MEMBER PROFILE

Ambazonia

Ambazonia Governing Council

Last updated: July 2018
Status: occupied territory
Population: six to eight million
Capital: Buea
Area: 42,383km square (16,364sq miles)
Languages: English and over 169 indigenous tribal dialects
Religions: predominantly Christian. Traditional African religions are also practiced.

UNPO REPRESENTATION
The people of Ambazonia is represented at UNPO by the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), which is a democratic, inclusive, non-discriminatory and non-sexist entity. As per its Charter, it consists of a National Council that functions as a parliament; a Council of Missions that holds judiciary power and seven executive departments. The mandate of the Ambazonia Governing Council is to free Ambazonia from colonial rule by Cameroun through the means recognised as legitimate under international law and to bequeath to future generations the foundations of a peaceful, just, democratic and prosperous sovereign Ambazonia that would foster global peace and development.

OVERVIEW
Ambazonia is the former United Nations Trust Territory of the Southern Cameroons. The 42,383 square kilometre land is bordered to the west and northwest by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the east and north east by the Republic of Cameroun and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean. Ambazonia is currently under military and administrative subjugation by Cameroun, which governs it as the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroun. The name “Ambazonia” is derived from the location of this territory in the Ambas Bay area within the Gulf of Guinea.

The Ambazonian population, of six to eight million people, includes a mosaic of over 150 indigenous tribes who inhabited the territory before European exploration of the land in the 19th century and who enjoyed democratic, prosperous, peaceful and quasi self-rule from 1954 to 1961 under its own government. Within this time, British rule of the territory was generally limited to external relations and defence.

Ambazonia is a victim of the illegal transfer of colonial authority over Ambazonia by Britain to Cameroun in a decolonisation process under the supervision of the United Nations. This is the consequence of the United Nation's attempt in 1961 to decolonise the Ambazonian territory by attaching it to Cameroun. Cameroun's government has engaged in continuous oppression and violations of the rights of Ambazonians as humans and as a people, including through torture, enforced, a limited access to education and economic growth opportunities, cultural assimilation, denial of the right to development for the inhabitants of the territory and denial of the right to life through the unlawful killing of Ambazonian civilians. On 27 November 2017, the government of Cameroun under Paul Biya officially started a violent “counter-insurgency” operation following mass protests in the region.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Colonial rule

In 1884 Alfred Saker, a member of an English Baptist Missionary Society, founded The Ambas Bay Colony. The territory was ceded to Germany in 1887 after Germany had established the protectorate of Kamerun in July 1884.

In 1916 the Armies of France, Britain and Belgium defeated Germany in Kamerun and took over the territory, sharing it between France and Britain. The Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 of that same year formalised the transfer. France reunited the land it had ceded to Germany in November 1911 back with French Equatorial Africa while its remaining portion of Kamerun was christened French Cameroun. Britain on the other hand contented itself with 20 percent of Kamerun, naming it British Cameroons and placing it under the Nigerian colonial governance system.

Following the Treaty of Versailles, British Cameroons and French Cameroun became League of Nations Mandated territories in 1922 and then United Nations Trust Territories in 1946. Britain further divided British Cameroons into Northern British Cameroons and Southern British Cameroons. Northern British Cameroon was administered as part of Northern Nigeria while Southern British Cameroon was administered as part of Southern Nigeria. By the British Order in Council of 26 June 1923, Southern British Cameroons became a distinct territory from the Northern British Cameroons within the international trusteeship system.

Independence and unification with French Cameroun

In 1954, Southern British Cameroons became a self-governing territory following its declaration of benevolent neutrality in the Nigerian Eastern House of Assembly. It had a legislature, a judiciary power, a House of Chiefs and a prime minister in the person of Dr Emmanuel Mbela Lifafa (E. M. L.) Endeley, who was also the Head of Government. In 1959, multiparty elections were held and the opposition candidate, Dr John Ngu Foncha, became the Prime Minister following a peaceful transfer of power.

During this time, the United Nations (UN) took several decisions concerning the British Cameroons. In the case of Southern British Cameroons, the United Kingdom ensured the future Ambazonia was sold to France's sphere of influence for a sum of 20,000,000 pounds. Thus, while French Cameroun became independent as Republic of Cameroun on 1 January 1960, a UN-led plebiscite was forced upon the people of British Cameroons in February 1961 to choose whether they wanted to “achieve independence” by joining the already
independent Republic of Cameroon or joining the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This false dilemma was against the prevalent decolonisation norms at the time that constituted the basis of self-determination as an international legal principle.

It was also in violation of UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 14 December 1960, which affirmed that independence was the inherent right of all colonies and trust territories. With the plebiscite conducted separately between the Northern and Southern British Cameroons, the people of Northern British Cameroons voted overwhelmingly to remain part of Nigeria, while the majority of the people of Southern Cameroons voted to achieve what they believed to be independence.

Discussions were to be held in the town of Foumban in French Cameroun from 17 to 21 July 1961 to draw up a charter for the running of a two-state system within a political arrangement, but these never took any form of legitimacy or concrete action due to the fact that neither the United Kingdom nor the UN attended.

In this regards, No Union agreement was ever produced and consequently, no document was signed and presented either to the National Assembly of the Republic of Cameroun or to the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly for ratification of a union between the Republic of Cameroun and the British Southern Cameroons. Through negotiations, the British Southern Cameroons leader, John Ngu Foncha would be appointed Prime Minister of the Federation and Ahmadou Ahidjo of the Francophone region would be the President. Ahmadou Ahidjo who was now President through the above arrangements, unilaterally proclaimed into being the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Re-centralisation phase under Ahidjo and Biya regimes

By a presidential decree of 1968, Ahidjo replaced Foncha with a subordinate. Four years later, on 20 May 1972, Ahidjo, in violation of the said article 47 of the Federal constitution stage-managed a referendum which led to the complete dismantling of the federal structures in favour of a unitary state system; thereby transforming the country into the United Republic of Cameroon.

In 1984, by Law No 84/1 of 4 February 1984, Paul Biya, Ahidjo’s successor, declared a unitary French-speaking Republic of Cameroun from the ashes of the United Republic of Cameroon. By doing this, he reverted the name of the country back to the Republic of Cameroun, the name by which French Cameroun gained independence on 1 January 1960.

1990s liberalisation process and the revival of the anglophone social movements

In 1990, President Biya, having been re-elected to the head of his party, announced that Cameroon would re-allow multiparty politics and social movements to become a part of Cameroonian society. This was part of a process of liberalisation that was widely encouraged by the Cameroonian government’s traditional allies, including France.

Although these reforms allowed the establishment of Anglophone social movements, the government continued to ignore requests for decentralisation. It was only in 1996 that the Biya government recognised the requirement for a decentralisation programme. Further tensions arose when Anglophone teachers initiated a strike against the government’s decision to create a central educational plan in the late 90s.

Post-2000 crackdown

Since the reorientation of world politics after the fall of the Soviet Union, many Cameroonians were optimistic about riding the wave of democratisation in the region and looked towards Biya’s plans as being a pathway to this goal and better governance. Left disappointed by the speed of reforms though, the Ambazonian civil society benefited from the lifting of the ban on social movements to try to accelerate and improve the decentralisation process.

These goals have remained elusive since 2000 due to several obstacles in due course. One was the economic crisis in the early 1990s, which strengthened the Cameroonian central government’s grip on the economy rather than weakening it going in to the new millennia. Under the auspices of structural adjustment programs, the Cameroonian government
privatised Ambazonian public services and conversely nationalised certain other industries such as agriculture in their hands, in order to create a state of quasi-dependence.

From the end of 2016 there has been a sustained demand for the respect of Ambazonian Anglophones’ rights by civil society actors and a subsequent response by the Biya government. The mass strikes and protests in Ambazonia were first ignored by the government but when a general strike was held in 2017, it led an armed crackdown looking to eliminate the multitude of actors. This crackdown, which triggered numerous human rights violations, has led to the largest civil society mobilisation for the rights of Ambazonians in years.

CURRENT ISSUES

Structural Discrimination, Exploitation and Assimilation

From the moment Southern Cameroonians agreed to form a federation of two separate but equal states with the former French colony of La République du Cameroun, the Anglophone minority has had to endure marginalisation, discrimination and economic deprivation.

An example of this is the disparity in the allocation of resources for developmental projects, the distribution of political power and representation in the overall governance structure of the state. As recent as 2017, the portion of the national investment budget allocated to the southern region, home region of President Paul Biya, was larger than that allocated to the English-speaking North West and South West regions combined. While the South, with a population of approximately 700,000, was allocated over 126 billion CFA francs, the North West and South West regions, with a population of approximately 3.4 million, were allocated just about 85 billion.

The disparity in representation within the executive, judiciary, military, general administrative powers and all other levels of governance has been equally alarming. Constitutionally, the Prime Minister, reserved for an Anglophone, only comes in fourth position in State protocol, after the head of state, the president of the Senate and the speaker of the National Assembly, all Francophones. This means that the Anglophone Prime Minister largely takes up a symbolic role rather than a genuine political force, particularly in light of ethnic power relations, in what is a clear breakaway from the original intent of the unified Cameroon governance system.

Admission records into the National School of Administration and Magistracy reveal that in 2016, only 8 out of 145 admitted students were from the English-speaking regions. With respect to the military, only 2 out of the 28 living Army Generals hail from the English-speaking regions.

Despite a constitutional provision stating that English and French are the official languages of the newly formed federal state, French has thus effectively become the administrative
language of preference. Ambazonians at all levels and corridors of government and the territory at large have to seek proficiency in the French language as a means of survival, career advancement and acceptance by a political and socio-cultural system that perceives and treats them as second-class citizens.

Through political manoeuvring, the name of the federal state has morphed, over time, from the Federal Republic of Cameroon, the United Republic of Cameroun to the present-day Republic of Cameroun. Its flag transformed from a flag bearing two stars, representing the two separate but equal states, to a single star, representing a single state.

State policies aimed at finalising the process of assimilation of Ambazonians have been implemented. Such policies exemplify what has been referred to as the "Francophonisation" of Ambazonia’s educational and judicial systems. This manifested through the appointment of French-speaking civil law practicing judges and magistrates to courts in Ambazonia where the operative language is English and which works according to Common Law. There is also widespread posting of French-speaking teachers to schools in Ambazonia to teach English-speaking Ambazonian children all subjects in French.

Enforced Disappearances

Cameroon, despite having signed it in 2007, still has not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. Since the 1990s, Cameroon has been guilty of disappearances of people within the Ambazonia territory and beyond, most of whom had challenged the regime.

On 7 January 2018 Tassang Wildfred, Sisiku AYuk Tabe, Nfor Ngala Nfor and 45 other Anglophone activists were abducted from Nigeria to Cameroon by the government of la République du Cameroun. It appears to have been done by Cameroon special forces without consultation of the Nigerian government, although the latter actor has been complicit in
rendering Ambazonian exiles back to Cameroon. The three men's whereabouts remained unknown for several months, including by their families (Premium Times, 12 January 2018 and Journal du Cameroun, 26 June 2018). The action reveals the regime's desire to continue enforcing and perpetrating enforced disappearances among Ambazonians both at home and abroad.

Refugees and Internal Displaced Peoples

Since the outbreak of the crisis in Southern Cameroons in October 2016, what began as a peaceful protest to ask for better living conditions has escalated to a civil war. This has created untold suffering to the people and Ambazonia, which has witnessed the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since independence in 1961. Forces loyal to the Biya regime invaded Ambazonia, causing havoc within municipalities, shooting indiscriminately, destroying properties and burning down homes and villages. The arsonist acts perpetrated by security forces have left thousands homeless and hundreds dead.

Systematic killings and constant harassment have resulted to an increased number of displaced persons, creating a considerable refugee and humanitarian crisis in Ambazonia that, until 2018, had gone unnoticed in the international media. Statistics from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reveals that the Nigerian government is the main host of Ambazonian refugees. On 20 March 2018, UNHCR spokesperson Aikaterini Kitidi stated that more than 20,000 Ambazonians had been granted refugee status following escalating violence in their communities. Official records show over 65,000 Ambazonian asylum seekers or refugees are spread across different states in Nigeria.
Reports from the camps equally reveal the deplorable living conditions of Ambazonian refugees which is creating a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly from prostitution. The spokesperson emphasised the particular situation of female refugees as a concern. The government’s subjugation of Ambazonia continues to subject Ambazonians to open hardship in Nigeria as refugees, coupled with complaints from a fraction of the Nigerian population who see Ambazonian refugees as a threat and accuse them of triggering further difficulties for Nigerians to access already-limited Nigerian public services.

Torture

The government of Cameroun has and continues to violate the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which it is a party, (CAT) and the national laws of the country, including its constitution, Penal Code which theoretically provide civilians protection from torture.

Cameroonian security forces have targeted and tortured to death English-speaking Ambazonians on the bases of their language and culture. The government’s attempt to infiltrate the cultural heritage of the people of Ambazonia with a different set of legal customs has been met with stiff resistance from Common Law lawyers and trade unionists. All these activists and political representatives defending their rights receive fierce resistance from the government, with many abducted, harassed, tortured, molested or jailed for denouncing governmental corruption. Activists and representatives from the people face continuous harassment and all sorts of ordeals from security forces within their detention cells.

Ambazonian students protesting against marginalisation and discrimination within their institutes have suffered police brutality for demanding better working conditions in their universities. Students’ protests in the said university have often been marked with indiscriminate shooting of live bullets, maiming, police brutality, mass arrest and rape. The Buea Central prison alone harbours more than 450 peaceful protesters bundled up by security forces during peaceful demonstrations in Buea and other parts of that region. The Yaoundé maximum-security prison Kondengui recorded the death of Vitalis Wolum and 4 Ambazonian inmates, bled to death from severe torture within their prisons cells.

Freedom of Speech, of the Press, of movement, and of Assembly

The government of Cameroon restricts freedom of expression heavily. Any open disagreement or expression of divergent views or opinions that does not align with the views of the government in power is considered an open attack on the government and treated as an act of terror. Ambazonian politicians, activists and civil society organisations who question authority or challenge the enactment or legalisation of certain laws that do not favour the people or the press receive severe attacks and crackdown from government security forces.

Private media outlets in Ambazonia reporting the current crisis and the human rights abuses in Ambazonia by government security forces have been forcefully shut-down to prevent the world from having knowledge of the on-going genocide in Ambazonia. Internet services in Ambazonia are shut down, thereby violating people’s rights to access social media through Facebook, WhatsApp and many other media. Journalists who openly report the acts happening perpetrated by law enforcement officers in Ambazonia are fired from their jobs and others are arrested and detained with claims of promoting hate speech.

Dissatisfied teachers, lawyers and youth who took to the streets in October 2016 to express their frustration regarding the infiltration of their educational and legal systems with French foreign laws were severely brutalised, arrested and jailed by the government of Cameroon. Others flee to exile for trying to exercise their fundamental right to freedom of expression as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The enactment of the 2014 anti-terrorism law by the government of la République du Cameroon has curtailed the freedoms of association and assembly in Ambazonia. The law, employed as a double-edged sword, was meant to combat Boko Haram terrorism but has been instrumentalised by the government to crack down on Ambazonian dissents. Freedom
of expression, press freedom, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and even freedom of association or peaceful demonstration can all be suppressed under this law. The government has used this law to perpetrate gross violations of various fundamental rights especially the right to freedom of assembly and peaceful association. The law, in its section 2, chapter II states what may constitute an act of terrorism without giving a clear-cut definition of what terrorism is.

ECONOMY AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Ambazonians today earn their living mostly through agriculture, micro-businesses and work in healthcare and education. Economic prosperity in the agricultural sector is threatened by environmental degradation, plant diseases, low mechanisation and fluctuating prices in the global market that affect local market conditions.

Ambazonia borders the over 150 million people market of Nigeria and is accessible to the high purchasing power nations of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It is, therefore, centrally located for regional international trade especially within the states in the Gulf of Guinea, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and to Europe, America, Asia and other continents through its deep sea ports.

Despite the economic richness of Ambazonia in terms of natural resources and potential trade, many Ambazonians live below the poverty line of less than 1 US Dollar a day. This is due to the denial of their access to employment opportunities, marginalisation in the labour market and the massive destruction and shutting down of companies that could provide job opportunities and capital within Ambazonia. There were also widespread reports of seizing of Ambazonian-held capital by the Cameroon government.

Foreign investors are coerced to invest in Francophone regions instead of Ambazonia. This has been the case, for example, for oil company Pecten and breweries Guinness and Isenbeck. Furthermore, the government of Cameroon has neither developed the natural seaport of Victoria nor improved that of Tiko to their full economic potential.
Report © 2018
The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
Research, layout and editing: UNPO Secretariat and UNPO USA (Washington, DC)

UNPO Advocacy Office
Rue du Pépin 54
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel. +32 25 13 14 59