

**21<sup>st</sup> September 2020**

### **A CEASEFIRE CALL FROM WOMEN**

In early 2020, the United Nations characterized the situation in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon as a complex humanitarian emergency with 2.3 million people in need. This is a dramatic increase from 2019's 160,000 persons in need of humanitarian assistance. Although estimates of persons killed as of 2019 by the UN stood at 3000 people, this number has since risen, and could today even be doubled or tripled. UNHCR estimates over 600,000 people have been internally displaced, and a further 60-70,000 refugees are seeking asylum in neighboring Nigeria. UNICEF estimates that more than 855,000 children are out of school due to the conflict. The situation since has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic; an escalation of violent clashes; and continued human rights violations as well as the perpetration of many dehumanizing acts on the civilian population. As such:

-Alarmed by significant human rights abuses committed by both security forces and separatist armed groups in Cameroon—including summary or arbitrary killings, forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, repression of fundamental rights, and violence against women and children, as cited in the Department of State 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Cameroon;

-Recognising the loss of thousands of human lives, massive destruction of properties, and displacement of persons occasioned by the conflict;

-Considering the damage to livelihoods, disruption of peace and security to the entire Cameroonian nation and most especially within the North West and South West Regions (former British Southern Cameroons), the loss of human dignity, and:

- Four years of no schooling,
- Increased child and maternal mortality,
- Absence of primary health care,
- Increased food shortages and other basic necessities;

-Determined to encourage and engage parties to the conflict to arrive at a peaceful and lasting settlement through negotiations;

-Convinced that as women, we bear the brunt of this violent conflict irrespective of our historical background, cultural, linguistic and political affiliation;

-Focusing on the provisions of the United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and basing our call on the AU's decade of ceasefire in Africa: Silencing the Guns in Africa 2020 as well as the UN Secretary

General's global call for a ceasefire and United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 2532 on cessation of hostilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;

We provide a thoughtful suggestion for stakeholders to engage in a ceasefire and eventual peace negotiations.

We, the women, urge parties to the conflict to:

- Respect human life and dignity and protect the population to stop the alarming death toll.
- Cease all hostilities by all armed actors immediately. We expect all parties to announce a cessation of hostilities within the next 30 days.
- Sign a written ceasefire agreement by November 2020, with each party clearly stating its commitment to making the process a success.
- Agree to a pilot ceasefire for six months, during which the parties improve their technical and security policies, with the contribution of civil society representatives. This agreement whose terms are borne out of a mutual respect for each faction must be binding on all parties with a local/international monitoring committee, composed of at least 50% women peacebuilders and religious women groups, put in place for follow up.
- Work toward a peace agreement and negotiation that is inclusive and sincere where all stakeholders, and not only those with political interest, are involved. A gender-balanced, inclusive commission should be set up to make the peace negotiation gender-responsive. Each faction should make provision for female participation of at least 50%, while civil society and other interest groups should also ensure gender balance for effective representation.
- Cooperate with all the humanitarian agencies in their efforts to provide relief and assistance to the ailing population.
- Form a think tank with members of the government of Cameroon and separatist armed factions as well as civil society to serve as a monitoring taskforce, aligned with other local/international bodies, to ensure all parties respect the ceasefire. Local women peacebuilders and women leaders should be prioritized.

We call on the Government of Cameroon to:

- Contribute to confidence-building among the parties to the conflict by releasing all arrested in relation to the armed conflict;
- Agree to a 6-month ceasefire to allow for political space to discuss these points with separatist groups and representatives of Anglophone civil society;

- Speed up an inclusive and sincere peace negotiation to address the root causes of the conflict with all factions for the sake of the ailing population within the conflict-affected areas.

We call on separatists armed groups to:

- Agree to a 6-month ceasefire to allow for political space to discuss these points with the Government of Cameroon and representatives of Anglophone civil society;
- Engage in sincere talks to identify measures that will return peace to our land.

This call is put out by women in the affected regions and beyond who—as mothers, aunties, sisters, and daughters—ache for a peaceful resolution to this deadly, violent, and traumatic conflict. It is piloted by the following organizations:

1. South West North West Women Taskforce SNWOT
2. Southern Cameroons European Women SCEW
3. Christian Women Fellowship CWF (PCC)
4. Cameroon Baptist Convention Women's Department CBCWD
5. United Methodist Women Association in Cameroon UMWAC
6. Southern Cameroons Women's League SCAWOL