



The Conflict in Cameroon – Roland Ngwatung Afungang

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The Nokoko journal is committed to a world where people are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, where respect for individuals' varied differences is maintained, and where everyone can realise their full potentials. NokokoPod is a companion to the journal, covering current African issues. It aims to bring forth new perspectives that broaden, trouble, complicate and enrich current discourses. Edited and annotated versions of the conversations will be made available on the journal website.

This issue of NokokoPod discusses the conflict in Cameroon. The podcast for this discussion is available on the Nokoko journal website. This conversation took place on August 22th, with Logan Cochrane in Ottawa, Canada, and Roland Ngwatung Afungang in Porto, Portugal. This version of the PDF has been reviewed by Logan Cochrane and Roland Ngwatung Afungang. In addition to the conversation, a set of annotations have been added as footnotes so as to strengthen the value of these publications and

*enable them to act as a resource for listeners and readers who want to have additional context and/or find additional resources on the topics discussed.*¹

Logan: This week we are joined by Professor Roland Afungang, from the University of Porto in the Centre of African Studies,² to speak with us about the conflict in Cameroon. As an issue that has gone underneath the news radar for many people, it is worth noting that each year the Norwegian Refugee Council makes a list of the world's most neglected displacement crises around the world.³ This year it was published in June (2019). The number one most neglected displacement crisis around the world was the one occurring in Cameroon. The NRC listed the conflict as having its origins in 2016, and up to its report in June 2019, more than 450,000 people had been displaced as a result of this crisis and more than 750,000 children are out of school due to the conflict. Yet, this conflict has not attracted a lot of attention. Today we will speak about the conflict and its history. To get us started, Roland could you dig deep a bit - for those of us who do not know Cameroon very well - about why there is a linguistic divide and its origins.

Roland: Thank you so much. Thanks to whoever is listening. As mentioned, I am Dr. Roland Ngwatung Afungang and a researcher at the Center for African Studies in the University of Porto. I will talk

1 Our guest this week uses "we" language at times during the interview; this is used as a general reference to Southern Cameroonians or Anglophone Cameroonians, the community whom he comes from. Roland Afungang is not making these statements on behalf of, or as a spokesperson of, any group or organization.

2 The work of Dr. Roland Afungang can be followed on various platforms, including:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roland_Afungang

<https://up-pt.academia.edu/AfungangNgwatung>

3 The details of tis report, and about the conflict in Cameroon specifically, are available here:

<https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/fr/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crisis/index.html>

about the Southern Cameroons, also known as Ambazonia, and war of independence that is currently on-going. To trace the history of the territory,⁴ the Portuguese arrived on the coast of Cameroon in 1470. They named the estuary of the river Wouri, which is one the biggest rivers in Cameroon, as *Rio dos Camaroes* (meaning the River of Prawns) because the mouth of that river was full of prawns. The malaria parasite prevented any significant European settlement until 1884 when the Germans finally colonized the territory. After the Portuguese, the British arrived on the coast of today's Southern Cameroons, in 1858 through one of their missionaries, Alfred Saker, who was a Baptist missionary. The British established a protectorate in this area from 1858-1887 and named it Victoria after the then Queen of England. After the British, the Germans arrived in the territory east of the Mongo river (present day Cameroon) in 1884 and colonized it by signing treaties with the coastal chiefs. In 1887, they moved inland to the west of river Mongo and took over the British protectorate of Victoria. The German expansion and rule in Kamerun continued right up to 1919, when they signed the treaty of Versailles, formally ending the 1st World War that saw the Kamerun colony placed under trusteeship by the League of Nations, and given to

4 For further details on the history of Cameroon, see:

Ardener, E. (1962). The political history of Cameroon. *The world today*, 18(8), 341-350.

Brain, R., & Eyongateh, T. (1974). *A History of the Cameroon*. London: Longman.

Chiabi, E. (1997). *The Making of Modern Cameroon: A history of substate nationalism and disparate union, 1914-1961* (Vol. 1). University Press of Amer.

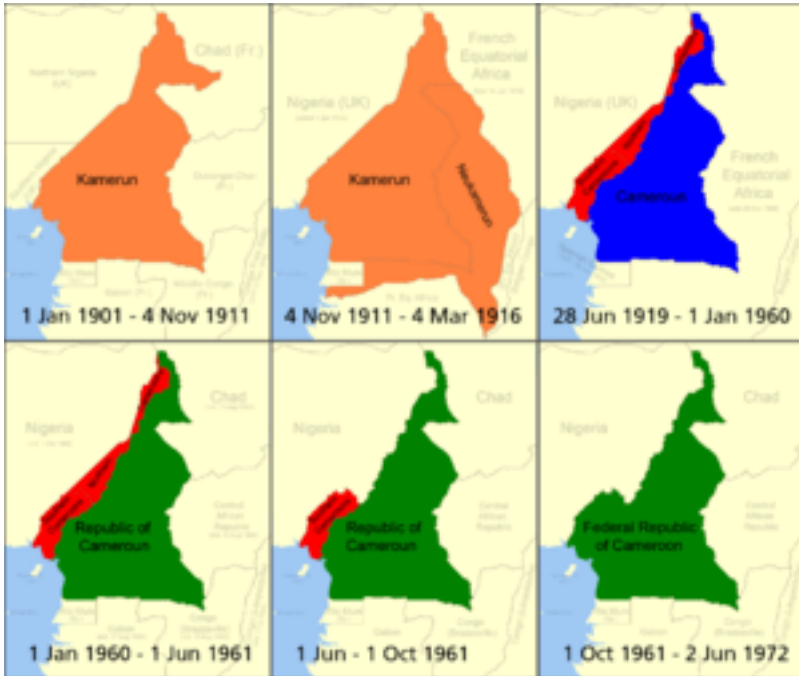
Fowler, I., & Zeitlyn, D. (Eds.). (1996). *African Crossroads: intersections between history and anthropology in Cameroon* (Vol. 2). Berghahn Books.

Ngho, V. J. (1987). *Cameroon, 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History*. Navi-Group Publications.

Ngho, V. J. (1996). *History of Cameroon since 1800*. Presbook.

Nkwi, W. G. (2010). *Voicing the voiceless: Contributions to closing gaps in Cameroon History, 1958-2009*. African Books Collective.

the British and the French to administer. This is how the colonial powers arrived in Cameroon.



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Following the June 28, 1919, Treaty of Versailles, German Kamerun was divided between the Allied powers, namely Britain and France, and was ruled as mandatory territories under the League of Nations. About 80% of the territory went to French, while 20% went to the British. Motivated by administrative convenience, the British divided their own share of the territory into two parts and named them, British Northern and British Southern Cameroons. They ruled these territories as part of Nigeria. British Northern Cameroons was attached to the British colonial government in northern Nigeria, while the southern part was attached to the government that was in Calabar. The two colonial powers, the British and the French ruled

the territories right up to 1960. After World War II, the United Nations (UN) transformed the mandated territories into trust territories under the Trusteeship Council and obliged the colonial powers to prepare the colonized peoples for self-rule.



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Logan: Can we jump to decolonisation and what happens as we move towards independence?

Roland: The path to independence in Southern Cameroon has been very difficult. I would like to go back to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 14 December 1960, which was on decolonization.⁵ That particular resolution called on all colonial powers to hand over the instruments of power back to the local people, and the clauses stressed the fact that independence cannot be refused based on the people's level of education, based on their economic power, or based on their ability to govern themselves. Rather, it was mandatory for the colonial powers to hand over the governance of the territories back to the local people. Following the independence of Nigeria and Cameroon in 1960, and based on the 1959 report given to the United Nations by the out-going British colonial administration (also known as the Phillipson report, wherein the British stated that its territories could not sustain themselves economically if they become independent), the UN decided to organize a plebiscite on 1st January 1961 for the two territories to decide their fate.

The two questions were: 1.) Do you wish to gain independence by joining French Cameroon? Or 2.) Do you wish to gain independence by joining Nigeria? Ahead of the vote, on August 10th and 11th of 1959, the leaders of Southern Cameroons held a conference in Mamfe that came to be known as the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference⁶ to decide on the questions that should be tabled for voting on the upcoming 11 February 1961 plebiscite. I would like to remind you that they voted 67% in favor that a third option be added, which would allow the people to vote for full independence. Unfortunately for the Southern Cameroonians, the third option was rejected by the United

5 Additional details on this resolution are available here:

<https://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml>

6 Awasom, N. F. (2002). Negotiating federalism: how ready were Cameroonian leaders before the February 1961 United Nations plebiscites? *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 36(3), 425-459.

Nations. The two options that were left were either to join La République du Cameroun or to join the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Finally, British Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria while the Southern Cameroons voted to join the republic of Cameroon. Following the results of the plebiscite, a vote was held in the United Nations General Assembly on the 21st of April, 1961, to decide on the status of the Southern Cameroons. This culminated to the passing of Resolution 1608 of 1st April, 1961, granting independence to the Southern Cameroons.⁷ I would like to call your attention to the fact that there were three questions posed during this particular vote: (1) Should the Trusteeship be terminated? (2) Should Southern Cameroons achieve independence? or (3) Should Southern Cameroons on achieving independence unite with La République du Cameroun to form a united republic of the Cameroons? Sixty countries voted in favor of independence for Southern Cameroons.⁸

To work out modalities regarding how the two states would live together, the leaders of La République du Cameroun and that of Southern Cameroons met in Foumban and came out with the constitution. Among the key decisions taken, it was agreed at that conference: (1) La République du Cameroun henceforth would be called Cameroun Orientale or East Cameroon and the Southern Cameroun would be called West Cameroon. (2) The two entities would form a federation that was to be called the Federal Republic of Cameroon. (3) That the federal constitution and the form of the state could not be changed in the future. This meant that despite the fact that Southern Cameroonians made up 20% of the population of the new state, the status-quo of the union could not be changed by any means.

7 Additional details on this, as well as the longer-term lobbying of the region, see:

<https://unpo.org/article/2713>

8 23 voted against, 10 abstained and 2 were absent. For additional information, from the perspective supporting Ambazonia independence, see:

<https://ambanews24.com/analysis-opinion-on-unga-res-1608-xv-of-21-april-1961/>

These were fundamental clauses of the federal constitution.⁹ Apart from these key issues, there were a lot of things that had to be ironed out in subsequent conferences, which were never held. The two heads of state had to table the proposed constitution to their parliaments for endorsement before a final agreement/constitution could be reached. I would like to note here that the vote to join the republic of Cameroon as a federated state, was a vote for one government with two different systems.¹⁰ It was some sort of way of maintaining the Southern Cameroonians identity, while becoming part of

9 For additional detail on this conference, see:

Achankeng, F. (2015). The Fouban "Constitutional" Talks and Prior Intentions of Negotiating: A Historico-Theoretical Analysis of a False Negotiation and the Ramifications for Political Developments in Cameroon. *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, 9(2), 11.

Fanso, V. G. (1999). Anglophone and Francophone nationalisms in Cameroon. *The Round Table*, 88(350), 281-296.

Ngoh, V. J. (1999). The origin of the marginalization of former southern Cameroonians (Anglophones), 1961-1966: An historical analysis. *Journal of Global South Studies*, 16(1), 165.

Ngoh, V. J. (2001). *Southern Cameroons, 1922-1961: A constitutional history*. Ashgate Pub Limited.

Njeuma, M. Z. (1995). Reunification and Political Opportunism in the Making of Cameroon's Independence. *Paideuma*, 27-37.

10 For additional details on federalism in Cameroon, see:

DeLancey, M. W. (1987). The construction of the Cameroon political system: The Ahidjo years, 1958–1982. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 6(1-2), 3-24.

DeLancey, M. W. (2019). *Cameroon: Dependence and independence*. Routledge.

Konings, P. J. J. (1999). The Anglophone struggle for federalism in Cameroon.

Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (1997). The anglophone problem in Cameroon. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35(2), 207-229.

Mehler, A. (2014). Why federalism did not lead to secession in Cameroon. *Ethno-politics*, 13(1), 48-66.

Stark, F. M. (1976). Federalism in Cameroon: the shadow and the reality. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 10(3), 423-442.

Cameroon. It was never a vote for annexation or surrender of sovereignty to the republic of Cameroon. Southern Cameroon was going to maintain their instruments of power. This meant that they were going to have their own judiciary system, run their own economy, control their own education system while having a central government based in Yaoundé. The then Prime Minister of Southern Cameroon was going to be Vice President of the new state, which was known as the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The President of La République du Cameroun that had become East Cameroon was going to be the Head of State. Amadou Ahidjo,¹¹ the President of La République du Cameroun became President of the new union and John Ngu Foncha,¹² the then Prime Minister of Southern Cameroon became the Vice President. This is how these two states came together.

Some years into that union, La République du Cameroun discovered that the Southern Cameroons had a lot of resources, particularly oil. To geographically locate the territory, the Southern Cameroons, is found in the Gulf of Guinea and it is estimated to be the richest region in terms of sub-soil resources in the whole of West Africa.¹³ In Africa, the Bakassi Peninsula is ranked third richest in terms of sub-soil resources, oil in particular. Due to these riches, and other factors, President Ahidjo decided to end the federation in 1972 after re-organizing another plebiscite where La République du Cameroun

11 Amadou Babatoura Ahidjo (1924-1989) was the first President of Cameroon, holding office from 1960 until 1982.

12 John Ngu Foncha (1916-1999) was the Vice President of Cameroon from 1961 to 1970. After leaving political office, he continued to advocate for, and support, greater autonomy for the former Southern Cameroons, including leading a delegation of the Southern Cameroons National Council to the United Nations in 1994 requesting support for such.

13 The World Bank also writes of this resource wealth; additional data on the economy is found in the World Bank Data Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/country/cameroon>).

citizens were allowed to vote. This unilateral decision to end the federal state was in violation of the Fouban conference and angered the Vice President at the time, who was the former Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroon. The skirmishes prompted the President of La Republique du Cameroun to cancel the post of Vice President, thereby sacking the Vice President John Ngu Foncha. He went further, and appointed another English speaking Cameroonian, Tandeng Muna,¹⁴ to replace him – however, in the capacity of the Speaker of the Parliament, not as Vice President. The name of the country was also changed from the Federal Republic of Cameroon to United Republic of Cameroon. Ten years after the federation was abolished, that is in 1982, President Amadou Ahidjo resigned and Mr. Paul Biya took over as the new head of state. Barely two years as President, Mr. Biya changed the name of the country from United Republic of Cameroon back to the La Republic du Cameroun, the same name the country had at independence. With this act, the federal system was replaced by the United Republic of Cameroon and the annexation process of former territory of Southern Cameroons was completed.

The problems we are having today stem from that failed federal union. From that point onward, the military in the French speaking Cameroon invaded southern Cameroon. They asked the then police force, that was known as the Mobile Wing, to drop down their weapons. They took over the security role and the economy was taken over by the government of Yaoundé. However, there were two things that were left standing: the judicial system or the common law system, and the education system which was the Anglo-Saxon system. This is the region where I come from, which is why I speak French and I speak English. I went to school in an English-speaking region

14 Salomon Tandeng Muna (1912-2002) was Vice President of Cameroon from 1970 to 1972.

of Cameroon, the former British Southern Cameroons. For my university education, I went to Yaoundé, where I obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees, with French as the main language of instruction. From there I left for Portugal, where I obtained my PhD. The crisis that erupted in 2016 has been going on since the federation was unilaterally abolished by President Ahidjo in 1972, barely eleven years into the union.

Logan: The tension is continuing, there are many issues that continue, but something changed in 2016 to spark protest. Could you talk about how, why, and why 2016? What pushed for that moment in time to be the moment that this crisis would start?

Roland: From time to time the people of the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, the people of the former British Cameroons, have always contested the annexation of the territory by La République du Cameroun. In 1994, there was an Anglophone General Assembly to call upon the central government to re-institute the federal system. This coincided with a large strike. The government used force and violence in response. Many people were killed and arrested in their effort to quell that demand in 1994. Four years later, in 1997, the anglophones rose up again in another big protest, asking to be considered as equals in the Republic of Cameroon and they called for the restoration of the federal system that was abolished in 1972. La République du Cameroun used their military; violence and brutality once again to respond to the people's request.

From 1997 to 2016 there was relative calm. From time to time people were arrested or detained, but the situation did not deteriorate as it did in 2016. What happened? Around 2012, the government began a systematic replacement of English-speaking teachers in the English-speaking regions with French-speaking Cameroonians. In Cameroon, most learned Anglophones speak English and French.

However, very few Francophones master the English language because they consider it a second language that is of no use. When you speak English in Cameroon, you are regarded as a second-class citizen. In the 1990s, Anglophones were referred to as Biafrans, as being from Nigeria. During my university days, I remember arguing with Francophones, they would just tell you "l'angolofou", meaning 'the Anglo-fool' or 'the English fool.' We experienced these kinds of insults but never responded because it was a common insult and meant almost nothing to us. What happened in 2016 to change the situation?

On 6th October 2016, the current uprising started when Common Law lawyers protested on the streets against the posting of French speaking magistrates with no mastery of the Common Law nor English language skills in the English-speaking regions.¹⁵ This protest was later joined by the teachers under the banner of the Cameroon Anglophone Teacher's Union (CATU). The teachers were protesting against the posting of French speaking teachers with no knowledge of the English language in English speaking schools in Anglophone regions. These two protests were brutally suppressed. However, in this instance, the teachers and lawyers were joined by other civil society organizations and the general public under the umbrella of Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC). Both in court and in schools, the people and students could not understand what the French speaking magistrates and teachers were saying.

For example, they would call someone and say "Venez ici, expliquez moi votre problème. Pourquoi vous êtes ici?" He is asking, "Come here. Can you tell me your problem? Why are you here?" That language will not be understood by many people in the former

¹⁵ The majority of Cameroon is under Civil Law.

Southern Cameroonians who do not speak French. When the lawyers went to court, these things were happening, and the judges were passing arbitrary judgments on the people because they did not understand what the judges were talking about. The people could not understand the questions from the judges. The lawyers rose up and said "Kindly withdraw the French-speaking magistrates in our courts because they do not understand the common law system as they have never been trained to administer that law and they do not speak the English language, which is the language of communication for the people in this area." Like the teachers, the lawyers were beaten. Their wigs were seized. They were dragged in the mud. When all these things happened, the people rose in support of the teachers and the lawyers.

The entry of civil society added many other issues that have not been addressed by the lawyers and the teachers. These included the abandonment of roads, the marginalization of the people, the constant reference to Anglophones as fools, the inability of Anglophones to obtain top positions in the government except of relegated appointments like the Minister of Women's Affairs and Minister of Employment and Vocational Training, which they said had limited influence on the economy and the people. The Pandora's box of problems that had been piling up since 1972 was opened. Civil society jumped in.

The then Prime Minister, Philemon Yang,¹⁶ called for a meeting with the teachers. The teachers said they could not attend the meeting without the lawyers and the civil society leaders. As a result, the other groups were added as, by that time, they had formed what became known as 'the Consortium', an organization consisting of

¹⁶ Philemon Yang (1947-) was Prime Minister from 2009 to 2019. He was the Ambassador to Canada for twenty years, from 1984 to 2004.

lawyer and teacher trade unions from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. During the meetings, the government insisted that the leaders should call-off the strike while the government look into the issues presented. The Consortium leaders refused. The lawyers refused to go to the courts and the teachers refused to ask students to go back to the classrooms. In return they asked for all those arrested during the protests to be released and a return to federalism. In response, the government decided to ban the consortium and the Southern Cameroons National Congress, which was the voice of Southern Cameroon at the time. When the two groups were banned, their leaders were arrested - this included Agbor Balla,¹⁷ Dr. Fontem Niba,¹⁸ Mancho Bibixy¹⁹ and others. They were taken into Kondengu maximum security prison in Yaoundé. The other leaders, including the Secretary General of the Cameroon Anglophone Teachers Trade Union, fled to Nigeria. While they were in Nigeria, the government announced a curfew, a State of Emergency, for the whole of southern Cameroon. The internet was cut off for a period of three months and during that period there was a serious crack down on anyone who tried to oppose the government. People were shot and killed.²⁰ The Secretary General of the Anglophone Teachers Trade Union was then joined by pro-independence activists who had escaped Cameroon for more than twenty years. This included political leaders who left the country long ago and were residing in Nigeria.

17 Felix Agbor Balla (1970-) is a human rights lawyer. He was arrested on January 17th, 2017, and released on August 30th, 2017.

18 Fontem Niba was a university lecturer and activist, who was the Secretary General of 'the Consortium' (CACSC). He was arrested on 17 January 2017.

19 Mancho Bibixy (1984-) is a political activist. He was arrested on January 19th, 2017. He was sentenced to 15 years in jail.

20 For some reporting on the conflict, see:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/cameroon>

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/july-2019#cameroon>

<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2018-march-2019/crisis-worsens-cameroon>

When the members of the Consortium went to Nigeria, they met these people, who made them understand that the Cameroon government has no consideration for them. These exiles explained that even peaceful marches are met with violence. Instead, they advocated for the need to demand the return of independence for Southern Cameroon.

On the 22nd of September 2017, the Governing Council of Ambazonia²¹ organized a big protest in Southern Cameroon. The protesters were asked to go out with peace plans in their hands during the march, as they protest. It was the same day that the President of La Republique du Cameroun, Mr. Paul Biya,²² was supposed to address the United Nations General Assembly. On that day, hell fell on the territory. Hundreds of people were shot by Cameroonian military men in helicopter gunships. People were beaten and thousands were arrested. Blood was flowing over the territory of Ambazonia. We did not expect to see that type of brutality. The Southern Cameroonians knew that the regime in Yaoundé were going to take some action, but it was not expected that hundreds could be killed, just for protesting peacefully and with peace plans in their hands.

Following the violence on the 22nd of September, the Governing Council called on the people again, on the 1st of October 2017, to once more take to their various chiefs and their palaces in order to declare the restoration of Ambazonian statehood. Julius Ayuk

21 The Governing Council of Ambazonia was established in 2013, which resulted from the unification of several independence groups and movements. The Council has been a key actor in advocating for independence, which includes the deployment of the Ambazonian Defence Forces, which is involved in conflict with the military and government of Cameroon.

22 Paul Biya (1933-) has been President since 1982, and before that as Prime Minister, from 1975 to 1982.

Tabé,²³ who was appointed to be head of the Governing Council of Ambazonia, declared independence for southern Cameroonians. On that day, again, people protested with peace plans in their hands. The worst happened; hundreds were killed, many were beaten and taken into the dungeons of La Republique du Cameroun.²⁴ That was the point when those leaders who believed in self-defence as a means to achieve independence came in. They communicated with the people, questioning them about how long they were willing to wait while the killing was on-going. They asked: Should all the people be killed before they start defending themselves? The killing was not just for a day, it was systematic. Hundreds were being killed as they days went by. These leaders said, "It is better to even use sticks to defend yourself than to stand and be slaughtered." As a result, the men, women and children stood up and started confronting the military whenever they come to arrest to arrest, fight them. If you die, then there shall be. We cannot sit back and see our mothers taken and killed in front of their children. This situation arose because of what was happening - the military would come in, take the father, call the all the sons, and shoot them in front of the mother as a warning.²⁵ This was why the Ambazonians took up arms. They used

23 Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabé (1965-) is the leader of the Ambazonia movement. In January, 2018, he was arrested in Nigeria. On August 20th, 2019, he was sentenced, along with nine others, to life imprisonment.

24 Reporting varies on these events. As access to information is difficult, there are varying claims regarding the number of deaths. Reporting from Al Jazeera (on the day of) stated seven deaths occurred on 1 Oct 2017 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/anglophone-cameroon-protests-turn-deadly-171001204308209.html>). A few days later, Reuters reported eight deaths had occurred (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-protests/cameroon-army-helicopters-shot-separatist-protesters-witnesses-idUSKBN1CB2BP>).

25 Human Rights Watch has documented cases of torture in prisons (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/20/cameroon-detainees-tortured>) as well as civilians being killed and instances of rape by security forces

local guns that they used to use for hunting activities, small cutlasses that they used for their farming, and farming tools.²⁶ From then, small arm groups were formed and now there are almost 20 different armed groups operating across the 13 divisions in Ambazonia.

Logan: Cameroon is acting but it is also being pushed, pulled and provoked by external actors. Could you talk about the role of other countries or international agencies in the UN?

Roland: I would like to stress here that France, the colonial master of La Republique du Cameroun, is believed to have planned the mafia that took place at Fouban in the name of a Constitutional Conference between Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroun. Most of the Presidents of Francophone Africa go to France for support based on the France-Afrique Accord signed at independence. At the beginning of the crisis, the Anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora organized protest marches in solidarity with the protests at home across at British, French and American embassies around the world. This was followed by protests at major international institutions, like the UN, and media houses (e.g. CNN, BBC etc.). We know that the French have the power to tell the Cameroun regime to stop the war and start negotiations, and they would stop. They listen only to France, alone. If France told Cameroon to end the war tomorrow, it shall end tomorrow. We have seen that practiced elsewhere, like in Ivory Coast where the French forced a

(<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/22/cameroon-security-forces-kill-civilians-rape-woman>).

²⁶ Armed opposition groups have also been documented by Human Rights Watch as escalating the conflict (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/24/cameroon-video-shows-separatists-torturing-man>) and targeting civilians (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/kidnappings-endemic-camerouns-anglophone-regions>).

regime change. Thus, we know they have the capacity to end the war in Southern Cameroon if they so desire.

Our protest has not been able to be heard in the United Nations even if we protested in front of the United Nations several times. We have contacted foreign NGOs and foreign governments to assist us and lobby on our behalf so that this case could be heard in the United Nations General Assembly or in the Security Council. Till today, only a single meeting has been held, which was about the humanitarian crisis in the conflict region.²⁷ Some human rights organizations, such as the Norwegian Humanitarian Organisation, International Human Rights Watch and others working in Cameroon, such as Caritas, the International Crisis Group contacted the United Nations to inform them about the humanitarian situation in Southern Cameroons. That meeting was held, but there no question on how to resolve the problem in Southern Cameroon. It was a meeting for humanitarian purposes.

Although some countries and NGOs have shown interest in the Southern Cameroon conflict, the only partner that I can say that has shown a bit of solidarity with the people of the Southern Cameroons has been the United States of America. The Trump Administration has passed some sanctions against the Cameroonian military²⁸. Before the beginning of this crisis, the Americans had a joint task

27 For some reporting on that meeting, see: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/un-warns-crisis-anglophone-cameroon-worsening>

28 For additional detail on the sanctions and military aid cuts, see:

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/06/politics/cameroon-security-assistance/index.html>

<https://www.cameroonintelligencereport.com/tension-over-purported-u-s-sanction-of-cameroonian-officials/>

<https://www.theafricareport.com/15928/anglophone-crisis-in-cameroon-the-lobbyists-war-rages-in-washington/>

force in Cameroon to assist the Cameroonian army to fight against Boko Haram in the northern part of Cameroon. However, it was found that weapons that were supplied by the Americans were being used to commit atrocities and war crimes in southern Cameroon as well as in the northern region of Cameroon. As a result, the Americans passed a sanction to withdraw all the military funding that they were giving to the Cameroonian army. Apart from that, there is no other country in the world that has stepped up to assist the people of southern Cameroon. World media houses have not been covering the conflict. We believe that the Cameroonian government has a good network of international partners headed by France backing them internationally. Secondly, the Cameroun government has been paying huge sums of money to international lobby firms to cover up the atrocities in Southern Cameroons and prevent any constructive outlet to the war. That is why we do not see the war of southern Cameroon on the headlines of any major international media house; BBC and CNN. I want to remind you that more than 6,000 people have been killed. Those that have been officially registered or documented by human rights groups, are about 2,000.²⁹ This means that they have obtained the name and evidence regarding the death and confirmed that data. There are more than 250,000 refugees in Nigeria. The official numbers given by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is about 120,000, but that number is actually greater. For example, that number does not count internally displaced people who are in the bushes. It should be noted that the majority of the displaced people are not in Nigeria, they are in the bushes.³⁰

29 International Crisis Group reports that 1,850 have been killed, by actors on both sides of the conflict, since 2017 (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/272-crise-anglophone-au-cameroun-comment-arriver-aux-pour-parlers>).

30 According to UNHCR, there are 1.12 million persons of concern in Cameroon, as of the end of 2018. This includes 380,329 refugees and 668,494 internally

Logan: One of the challenges of a conflict zone is obtaining data, as you are saying; how many people are where, where do they move, and tracking different aspects of the conflict, something basic such as deaths or indirect impacts such as school enrollment? Could you briefly tell us some examples of how you or others are trying to use innovative approaches to get data on the conflict?

Roland: As a geospatial scientist, I have been working to map the areas that have been burned down. An estimated 250 villages have been completely burned down by the Cameroonian army. They have employed “scorched earth tactics” across Southern Cameroons because the military believes that when people leave the area it makes it difficult for Ambazonia forces to come out and fight since the population harbors and support the fighters. I have been able to map about 200 of these villages and identified them using aerial photographs. I have used remote sensing techniques to determine when the villages were burned and the spatial extend of the destruction, by comparing images before and after the event. For example, if village A was burned in February 2017, I compare satellite images of the area taken in January and images taken after the incident to show what has been destroyed.³¹ There are other organizations that are working to document the crimes that are being committed. Some of these efforts are headed by Cameroonian-based NGOs like Caritas, Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa and others. We also know that Human Rights Watch, which has been very active in the conflict from the beginning, has a lot of information on the crimes that have been committed. However, there is a need for people to go on the ground. Some international media houses, such as

displaced people. For more information, see data sets made available by UN-HCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/data.html>

31 The articles and data are not yet published. However, reports of this nature are commonly reported on (e.g. <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/37687>).

Sky News based in the UK, DW TV from Germany and TV5 from France have visited some parts of the territory and have reported on what they have seen and heard. From time to time, BBC journalists during their African New bulletin have send in reports on the war front.

In terms of sensitization, we have organized hundreds and hundreds of protests across the world. We have spent time and money to organize and attend protest marches, but no one seem to be listening to us. The international community has been deafened. This is because La Republique du Cameroun is able to work with its Godfather and protector, France, which is an influential partner in the international system. When France says 'No', the United Nations and the Security Council become quiet. No matter how loud we shout, no matter how many people die, no matter the number of gruesome pictures depicting atrocities committed against civilians we publish, the international community has remained silent. I have an inventory of the villages that have been burned down. I have satellite images that I have analyzed. People living in different parts of Ambazonia are doing work, but not in a centralized system. Each and everyone is trying to do whatever they can do on their own to help the struggle.

Logan: Looking forward, and maybe with reference to some of the mediation efforts and failures, what do you see in the future? What will happen? What do you anticipate in terms of any form of conflict resolution?

Roland: I would say that the talks about negotiation are a charade. It is hypocrisy. It is very hypocritical because when somebody wants to negotiate, their actions can say if they are serious or not. La Republique du Cameroun seems to have contacted a Swiss

organization, called HD, to be a mediator in a conflict.³² Different factions of the Southern Cameroons movements were contacted by this NGO (HD). Some of them attended the start-up talks in Geneva. However, others did not attend because the basic principles that guide such a process were not followed. First, La Republique du Cameroun did not officially say that they wanted to enter into any negotiations with the leaders of the Southern Cameroon. Secondly, HD is an NGO, it is a private organization and we are talking about issues that concern two states - states that were brought together by the United Nations resolutions and international law. Thirdly, Switzerland is not actually considered a neutral country, or as somebody who can be trusted, because La Republique du Cameroun has very close ties with Switzerland. Those peace talks started, and there was some hope because it was endorsed by the Americans, Canadians and the Germans, as a good initiative. However, those talks have died down because there was no will on the side of the Biya's government. It was just to show the international community that La Republique du Cameroun is trying to talk with what they call separatists. To support my claim, the Government of Cameroon never officially stated that they were having any meetings in Switzerland with Southern Cameroon leaders. Moreover, the Cameroon military has doubled their actions on the ground against the population. The

32 According to Reuters, Switzerland agreed to mediate talks between the groups. At the time, the Government of Cameroon did not make a comment regarding this and the president was only reported to be 'on holiday' in Switzerland (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-separatists-swiss/swiss-government-to-mediate-cameroon-peace-talks-idUSKCN1TS2F0>). HD is the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), which was brought in by the Swiss government to facilitate the talks. The neutrality of the Swiss has been questioned by opposition groups, including the Ambazonia Governing Council (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-separatists-swiss/swiss-government-to-mediate-cameroon-peace-talks-idUSKCN1TS2F0>). The HD Centre reports that it was opposition groups that contacted it first, to start the talks and seek mediation.

leaders of the Southern Cameroon groups that attended the Swiss meeting stated that, for discussions to start, there should be a cease fire. That the military that has been deployed into urban centers, into towns and the villages should withdraw to their camps to create an enabling environment for the talks. But, none of these conditions have been considered by the Biya's government. What we see is a continuity of violence. People are continuously being killed. Even on the same day that the meeting was going on in Geneva, La Republique du Cameroun skyrocketed the attacks on what they call separatists. Many people were killed in the northern zone, in a place called Jakiri, a locality in north-west Cameroon.³³ All these made us believe that La Republique du Cameroun had no real intentions to negotiate because they did not even talk about it. The future is very dark. There was a beam of light pointed in the dark, but that light has been taken away. Now, there is nothing going on - only fighting and fighting. The killings are going on. Unfortunately for the Ambazonians, there is nobody to come to their aid. They are the minority. They are outnumbered and out-gunned. They do not have the weapons to fight back. They are only there to die. I do not know what will happen tomorrow. Maybe, at the end, everybody will die. I do not know what the future holds. However, the people are determined to get freedom at all cost and are poised to fight till the last man standing.

Logan: As a final point, could you speak to what this means for the people who are living in these areas? At the beginning, I

33 There are multiple news reports of violence in Jakiri. For example, in March (<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists>), June (<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-north-west-and-south-west-crisis-situation-report-no-8-30-june-2019>); <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-military-delivering-aid-english-speaking-regions>) and July (<https://www.voanews.com/africa/switzerland-says-it-mediating-talks-camerouns-separatist-crisis-deepens>).

mentioned that an estimated 750,000 children are not in school. As this conflict continues, there are going to be long term impacts, not just on school but also on health care, infrastructure and the economy. Could you speak to what this means for the everyday people?

Roland: It is a very horrific situation for the people who are enduring this war. There are no medicines. There are no roads. The few roads have all being blocked in order to prevent the military from coming into the towns and villages. The few bridges have been damaged. Children have not been going to school for the third consecutive year. There are food shortages. Starvation and famine are setting in. The economy has been thrown to the dogs. There is no movement of people. There are corpses lying left and right, without anyone to bury them. The people each day do not know what tomorrow will hold for them.

Yesterday, the 21st of August, the government of La Republique du Cameroun actually sentenced the leaders of the Ambazonia revolution that were captured in Nigeria.³⁴ Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe and his whole cabinet were charged for treason, secession, terrorism among others and given life imprisonment. Before yesterday, there were some dreams of hope that schools may resume. If schools resume, gradually we can bring down the temperaments and find a way to sit down and negotiate. The actions of the government yesterday were done intentionally to derail the school resumption campaign that had been going on. While school resumption campaigns were going on, the government sentences the Ambazonian leaders to life imprisonment. What is the government telling the people on the ground? They are telling them that if they dare send their children to

34 For reporting on this, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/20/cameroon-anglophone-separatist-leader-ayuk-tabe-handed-life-sentence>

school, they will be killed. People are now asking their families not to send children to schools because the government will kill them. If the government decides to sentence the leaders, who will sit down at the negotiation table to broker a deal with the government for peace to return? Who will negotiate? It means that the government do not envisage negotiation as a means to end the war. The people who were to negotiate are the same people who have been sentenced to life in prison.

Looking at the security challenges, we are worried that anybody who attempts to go to school may be killed by stray bullets. We are asking parents to make the ultimate decision to let their child go to school or not. We are not against school resumption. What shall we do if we encourage children to go school and the children are killed in the crossfire? Today, as I am talking to you, more than two hundred people have died.³⁵ I have a lot of videos that are streaming into my phone because I talked to people about our interview and they were calling me from different parts of the world to send me information in order to channel that to you. Whenever we can talk to the world, we try to give as much information as possible. Maybe somebody, somewhere, can come to our aid.

The government is very unwilling to do anything, even to begin the basics. The military is still on the streets. As we are talking, the sounds of the guns are deafening. As I am talking to you, I would not be surprised if they call me and tell me that my father has been killed. When I talk to him on the phone, I hear guns. I can tell you, there is no hope. In a situation like this, we expect the African Union

35 During recent events, particularly following the military court's ruling of life imprisonment to the Ambazonia Governing Council, there have been many reports of killings. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported at least 40 deaths (<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/atrocities-alert-no-169-education-under-attack-cameroon-and-myanmar-burma>).

or neighboring states to come in and say, 'why are you people quarrelling?' or to call the government to sit down and talk, or to de-escalate the situation. But what we are seeing is that the Government of Nigeria is conniving with the Government of Cameroon to escalate the war. Refugees from Southern Cameroon were arrested in Nigeria and sent back to Cameroon.³⁶ People escaping from the war zone into Nigeria are being arrested and sent back to Cameroon. That is why most of the people prefer to be in the bushes in Cameroon, rather than go to Nigeria. In Nigeria, if you are identified as anyone who is sending audios or videos in support of the struggle, you are arrested and put on the next plane back to Cameroon and then you are in the military dungeons of Kondengui, the maximum security prison in Cameroon's political capital Yaoundé. As I am talking to you now, I do not know what would happen. Since the war began, France has given lots of loans to Cameroon. These loans are geared to support the ailing Cameroonian economy destroyed by the war. Southern Cameroon - Ambazonia contributes about 66% of the national domestic product of the country. France is going to give Cameroon more money to continue the war.³⁷ China, for its part, has given Cameroon billions and billions of Franc CFA in support of Cameroon, calling that help humanitarian aid to rebuild the villages burned by the military.³⁸ The British government is sending their

36 Reporting on this is scant. However, one legal case in the Federal High Court in Abuja, Nigeria, specifically ruled that deporting the leaders of Ambazonia was illegal (they had already been deported), suggested that this was indeed taking place (<https://allafrica.com/stories/201903040677.html>).

37 In February, 2019, France decided to continue its military cooperation with Cameroon (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-cameroon/france-says-to-continue-military-cooperation-with-cameroon-idUSKCN1PW1RA>).

38 As an example of Chinese support, in 2019 China forgave US\$78 million of debt (<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3022301/lenders-remorse-china-finds-africa-projects-require-growing>). France has also given large sums of humanitarian support, including in 2019

companies to sign contracts with the Government of Cameroun for the exploitation of national resources, in particular gold and natural gas.³⁹ The terms of these contracts are unknown, and we believe the terms are highly favourable to Britain since Cameroun is desperate for cash. It is a very dangerous situation. As we speak, the situation is very critical. We do not know what would happen in the next minute.

Logan: This is an issue that many people are not aware of. I would like to thank you for taking the time to tell us more about it and share your perspective. I would also like to thank you for the research that you are doing to contribute data so that everyone can better understand what is happening in the conflict, where and to what scale. Having that data is a critical foundation to increasing global understanding for the conflict. This approach is a useful one. Thank you for both of those things, speaking and contributing your research work to increasing global attention to the conflict in Cameroon.

Roland: I would like to thank you for having interest in our plight and helping to expose what is going on in Southern Cameroon – Ambazonia - to the world. I remain open and you can contact me at any time for more information. I am going to publish

(<https://www.businessincameroon.com/social/0705-9099-france-approves-xaf528bln-humanitarian-aid-in-the-far-north-and-east-cameroon>).

39 Reports of UK initiatives to increase investment in 2019 include:

<https://www.businessincameroon.com/economy/2507-9381-uk-export-finance-ready-to-invest-600-mln-in-cameroon-high-commissioner-rowan-james-laxton-says>

<https://www.ft.com/content/ce93b1ee-891a-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/from-saudi-to-cameroon-do-uk-business-links-really-open-channels-to-raise-human-righ/>

<https://www.businessincameroon.com/hydrocarbons/2202-8874-cameroon-franco-british-perenco-plans-12-5-36-5mln-investment-in-bomana-oil-block>

some articles that I presented in Canada.⁴⁰ The articles will be available soon for others to read.

⁴⁰ Information regarding that presentation is available on the conference agenda:
http://www.ieim.uqam.ca/IMG/pdf/caas-acea-uqam-2019-programme_preliminaire1.pdf