

Council Review of Cameroon Comes at Critical Moment

Item 6 UPR adoption

HRW welcomes Cameroon's UPR adoption, which comes at a timely moment for the country.

Earlier this year, HRW documented numerous human rights violations committed by both armed separatists and government forces since a pro-independence movement began to grow in the country's Anglophone region in late 2016.

In 2016 and 2017, government security forces used excessive force to break up at least five demonstrations organized by members of the country's Anglophone minority, located primarily in the South West and North West regions of the country, who were calling for the region's independence. Security forces, equipped with anti-riot gear including shields, helmets and tear gas, used live ammunition, including from helicopters, against demonstrators equipped at most with stones, and against unarmed bystanders, killing at least a dozen people and injuring scores. Some individuals detained in the context of the demonstrations were subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

The government's initial crackdown against peaceful demonstrations was followed by an escalation in violence, with armed separatists attacking government workers. Abuses perpetrated by separatists and documented by HRW include threats against teachers and parents aimed at preventing them from sending their children to class, attacks on schools, killings, kidnappings, and extortion of civilians and state workers. According to local authorities, at least 32,000 children have been out of school since November 2017.

HRW found that government forces responded to the growing separatist insurgency by carrying out abusive security operations against localities suspected of supporting secessionist groups. There, members of security forces committed extrajudicial executions and used excessive force against civilians. For instance, HRW documented how security forces burned several hundred homes and other property in twenty villages. Our researchers documented how four elderly women died, burned alive, after security forces set fire to their homes.

In this context, HRW is pleased to see Cameroon accept many recommendations urging it to engage in dialogue with the Anglophone community and effectively implement its bilingualism policy to avoid discrimination. However, we regret that thus far, these recommendations have yet to be implemented on the ground.

This UPR review presents an important opportunity for the Council to make use of its mandate to prevent human rights abuses. Cameroon should cooperate with the OHCHR and urgently facilitate its access to monitor the situation.

