims/2022833>

[Press release]. (2020, October 27). Press Briefing Notes on Cameroon. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26428&LangID=E>

Cameroon: House Speaker condemns recent attacks on schools in Anglophone regions. (2020, November 12). Retrieved from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-house-speaker-condemns-recent-attacks-on-schools-in-anglophone-regions/>

“I share in the suffering of the families of the young students barbarically killed last Saturday in Kumba, in Cameroon. I feel great bewilderment at such a cruel and senseless act, which tore the young innocents from life while they were attending lessons at school. May God enlighten hearts, so that similar gestures may never be repeated again, [and the] tormented regions of the north-West and south-West of the country may finally find peace.”<sup>55</sup>

Henrietta Fore, Executive Director for UNICEF expressed outrage over the attack, stating that “attacks on education are a grave violation of children’s rights. Schools must be places of safety and learning, not death traps.<sup>56</sup>” The government of Cameroon called for a national day of mourning following the incident and, while no group claimed responsibility for the attack, accused separatists of committing the violent acts.<sup>57</sup> Despite this response, the governmental security forces of Cameroon have been accused of perpetrating humanitarian crimes during this crisis and failing to provide adequate security to schools to prevent attacks from occurring.



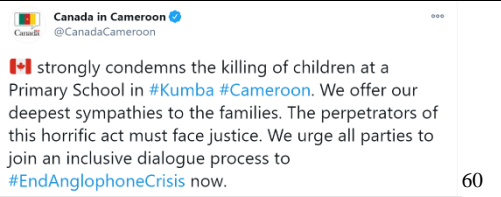
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<sup>55</sup> Pope Francis prays for victims of Cameroon school shooting. (2020, October 27). Retrieved from <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-10/cameroon-bishop-attack-anglophone.html>

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF. (2020, October 24). [Press release]. Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on School Attacks in Afghanistan and Cameroon. Retrieved December 19, 2020, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-school-attacks-afghanistan-and>

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch Urges Cameroon to Investigate Schoolchildren Massacre in Kumba. (2020, November 02). Retrieved from <https://todaynewsafrika.com/human-rights-watch-urges-cameroon-to-investigate-schoolchildren-massacre-in-kumba/>

**Figure 2: #EndAnglophoneCrisis and other Statements Released to Condemn the Attacks on Education in Cameroon**

<p><b>United States Embassy Yaounde</b></p>	 <p>U.S. EmbASSY, YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON PRESS RELEASE *****</p> <p>U.S. Condemns Escalating Attacks in Northwest and Southwest Regions <i>Friday, November 6, 2020</i></p> <p>The U.S. Embassy condemns the continued escalation of attacks by armed individuals in recent weeks targeting schoolchildren, teachers, and religious and traditional leaders in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. The attacks against schoolchildren and schoolteachers are particularly concerning. Every child must be allowed to learn in safety, and every teacher must be safe as they help students learn. We stand in solidarity with the students, teachers, and leaders such as Cardinal Tumi and the Fon of Nso who have been targeted in Kumbo, Limbe, Bamenda, and other communities. Perpetrators of such attacks and those who condone these actions demonstrate a disregard for the social fabric of communities in both regions and for peace and prosperity in Cameroon. We support all those who speak out for dialogue and peace and an end to the senseless killings and violence.</p> <p>###</p>	<p>58</p>
<p><b>French Ambassador to Cameroon</b></p>	 <p><b>Christophe Guilhou</b> @ChrisGuilhou</p> <p>Révulsé par le massacre d'enfants dans une école à Kumba ce matin, je condamne cet acte barbare avec la plus grande fermeté. Ses auteurs devront être traduits en justice et condamnés. Tous les efforts doivent être désormais réunis pour mettre un terme au conflit dans le #NOSO.</p>	<p>59</p>
<p><b>High Commission of Canada in Cameroon</b></p>	 <p><b>Canada in Cameroon</b> @CanadaCameroon</p> <p>🇨🇦 strongly condemns the killing of children at a Primary School in #Kumba #Cameroon. We offer our deepest sympathies to the families. The perpetrators of this horrific act must face justice. We urge all parties to join an inclusive dialogue process to #EndAnglophoneCrisis now.</p>	<p>60</p>

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Condemns Escalating Attacks in Northwest and Southwest Regions. (2020, November 06). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/USEmbYaounde/status/1324798651869388802>

<sup>59</sup> Guilhou, C. (2020, October 24). Révulsé par le massacre d'enfants... Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ChrisGuilhou/status/1320063794756857862>

<sup>60</sup> Canada strongly condemns the killing of children... (2020, October 27). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CanadaCameroon/status/1321026227629678598>

<p><b>African Union Commission</b></p>	 <p><b>Moussa Faki Mahamat</b> @AUC_MoussaFaki · Oct 24      There are no words of grief nor condemnation strong enough to articulate my full horror at the brutal attack targeting primary schoolchildren, killing at least 6 of them and seriously injuring 13 more, as they sat learning in their classroom in #Kumba, southwest #Cameroon.</p> <p>845 759 61</p>
<p><b>British High Commission in Cameroon</b></p>	 <p><b>UK in Cameroon</b> @UKinCameroon · Nov 4      The UK condemns the recent attacks on educational institutions in North West and South West including #Kumba, #Kumbo and #Limbe. Every child has the right to a safe education &amp; every teacher to safety at work. This violence must stop. Those kidnapped must be released unharmed.</p> <p>18 48 59 62</p>

**4.3.2. Reactions: Environment of Fear**

i.) Lack of Security Around Schools

Many have blamed the government for not providing adequate security in schools. The latest incidents in November 2020, at Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba, Kulu Memorial College in Limbe, and Firm Foundation College in Bamenda, all occurred in schools located in well populated, urban areas. These and many other incidents in the past have raised questions about the government’s commitment to provide security around schools. Following the November 5, 2020 attack on Kulu Memorial College in Limbe, one teacher who refused to return to the classroom until the government fulfils its promise to protect schools was quoted saying that:

“The government assured parents and stakeholders of education that this time around maximum security has been put in place to ensure the smooth functioning

<sup>61</sup> Mahamat, M. (2020, October 24). There are no words of grief nor condemnation strong enough... Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/AUC\\_MoussaFaki/status/1320069152690884611](https://twitter.com/AUC_MoussaFaki/status/1320069152690884611)

<sup>62</sup> The UK condemns the recent attacks on educational institutions in North West and South West... (2020, November 04). Retrieved from [https://twitter.com/UKinCameroon/status/1324050700662411265?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eetweembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1324050700662411265%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1](https://twitter.com/UKinCameroon/status/1324050700662411265?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eetweembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1324050700662411265%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1)

of schools in the Northwest and Southwest regions. But what do we get every day? Students being attacked left and right, teachers also being victims.”<sup>63</sup>

While the attacks that occur spontaneously can be difficult to predict, many are of the opinion that there is a lack of will from the government to live up to its responsibilities.<sup>64</sup> In their defence, the government has pointed to the challenges on the part of the security forces to be present in all schools. The governor of the Northwest regions was quoted saying that:

“It is not possible for security men to be behind every student. We are asking them to continue going for classes because after the sad incidents, a special security device has been set up by the generals in charge of security at the level of the headquarters of the region and in the other divisions to accompany the students.”<sup>65</sup>

In September 2018, Cameroon announced its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, joining the international political commitment to protect education during armed conflict. The Director of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) stated upon the endorsement that: “Cameroon’s endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration signals the government’s commitment to better safeguard learning and mitigate the devastating damage caused by attacks on education and military use of schools.”<sup>66</sup> Nearly two years later, some believe that this promise has gone unfulfilled: the deadly attack on Mother Francisca Bilingual Academy in Kumba occurred in the middle of the day. Residents have stated that security forces were not nearby, elaborating further that only government schools in the area have security forces<sup>67</sup>. René Sadi, Cameroon’s Minister of Communications, condemned the attack and stated that the school had only just started operations at the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year, “without the knowledge of the competent administrative authorities and could not benefit from the same

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<sup>63</sup> Kindzeka, M. (2020, November 5). Cameroon Teachers, Students Abandon Schools After Attacks. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-teachers-students-abandon-schools-after-attacks>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

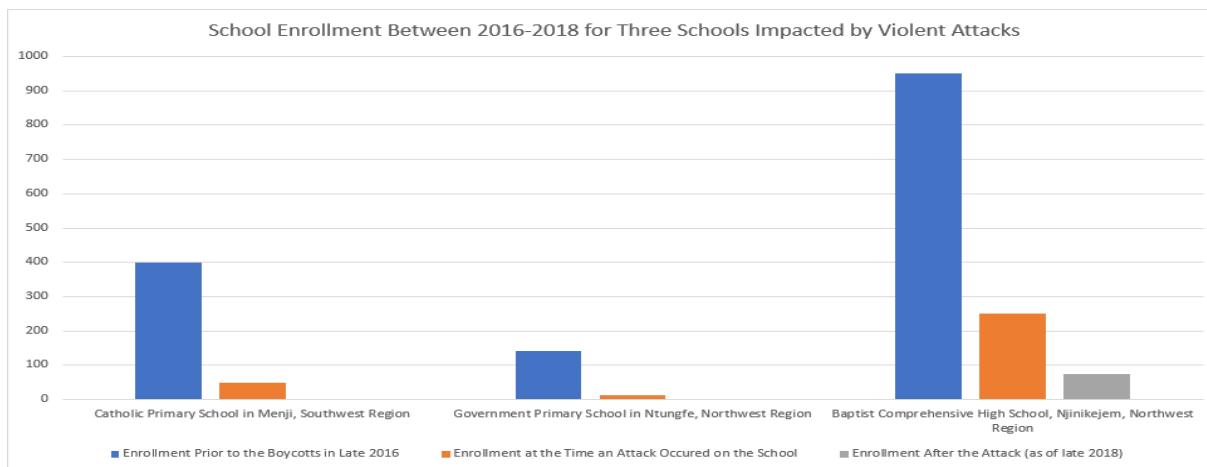
<sup>66</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-81st-country-endorse-safe-schools-declaration>

<sup>67</sup> Cameroon: Gunmen Massacre School Children. (2020, November 02). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/02/cameroon-gunmen-massacre-school-children>

security measures as other schools” in the region<sup>68</sup>. However, residents and local journalists contend that the school has been in operation for several years<sup>69</sup>.

Despite the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and the calls to return to school, the fear of renewed and more aggressive attacks prevents parents from sending their children back to school, and teachers from returning to the classroom. Figure 3 below illustrates student enrolments at three schools covered in Amnesty International’s 2018 study on Violence and Human Rights Violations in Anglophone Cameroon. Enrolment at the three schools suffered in late 2017 / early 2018 when an attack occurred at each institution: Catholic Primary School in Menji suffered an arson attack in October 2017, and two teachers were assaulted while at school, one at Government Primary School in Ntungfe in January 2018 and the other at Baptist Comprehensive High School in Njinikejem in February 2018. At the time of these attacks, enrolment at the schools was already significantly lower than they were prior to the boycotts in 2016, and it appears that the violent attacks further dissuaded parents from sending their children to school.

**Figure 3: School Enrolment Case Study**



<sup>68</sup> Bihina, F. (2020, October 25). Cameroon - Kumba Massacre: The government notes that the attacked school launched its activities "without the knowledge of the competent administrative authorities, and could not benefit from the same protective measures as other schools in the Department of the Mémé ". Retrieved December 03, 2020, from <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-massacre-de-kumba-le-gouvernement-note-que-lecole-attaquee-a-lance-ses-activites-386439.html>

<sup>69</sup> Cameroon: Gunmen Massacre School Children. (2020, November 02). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/02/cameroon-gunmen-massacre-school-children>

## ii) False Alarms, Fear and Panic

While parents and relatives have expressed genuine fear for the safety of the children and loved ones in schools, it is also argued that false alarms and panic have contributed to prolong school closures. This is the case in more urban cities, especially in the Southwest region, considered relatively safe for some adjusted learning activities to carry on, yet still caught up in fear of the unknown. A resident in Bamenda is quoted to have said: “There are a few schools that are operating in Bamenda, especially in upstate Bamenda...but it is really difficult to find schools functioning in the [rural areas].”<sup>70</sup>

Repeated calls for teachers and students to muster the courage to attend school have not often been heeded. The governor of the Northwest region in an interview with VOA News admitted that “...several thousand students and teachers at other schools in the region are too scared to attend, despite added troops, which the governor called a “special security device.”<sup>71</sup>

The lack of a full uninterrupted school year in the Anglophone regions for four years has also raised serious concerns. Many have started questioning the rationale behind this and have encouraged students and teachers to be brave in the face of threats and attacks. The president of the Cameroon Union of Parents and Teachers is quoted as saying that:

"We want to encourage our kids, despite their ages, they have a responsibility to write their own history. They are living within a period of consternation within the Anglophone sub system. The only way for them to make history is not to abandon the classroom. The first element is that of courage. To the parents, they should be able to realize that this call for independence is a sterile struggle.”<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, the public has been blamed for spreading rumours and creating panic leading to further disruption. The period that follows a school attack has often been characterized by

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<sup>70</sup> DW, Cameroon: Schools targeted in Anglophone crisis, June 6, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-schools-targeted-in-anglophone-crisis/a-55521637>

<sup>71</sup> VOA News, Cameroon, Teachers, Students Abandon Schools After Attacks, November 5, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-teachers-students-abandon-schools-after-attacks>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid



rumours and false alarms of other or impending incidents. The result of this has often been pandemonium and chaos leading to further disruption of school activities. During his stay in the Southwest region from December 2018 to February 2019, the Executive Director of SODEI, Gilbert Ajebe Akame, witnessed over 10 of such incidents of false alarm and panic. In one incident, a sudden rumour of an attack in a school in Muea, a village outside of Buea, left the entire Fako Division of the Southwest in panic and pandemonium, he observed. Sitting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of a building in the heart of Molyko in Buea, he observed chaos, and the traffic constrained by taxis and private vehicles heading to the surrounding schools to pick up relatives. Upon overhearing people calling for their relatives and friends to stay indoors because armed separatists had allegedly invaded the city, he sought to inquire for himself and found out that it was a rumour of an attack, of which nobody seemed to know for sure.

These scenarios, characterized by false alarms leading to panic, have been rife during the period of the crisis and has helped fuel school disruption. Recently, in the aftermath of the attack in Kumba, there was another such panic incident resulting from a tyre explosion from a vehicle along the Mutengene-Limbe road. This happened near a school in a very central location in a place called Ombe. The result was panic throughout Fako Division, and as a consequence, schools were again closed for the rest of the week.<sup>73</sup>

It has also been found that the general coverage of the crisis by private media houses mostly TV stations have helped to promote fear. A survey conducted in Molyko, a cosmopolitan neighbourhood in Buea mostly inhabited by students, revealed that media reporting of the crisis has instilled fear and mistrust in the minds of many in the Anglophone regions (Ngange et al, 2020).

### iii) Social Media and Misinformation

Besides physical attacks on educational facilities and users, and other actions or inaction from heads of private institutions and government, misinformation, falsehood and propaganda have been used to further disrupt school activities. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and

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<sup>73</sup> Mimi Mefo Info (October 27, 2020) Uncertain Tuesday in Anglophone Regions. Retrieved from <https://mimimefoinfos.com/uncertain-tuesday-in-anglophone-regions/>

Facebook became a major source for receiving and transmitting information especially among youth during the period of the crisis from 2016 to present. Hence, it has played a major role in spreading false information, rumours, and ungrounded justification for students to stay away from schools (Ngange, 2019).

It is worth noting the impact the social media has had in influencing youth engagement in social and political change in Africa and globally. The social media has been an enabling platform for youth mobilisation, ideating, strategizing and engagement in the political process. The internet has made it possible for mobilisation and propagation of protest events and reaction by security forces across borders in real time. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and personal blogs have played a key role. With youths having an upper hand in the use of these new technologies, it has made it possible to circumvent hierarchical structures of authority (Alcinda Howana, 2015).

The open access on the internet and the ease of communications via social media tools also implies the widespread of unverified information, propaganda and all sorts of material that could blur the actual state of events. Ngange (2019) found that distortion of information regarding the Anglophone crisis and the school boycott started as soon as the crisis began in late 2016. He quotes an audio message released in December 2016 by an unknown activist and shared via WhatsApp, implying that the leaders of the “revolution” including heads of teachers’ trade unions and lawyers’ associations were being threatened and forced to sign an agreement during a negotiation session with government officials, leading to agitation in major towns in the Anglophone regions. However, this message was later refuted by the leaders of the trade unions, claiming that no such thing happened. The intention of such a message was meant to fuel the agenda of the Anglophone activists including the continuous boycott of schools. Ngange (2019), equally refers to another incident where a video was circulated claiming malpractices during the 2016/2017 (General Certificate of Education) GCE exams which later turned out to be false. The intention of this video he stated, was to sabotage the GCE examinations and reinforce the boycott message.

The social media has also been used by “well-wishers” and “sympathizers” to appeal to parents and guardians to keep their children away from school and away from violence. This often happens

in the aftermath of a major school incident or simply based on the discretion of some social media users and bloggers who usually have a huge following. Such information is always in the form of Facebook live videos, Facebook posts or recorded WhatsApp audio messages. The authors often appeal to the sympathy and show concern for those vulnerable pupils and students caught in the violence.

#### **4.3.3. Seeking Educational Alternatives**

Due to the environment of fear created by the continued, violent enforcement of the ban on education by NSAGs, parents in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon have generally been left with a few alternatives to defying this ban: keep their children at home, seek informal alternatives to traditional schooling, and/or flee the region for safer schooling options. Rather than risk sending their children to school, parents in the region are turning increasingly to informal alternatives to ensure their children are educated. It's important to note that some children are still going to formal school settings in the region, but many do not attend on a regular basis, and the school days and hours are varied to mitigate threats of attack and as a precautionary measure to slow the spread of Covid-19. Some parents have hired private tutors while some teachers have transformed their homes into makeshift classrooms (Ngong Song, 2019).

Nongovernmental organisations are offering humanitarian aid and educational resources to fill the gap left by traditional schooling options. Henrietta Fore of UNICEF stated that “when children are out of school, they face a higher risk of recruitment by armed groups, child marriage, early pregnancy and other forms of exploitation and abuse.”<sup>74</sup> In response to the crisis, the organisation has provided psychosocial support for 30,000 children, books and learning materials for 37,000 children, interactive literacy and numeracy lessons over the radio for use by children at home, advocacy for the safe reopening of schools along with risk mitigation plans should reopened

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<sup>74</sup> UNICEF. (2020, October 24). [Press release]. Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on School Attacks in Afghanistan and Cameroon. Retrieved December 19, 2020, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-school-attacks-afghanistan-and>

schools face an attack.<sup>75</sup> The Higher Institute of Technology and Management in Central Africa has provided online lessons and Higher National Diploma courses. However, some cities are suffering from frequent power and internet outages that make studying at home in these two regions challenging (Ngong Song, 2019).

Despite these informal school options, the four-year ban on education is already negatively impacting children and families in the region. The National Education Secretary of the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union Semma Valentine, as quoted by Ngong Song said: “only about four thousand kids wrote the common entrance and first school leaving certificate exams...the Northwest region used to send in close to seventy thousand pupils for these exams” (Ngong Song, 2019). Yakubu and Salisu, in their study on Determinants of Adolescent Pregnancy in Sub-Saharan Africa (2019), concluded that, in addition to community sensitisation and the provision of health services, “ensuring girls enroll and stay in schools could reduce adolescent pregnancy rates.” This finding echoes the concerns expressed by Fore and Valentine, where the latter reported nearly 300 pregnancies by women and girls between the ages of 14-20 in three health centers in Bamenda alone.

UNICEF reported more than 450,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, since the crisis began in 2016, and reported more than 150,000 of IDPs were children.<sup>76</sup> Cities most subjected to violent attacks, like Bamenda in the Northwest and Buea and Kumba in the Southwest, have been the most impacted by the displacement, creating and sustaining a constant environment of fear of both the government’s security forces and the NSAGs. Some residents are reported to be hiding out in the bush, while many are fleeing west to cities like Bafoussam and Yaoundé, seeking not only safety but an opportunity to send their children to

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<sup>75</sup> UNICEF. (2020, October 24). [Press release]. Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on School Attacks in Afghanistan and Cameroon. Retrieved December 19, 2020, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-school-attacks-afghanistan-and>

UNICEF. (2019, June 21). Geneva Palais briefing note on the situation for children in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-situation-children-north-west-and-south-west-regions>

<sup>76</sup> Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 09 (Rep.). (2020). UNICEF.  
Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report (Rep.). (2019). UNICEF.

school after four years of school lockdowns and increasingly violent attacks (Ngong Song et al., 2019).

#### **4.4. Case Study Comparisons: Bamenda and Buea; Kumba and Limbe**

The purpose of this section is to briefly explore what has potentially caused the differences in how the Anglophone Crisis has been manifested in two sets of cities: Bamenda and Buea, and Kumba and Limbe. Bamenda, of the Northwest region, and Buea, of the Southwest region, were chosen as comparison to highlight the differences in the violent attacks against schools across time for these two capital cities. Atrocities have been committed in both cities since late 2016, but in recent months those in Buea are becoming less frequent. The Southwest region cities of Kumba and Limbe were chosen to highlight contrasts: though Limbe is geographically closer to Buea, Kumba has experienced some of the most violent attacks in recent months while Limbe has been considered relatively safe. This section offers only preliminary research into these four cities. Further exploration is warranted to determine the extent to which the unique histories of each city impact the actualisation of violent attacks on schools.

##### **4.4.1. Bamenda and Buea, The Capital Cities of the Anglophone Regions**

Bamenda, capital of the Northwest region of Cameroon is the fifth largest city of the country, with a population of 393,000 in the city (or 2 million, including the surrounding areas).<sup>77</sup> Known for being a trade and export center, Bamenda is cosmopolitan and has the University of Bamenda, which is one of the few public universities in the Northwest region.

The Anglophone Crisis is said to have begun in Bamenda with the initial strike by Common Law lawyers that occurred on October 11, 2016. On May 9, 2015, Common Law lawyers from the Northwest and Southwest regions wrote an appeal letter to the government, related to the need to have laws translated from French into English and objecting to the appointment of French-educated judges unfamiliar with English Common Law practice. This letter received no response from the government and in reaction Common Law lawyers initiated a sit-down strike in October 2016 to protest the perceived marginalisation of the English-speaking minority. Additional strikes,

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<sup>77</sup> World Population Review. (2020). Population of Cities in Cameroon (2020). Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/cameroon>

marches, and protests followed, including a march on November 8, 2016 where hundreds protested in Bamenda to reiterate their call “for the full restoration of the Common Law system as it was at the time of the federal system... [and added] a demand for federalism.”<sup>78</sup> This protest was violently dispersed by government security forces, and the increasingly violent reactions to protests eventually led to riots in the region.

Bamenda is also the founding city for the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium, which participated in initial negotiations with the government in 2016 before being banned in 2017, the Social Democratic Front, a pro-federalism opposition party, and the Southern Cameroons National Council, which calls for the independence of Southern Cameroons. The city also has a strong military presence and has suffered some of the most violent clashes and attacks on schools since the conflict began.

Buea, capital of the Southwest region of Cameroon, can be considered the epicenter of the conflict in the Southwest. It is smaller than Bamenda, with an urban population of 47,300 (or 300,000 including the surrounding areas).<sup>79</sup> Buea is a trade and administrative center, is commonly referred to as the technology innovation center of Cameroon, and features the University of Buea, Cameroon’s first Anglophone university. The city also hosts several other schools of higher education, including the St. Francis Schools of Nursing and Midwifery (Biaka University Institute of Buea) and the Catholic University Institute of Buea.

On November 28, 2016, students at the University of Buea organized a peaceful protest “to call for the payment to students of the president’s achievement bonus, denounce the banning of the University of Buea Student Union (UBSU) in 2012 and protest at the introduction of a penalty for late payment of education fees and the additional fee charged for accessing examination results.”<sup>80</sup> Police called to the campus utilized excessive force to suppress the protestors, and were accused

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<sup>78</sup> Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads. (2017, November 06). Retrieved December 12, 2020, from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-cameroons-anglophone-crisis-crossroads>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

of beating students with batons, firing teargas, and sexually assaulting female students. Prior to this march, the violence associated with the crisis had been limited to the Northwest. When the proponents of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia declared independence from Cameroon, they claimed Buea as their capital city.

Like Bamenda, Buea has experienced violent clashes and attacks on schools, but the severity and frequency of these attacks have been decreasing in the city. While population density and the centrality of the conflict being in Bamenda may have a close connection to this, the actual cause may be more closely associated with ethnic divisions between the Northwest and Southwest regions and the divided conception of federation between the two areas. The Northwest region is dominated by the Grassfields, associated with the Bamiléké, majority (who trace their origins to the Francophone West and the Anglophone Northwest), while the Southwest is dominated by the Sawa ethnic groups (who trace their origins to the Francophone and Anglophone coastal areas). That “the southern elites and indigenous groups have always denounced the demographic, political and economic domination and monopolisation of their lands by Northern migrants” is manifest through the different conceptions of federalism for a more autonomous Cameroon.<sup>81</sup> Anglophone activists in the Northwest call for a two-state federation, separating the Northwest and Southwest regions as independent from the rest of Cameroon. Activists in the Southwest have proposed alternative formations, with some calling for a federated state for Southwest Cameroon that connects the Sawa with the Bakweri minority in the coastal areas, or a ten-state federation that matches with Cameroon’s existing ten regions, or a different pattern of four to six states that may appeal more to the country’s Francophone population.<sup>82</sup>

The lack of consensus between the two regions undermines the effectiveness of the secessionist movement. This movement is further weakened in the Southwest, where a clear goal for a federated Anglophone state is unclear. Additionally, leaders in the Southwest were reported as calling on the youth in the region to “break with the disorder caused by northerners [Northwesterners]” in 2017,

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<sup>81</sup> Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads. (2017, November 06). Retrieved December 12, 2020, from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-camerouns-anglophone-crisis-crossroads>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

which suggests that leaders there see the Anglophone Crisis as more closely associated with the Northwest.<sup>83</sup> Buea specifically is also less populous than Bamenda, which may play a role in the decreasing frequency and severity of attacks in the city. This last note is key to understanding the difference of violent attacks in the two Southwest cities of Kumba and Limbe.

#### **4.4.2. Kumba and Limbe, Southwest Cities**

In June 2020, The Africa Report stated that fewer cities in the Southwest region were observing Ghost Town days, but the populace of Kumba were largely still abiding by the restrictions.<sup>84</sup> The difference in ongoing violent attacks and observations of Ghost Town days between Kumba and of Buea and Limbe may be closely associated with the population size and makeup of each city.

Kumba is one of the largest cities of Cameroon, with 144,000 in the urban areas (or, 400,000 including the surrounding areas).<sup>85</sup> Kumba is metropolitan, a central commercial town in the region with a high level of activity and is one of the more developed cities in the Meme division. The city is also a regional transportation centre and serves as the governmental headquarters of the Meme division.<sup>86</sup> Kumba is known to be ethnically diverse and features a relatively young population. Kumba has experienced some of the most severe attacks on schools, including the attack on October 24, 2020, that left 7-8 children dead.

Limbe has a smaller population than Kumba, with 72,000 in the urban areas (or, 112,000 including the surrounding areas).<sup>87</sup> The city is a major tourist destination, featuring a variety of hotels and attractions. It is also home to the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) at the Man O'War Bay base, the main training and instruction centre for that elite military force. Unlike Kumba, Limbe is

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Foute, F. (2020, June 25). Anglophone Cameroon: Buea near normal, while Bamenda a ghost town. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://www.theafricareport.com/31216/anglophone-cameroon-buea-near-normal-while-bamenda-a-ghost-town/>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid note 77

<sup>86</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (Ed.). (2014). Kumba. Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kumba>

<sup>87</sup> Limbe. (2020). Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://www.city-facts.com/limbe>



generally considered safe, despite the occurrence of some attacks in the area. The FCDO [or, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom] advises “against all travel to the North West and South West regions, except Limbe in Fako division, where the FCDO advises against all but essential travel... During a lockdown in February 2019, there were reports of violence and loss of life...Incidents of sporadic gunfire also occurred, including shooting in Bamenda, Buea and the outskirts of Limbe.”<sup>88</sup>

The notable differences between Kumba and cities like Buea and Limbe appear to be population density and the presence of a younger populace. Noted above, leaders in the Southwest region called for the youth to distance themselves from the disorder in the Northwest region, but the younger populace, especially those living in Kumba, have increasingly denounced their messaging.<sup>89</sup> The violence in Kumba may be closely associated with an increasingly frustrated youth population who have lost trust in the ruling bodies, both from the Cameroonian government and from activist leaders in the Southwest region. But more research is necessary regarding all four cities to conclusively state how and why violent attacks are manifest in the different areas.

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<sup>88</sup> Safety and security - Cameroon Travel Advice. (2020). Retrieved December 20, 2020, from <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/cameroon/safety-and-security>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid note 81

## 5. Conclusion

The violence witnessed in schools in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon for the past 4 years is unprecedented. The recent coldblooded killing of 8 children in their classroom in Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba on October 24, sent shock waves throughout the country and attracted international condemnation. This gruesome attack represents one of the lowest points in the school crisis and many believed it should signal a clarion call for concrete measures and solutions to be put in place to avoid a repeat. Yet, many were still sceptical about the response and measures to prevent a repeat. Not long after the attack on October 24, there were incidents of kidnapping, torture and humiliation of students and teachers in both the Northwest and Southwest regions in early November 2020.

The issue of the presence of government security forces around schools as a concrete security measure poses a dilemma. It is true the presence of forces around schools has a psychological impact and could possibly affect the quality of learning. It is also true that many attacks have happened in schools in the absence of security forces or proper security measures. The trickiest part of it all is the fact that, as per government representatives, the government lacks sufficient resources to patrol all schools at the same time and cannot reasonably be expected to. Some argue that there is a lack of will by the government to take serious measures to ensure a secure learning environment. Children in rural villages where there is little or no security resulting to complete abandonment and transformation of their schools and classrooms into camps for NSAGs, have been most affected and risk the most severe long-term impact. The government with the help of international partners must design and implement well informed and lasting solutions to the security crisis and ensure a return to normal functioning of schools.

The government's commitment to the Safe School Declaration must mean something. At SODEI, we believe in the importance of education as a universal right not only to improve and protect the lives of young people, but also to increase the potential for growth, stability, and equality. With this in mind, we are fully committed to play our role both through advocacy and the design and implementation of programs to help ease the strain on education caused by the crisis and the effects of inequalities in society.

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