MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on the human rights situation in Cameroon
(2021/2983(RSP))

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on behalf of the S&D Group
B9-0564/2021

European Parliament resolution on the human rights situation in Cameroon
(2021/2983(RSP))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Cameroon, notably that of 18 April 2019,

– having regard to the EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2020,

– having regard to the Cameroon situation report of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of 5 November 2021,

– having regard to the statement on Cameroon by UN human rights experts of 12 October 2020,

– having regard to the statement by the EU to the 48th UN Human Rights Council of 14 September 2021,

– having regard to the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code of 2005,

– having regard to resolution 416 (LXIV) 2019 of the African Union on the abolition of the death penalty in Africa,

– having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,

– having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights of 1981,

– having regard to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon,

– having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

– having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas opposition parties and activists, peaceful protestors, civil society organisations and human rights defenders face widespread repression, threats and violence perpetrated by state and non-state actors in Cameroon;

B. whereas legitimate protests have been banned, individuals beaten, arrested and detained, and gatherings targeted by tear gas and water cannons;

C. whereas the presidential elections held in Cameroon in October 2018 were marred by allegations of fraud and irregularities; whereas the subsequent protests were met with disproportionate force by state security forces;
D. whereas around 200 people including Maurice Kamto, leader of the opposition party the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), were arrested in January 2019 and detained; whereas Maurice Kamto was released in October 2019 but rearrested in September 2020 and held under de facto house arrest until December 2020;

E. whereas over 120 other MRC members and supporters remain in detention including leaders Olivier Bibou Nissack, Alain Fougé Tedom and Pascal Zamboue; whereas the lawyer Felix Agbor Nkongho, a prominent defender of human rights in the Anglophone community, has faced attacks and harassment, and has recently received death threats;

F. whereas some civilian opposition members are being tried in military courts, and without sufficient access to information in their own language, or access to an appeals process;

G. whereas, following the mass protests in response to the 2018 presidential election, the international community called on the government of Cameroon to revise the electoral system through an inclusive review process before subsequent elections were held; whereas this has not taken place; whereas recent protests erupted following government plans to hold regional elections;

H. whereas deep tensions remain in the country between the Francophone majority and Anglophone minority communities; whereas peaceful strikes and demonstrations took place in 2016 by Anglophone teachers and lawyers in the Northwest and Southwest regions in opposition to the imposition of the French legal system and language in their courts and classrooms;

I. whereas civilians have been targeted in the escalating violence, and resulted in ongoing attacks by armed separatists including killings, extortion and kidnappings, including that of humanitarian aid workers;

J. whereas separatists have called for a boycott of education in the region and perpetrated attacks on hospitals and schools, leading to the killing of children and the deprivation of essential health and educational services; whereas on 14 October a five year old girl was killed in crossfire by a gendarme in Buea while walking to school; whereas on 12 November 2021 a seven year old girl was killed in similar circumstances by a police officer in Bamenda;

K. whereas Cameroonian security forces have responded to armed separatist groups with widespread and disproportionate force against gangs and civilians, with the perpetration of human rights violations including killings, rape, torture, gender-based violence, and the destruction and looting of property;

L. whereas a national dialogue was undertaken in September 2019 with the intention of resolving the conflict in the English-speaking regions between armed forces and separatist rebels; whereas two years later the implementation of the announced measures have yielded few results;

M. whereas on 24 October 2020 gunmen stormed a school in the Fiango neighbourhood of Kumba and killed seven children; whereas 12 people were arrested, including the school
owner and several teachers; whereas they were tried by a military tribunal in a case allegedly marked by irregularities; whereas four of the defendants were sentenced to death;

N. whereas on 11 September 2021 a non-state armed group announced a lockdown in the Northwest and Southwest regions from 15 September to 2 October; whereas the lockdown was strictly enforced, including the closure of almost all schools and learning centres; whereas violence was perpetrated against individuals refusing to observe the lockdown, including children and teachers;

O. whereas few exceptions to the lockdown were granted on humanitarian grounds, and as a result aid disbursement was significantly disrupted including access to food rations and health services; whereas UN agencies have been forced to suspend humanitarian activities; whereas as of September 2021 the NWSW 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan has been funded by around only 16%;

P. whereas an estimated 2.2 million people have been affected in the Northwest and Southwest regions including 573,900 people internally displaced; whereas there are approximately 68,600 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria; whereas the humanitarian crisis in the country remains deeply concerning;

Q. whereas Cameroon faces additional threats from Boko Haram in the Far North region, including the indiscriminate killing of civilians, kidnapping and looting;

R. whereas the persecution of LGBTI people in Cameroon is intensifying; whereas human rights organisations have recorded increasing rates of arrests, beatings and harassment by the Cameroonian police; whereas sexual relations between people of the same sex are criminalised in Cameroon and punishable with up to five years in prison; whereas this treatment is in violation of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

1. Deeply regrets the escalating violence, repression and harassment of opposition politicians and activists, peaceful protestors, civil society organisations and human rights defenders; urges the government of Cameroon to take all steps necessary to uphold its obligations to protect the rights of assembly, peaceful protest and the legitimate operation of CSOs;

2. Insists that individuals detained on unsubstantiated or politically-motivated charges, including peaceful protestors, are immediately released, including Olivier Bibou Nissack, Alain Fougé Tedom and Pascal Zamboue; urges security forces to end the use of force against civil society and offer adequate protection for opposition politicians and human rights defenders facing threats, including Felix Agbor Nkongho;

3. Deplores the use of violence by armed separatists and security forces in the Northwest and Southwest, in particular that against children; deeply regrets the terror, hardship and humanitarian crisis which is facing people in the Anglophone community as a result of human rights abuses perpetrated by both factions;
4. Is particularly concerned at the impact of the crisis on children, notably through the boycott and closing of schools, armed attacks and the killing of children; urgently calls on separatists and security forces to cease all violence against children; recalls the obligations of the Cameroonian government to ensure access to education and the safeguarding of children;

5. Notes that resumed and intensified political dialogue is the only legitimate path to a peaceful settlement in the Anglophone regions; urges parties, notably the government, to work closely with international organisations such as UNHRC to facilitate such structured talks;

6. Is concerned at the widespread impunity of security forces; strongly urges the Cameroonian government to investigate all alleged incidents of violence perpetrated by security forces and bring the perpetrators to justice, in order to establish a culture of accountability;

7. Opposes the use of military courts for the trial of civilians; recalls the international obligations to a fair trial by which Cameroon is bound, and urges the government to fulfil these obligations by ending the jurisdiction of military courts over the civilian population;

8. Regrets the death sentences which have been handed down in recent trials; recalls that the death penalty has not been used in Cameroon since 1997 and welcomes this trend towards de facto abolition; recalls that the European Union opposes the death penalty in all cases and without exception; urges the courts to refrain from issuing such a sentence and to confirm it will not seek the death penalty for opposition activists or protestors; calls on the government of Cameroon to ratify the second optional protocol to the ICCPR on death penalty abolition;

9. Underlines the importance of regional collaboration and urges the government to work closely with the African Union and ECCAS which have both issued stark warnings on the deteriorating situation in the Anglophone regions;

10. Expresses its deep concern at the deteriorating situation for LGBTI people in Cameroon; insists that the government and security forces uphold their commitments to the protection of human rights including a zero tolerance approach to harassment, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity; expresses solidarity with CSOs and human rights defenders in Cameroon protecting LGBTI rights and urges the Commission and EEAS to step up financial support for their efforts; reiterates that the criminalisation of same-sex relationships in Cameroon is a violation of international human rights obligations, and urges the government to repeal the legislation;

11. Reiterates its previous calls for a review of the electoral system involving all stakeholders in Cameroon in preparation for an inclusive reform of the system; recalls that this should be undertaken immediately and before the next round of scheduled elections; supports EU technical assistance in this regard to facilitate consultations on strengthening and consolidating democracy;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and
the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign
Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the
OACP-EU Council, the institutions of the African Union, and the Government and
Parliament of Cameroon.