

UN Officials call for enhanced protection of civilians facing escalating violence in Cameroon

Press Statement: For Immediate Release

New York, 21 February 2020 - The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Najat Maalla M'jid, and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, deplore the continued reports of human rights abuses committed against civilians including women and children in the South-West and North-West regions of Cameroon.

“We are deeply concerned about reports of violence, including the 14 February attack on Ngarbuh village in the Northwest region that left 23 civilians dead, including 15 children. The four officials deplored continued reports of attacks against civilians including extra-judicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and property destruction, as well as retaliatory attacks, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, disproportionately affecting women and children in the south-west and north-west regions of Cameroon and forcing many to flee their homes. Children continue to be particularly affected by the crisis with reports of attacks on schools, extensive school closures in the affected regions and thousands of children out of school. Information received on the recruitment and use of children by armed actors and the detention of children for their actual or alleged association with armed actors raise further protection concerns.”

Hundreds of thousands of people are reported to be displaced in the affected regions and the lack of security has further exacerbated the plight of marginalized and vulnerable groups. “It is urgent to prevent further violence and to protect all women, girls, boys and men from grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Severely constrained humanitarian access and limited resources for service-providers has reduced the availability of sexual and reproductive healthcare for women, including urgent treatment for survivors of sexual violence,” they said.

The four senior officials called on the Cameroonian Government to discharge its primary responsibility to protect its population by addressing the root causes of violence and ensuring that victims of the attacks, are provided with the appropriate protection and assistance. They further called on the authorities to fully investigate and hold accountable those responsible for the serious

violations and abuses that have been committed. “We urge the Government of Cameroon to ensure full respect for human rights, including the rights of women and children, and to ensure that the humanitarian needs of civilians are met. Furthermore, we remind the Government that children associated with armed groups should be considered primarily as victims and their detention used only as a last resort and for the shortest period of time. We also emphasize that all forms of sexual violence are categorically prohibited under international humanitarian and human rights law.”

The United Nations offers its support and assistance to the authorities in Cameroon to address this situation and improve protection and service-delivery for civilians in affected areas, and for those who have been forcibly displaced.

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