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

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
– having regard to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
– having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights of June 1981, which Cameroon has ratified,
– having regard to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon,
– having regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1993 by Cameroon,
– having regard to the resolution of 11 March 2021 of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the EU on democracy and the respect for constitutions in EU and ACP countries,
– having regard to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,

A. Whereas, since 2017, Cameroon’s Anglophone Regions have been engulfed by a dramatic and growing civil war that has killed thousands of people and led to a full-blown humanitarian crisis;

B. Whereas the initial peaceful protests promoted by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium against the Federal Government’s marginalisation of Cameroon’s Anglophone regions in 2016 were suppressed with extreme violence by the state authorities, fuelling support for separatism and the emergence of several separatist militias calling for a new state, Ambazonia, and prompting a bloody military conflict;

C. Whereas dialogue is a precondition for peace, and President Paul Biya’s government has consistently rejected direct talks with any separatist leaders from the Anglophone Regions;

D. Whereas the ongoing conflict in Cameroon has internally displaced over 1 million people; whereas according to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) report on Cameroon of 5 October 2021 there are over 2.2 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and over 66,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring Nigeria;

E. Whereas Cameroon hosts more than 447,000 refugees and asylum seekers; whereas the spill over of this crisis affects the Cameroon West and Littoral regions;

F. Whereas this conflict has had a disproportionate impact on children, with 700,000 students having been deprived of their right to education due to a forced school boycott across the
Anglophone Regions and, according to OCHA, teachers and students have been attacked, kidnapped, threatened, and killed in the Anglophone Regions;

G. whereas civilians carry the brunt of the violence and conflict between government and separatist forces and make up the vast majority of casualties; whereas government forces and separatist forces alike continuously perpetrate reprisal attacks against one another, purposefully targeting civilians and vulnerable parts of the population;

H. Whereas, as of August 2021, children make up 28% of all survivors of Gender Based Violence and face a heightened risk of child recruitment, child labour and child abuse, with over 50% of children in Cameroon having reportedly been abused; whereas, according to the UN Population Fund, 38% of women aged 20-24 were married before age 18 and 13% were married before age 15;

I. Whereas the rule of law is not upheld by the state of Cameroon, with independent monitors including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, having previously documented military trial proceedings marred by serious substantive and procedural defects, in which the presumption of innocence, the right to an adequate defence, and the independence of proceedings and of the judiciary overall are all seriously undermined;

J. Whereas the Courts in Cameroon continue to impose the death penalty; whereas the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights has long called on governments to abolish the death penalty;

K. Whereas the situation in the northern part of the country is still dominated by the struggle against Boko Haram; whereas the members of BIR (Bataillon d’Intervention rapide) executed civilian women and children and they have not yet been criminally prosecuted, the security of the civilian population in the areas where Boko Haram operates is precarious and requires that the Cameroonian authorities take full responsibility and needed action;

1. Urges President Paul Biya’s government and the Anglophone separatists to initiate, without further ado, peace talks to avoid a further dramatic escalation of the humanitarian situation in Cameroon and to put an end to the human rights violations this conflict has prompted; calls on both sides of the conflict to cease staging reprisal attacks against one another, which purposefully target civilians suspected of affiliation with either government or separatist forces;

2. Condemns the arbitrary arrests of political opponents and peaceful protesters, independent press and other civilians, and deplores the use of a military tribunal to try civilians, which is in violation of international law; is concerned by serious procedural irregularities, including depriving the accused of their right to challenge the evidence against them and to present evidence in their own defence; deplores the use of torture against any person by any party to the conflict;

3. Calls on the Cameroonian authorities to stop railroading people into a sham trials before a military tribunal, with a predetermined outcome, capped with the imposition of the death penalty, which is unlawful under international human rights law;
4. Insists that the Cameroonian authorities ensure that victims of the ongoing conflict have the right to an independent, fair and effective investigation into their case, and that those responsible for human rights violations and abuses be brought to justice in a fair trial; stresses that facilitating corrupt trials amounts to impunity;

5. Calls on the Cameroon government to, without further delay, ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the abolition of the death penalty and to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; calls upon the Government to, in the meantime, put an end to impunity and ensure absolute judicial independence, which are core components of the rule of law and the foundation of a functioning democratic state;

6. Deplores the attacks against teachers and students across the Anglophone Regions in Cameroon; urges separatists to cease immediately all attacks against schools and to end the forced education boycotting, allowing the safe return to school of all students and teachers; implores the Cameroon authorities to prioritize the rights and safety of children above any other political motive; condemns the instrumentalisation of children and communities during attacks which lead to killings, rape, looting and abduction by terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram;

7. Condemns the excessive use and abuse of force against political opponents, and peaceful protestors; deprecates the abuse of lockdown measures, such as curfews or banning public meetings, under the veil of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to constrain freedom of expression, the press and the right to peaceful assembly;

8. Expresses concern at the status of freedom of speech and freedom of the press in Cameroon; deplores the arbitrary arrest and harassment of journalists and opposition politicians and the silencing of political dissent; calls on the government of Cameroon to promote and ensure the protection of the right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the right to protest; calls for the strengthening of an inclusive democratic dialogue between all stakeholders and political players throughout all regions of Cameroon;

9. Insists that all parties to the conflict immediately provide unfettered humanitarian access, given that 2.2 million people are now in humanitarian need and stresses that humanitarian assistance currently provides life-saving support and protection to large portions of the population, including refugees from Nigeria and Central African Republic; deplores, therefore, the fact that over 40,000 people were denied food assistance due to insecurity and roadblocks in the North-West and the South-West regions, as well the recent attacks on health facilities and the fact that humanitarian activities were banned under lockdown;

10. Condemns the attacks against humanitarian workers, including their abduction, harassment and murder in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon and, equally, condemns the escalating intimidation towards independent monitors and human rights defenders, especially women rights defenders, whose work is more important than ever in the context of serious human rights violations by all parties to this conflict;

11. Urges the international community, notably the African Union, Central African States, United Nations and the European Union to exert pressure on the Cameroon authorities to
put an end to the violence, enable humanitarian access, and develop and apply a sustainable, peaceful and democratic solution to the ongoing crisis; considers that a UN Human Rights Council Fact-Finding Mission to Cameroon would be appropriate to determine the degree to which international human rights law and international humanitarian law have been violated and by whom; recommends that the UN Security Council formally add the situation in Cameroon’s Anglophone regions to its agenda and that the UN Secretary General provide a briefing on the situation without further delay;

12. Calls upon the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to consider adopting targeted sanctions towards those individuals responsible for human rights violations, by means of the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime;

13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the European Commission /High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the ACP-EU Council, the institutions of the African Union, and the Government and Parliament of Cameroon.