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"CONTEMPLATING DIPLOMATIC FRACTURES WHILE BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SOCIOPOLITICAL INJUSTICE AND APATHY''

Mitigating the Conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone Region and Safeguarding Human Rights

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Introduction

Cameroon's Anglophone crisis is a prolonged conflict in the country's two English-speaking regions, the North-West and South-West, involving government forces and separatist armed groups. The conflict began in 2016 as peaceful protests against the marginalization of Anglophone institutions and escalated into armed violence in 2017 following the declaration of an independent state known as "Ambazonia." Since then, fighting and government crackdowns have caused a severe humanitarian and human rights crisis, resulting in at least 6,000 civilian deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, abductions, sexual violence, and the destruction of villages highlight the brutality of the conflict.

Despite Cameroon's responsibility to protect its population, violence in the Anglophone regions persists. Civilians remain trapped between military operations and separatist attacks, while prolonged school closures have denied education to an entire generation. International organizations have warned of escalating humanitarian needs, with millions affected nationwide by conflict-related crises. Efforts to resolve the conflict, including a 2019 national dialogue and mediation attempts, have failed to bring lasting peace, and although the United Nations Security Council has not formally intervened, the crisis continues to threaten human rights and regional stability.

This chair report aims to provide delegates with a clear understanding of the Anglophone conflict by outlining its background, key actors, major events, and previous resolution efforts, while proposing possible solutions. It seeks to equip delegates at İnançMUN 2025 with the knowledge needed to

develop realistic, human-rights-centered strategies that address root causes, protect civilians, and contribute to lasting peace in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

Definition of Key Terms

Anglophone (Cameroon): English-speaking people in Cameroon, mainly living in the North-West and South-West regions. They are a minority and have long felt treated unfairly in a mostly French-speaking country.

Francophone (Cameroon): French-speaking people in Cameroon, who make up most of the population and control most government power. Tension between Francophones and Anglophones is a main cause of the conflict.

Ambazonia: The name used by Anglophone separatists for the state they want to create in Cameroon's English-speaking regions. It was declared in 2017 but is not recognized by other countries.

Separatist Groups (Anglophone Crisis): Groups that want the Anglophone regions to leave Cameroon and form a new country. They use armed force and often shut down schools and businesses.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): Someone who had to leave their home because of violence but is still inside their own country. Many people in the Anglophone regions have become IDPs.

Special Status (Cameroon's Anglophone Regions): A limited form of self-rule given to the Anglophone regions in 2019. Many people believe it does not give enough power or real change.

Federalism: A system where power is shared between the national government and regional governments. Some Anglophones support this as a middle solution that keeps Cameroon united.

Human Rights Violations: Serious harm done to people's basic rights, such as killing civilians, arresting people unfairly, using violence or torture, and attacking schools or hospitals.

General Overview

Historical Background of the Anglophone Conflict

Cameroon's Anglophone crisis has deep colonial roots. Originally a German colony, the territory was divided between Britain and France after World War I under League of Nations mandates. The British-administered areas, known as British Cameroons, were split into Northern and Southern Cameroons. In a UN-organized plebiscite in 1961, British Cameroons were given the choice to join either Nigeria or Cameroon, with no option for full independence. Northern Cameroons joined Nigeria, while Southern Cameroons (today's Anglophone North-West and South-West regions) voted to unite with the former French Cameroun.

On 1 October 1961, Cameroon became a bilingual federal state consisting of West Cameroon (Anglophone) and East Cameroon (Francophone). The federal system was intended to protect Anglophone self-rule, language, and legal traditions. However, power remained centralized in Yaoundé. In 1972, President Ahmadou Ahidjo abolished the federal system through a referendum and replaced it with a unitary state, a move widely viewed by Anglophones as a violation of the 1961 agreement. Subsequent governments, including that of President Paul Biya (in power since 1982), continued policies that weakened Anglophone autonomy and recognition.

Over time, Anglophone grievances deepened due to perceived marginalization. Complaints included the dominance of French in public administration, limited Anglophone representation in government, and the imposition of Francophone legal and education practices in Anglophone regions. Calls for federalism or greater autonomy grew during the 1990s and 2000s but were largely dismissed by the

government, while Anglophone activism was often restricted. This long-standing frustration laid the groundwork for the current conflict.

Outbreak of the Crisis (2016-2017): Protests to Insurgency

The immediate crisis began in late 2016, when Anglophone lawyers, teachers, and students protested the erosion of the English-based legal and education systems. Demonstrators objected to the appointment of Francophone judges and teachers in Anglophone institutions and demanded respect for common law, English-language education, and decentralization. These protests were initially peaceful.

The government responded with force, using live ammunition, mass arrests, and later banning Anglophone civil society groups. In early 2017, authorities imposed an internet shutdown in the Anglophone regions, further inflaming tensions. As moderate leaders were arrested or silenced, radical separatist ideas gained popularity. After failed dialogue attempts, separatist leaders declared the independence of "Ambazonia" on 1 October 2017. Security forces violently suppressed demonstrations, marking the transition from political unrest to armed conflict. By late 2017, separatist militias had emerged and the government launched full-scale military operations.

Escalation and Human Rights Impact

From 2018 onward, the conflict intensified. Government forces conducted counter-insurgency operations that often harmed civilians, including village raids, arbitrary arrests, and destruction of property. Several incidents involving civilian deaths drew international condemnation. Human rights organizations documented widespread abuses by security forces, including extrajudicial killings and torture.

Separatist groups have also committed serious abuses. They have enforced school boycotts, attacked schools, kidnapped civilians, and targeted those seen as cooperating with the government. These actions have led to widespread fear and prolonged school closures, leaving hundreds of thousands of

children without education. Both sides' actions have contributed to a severe human rights crisis, with civilians trapped between military reprisals and separatist intimidation.

By late 2023, more than 6,000 civilians had been killed, and displacement reached massive levels. Hundreds of thousands were internally displaced, while tens of thousands fled to Nigeria as refugees. Many villages were abandoned, and displaced people faced severe shortages of food, shelter, healthcare, and protection. Humanitarian access has been limited due to insecurity and attacks on aid workers.

International and Regional Dimensions

Although primarily an internal conflict, the Anglophone crisis has drawn international concern due to its humanitarian and human rights implications. The United Nations and other international actors have repeatedly called for dialogue and restraint. In 2019, the UN Security Council discussed Cameroon informally, but no formal resolution has been adopted. Regional organizations and neighboring states have largely respected Cameroon's sovereignty, while Western countries have imposed limited diplomatic and economic measures in response to abuses.

The Anglophone conflict is one of Central Africa's most serious internal crises, rooted in historical grievances, governance failures, and identity issues. What began as peaceful protests escalated into armed conflict due to repression and unresolved demands. The prolonged violence has caused extensive civilian suffering, displacement, and human rights violations. Understanding this background is essential for evaluating past failures and developing realistic, rights-based solutions. The following sections will examine the key actors, timeline, previous resolution attempts, and possible paths toward peace.

Major Parties Involved

Republic of Cameroon

The Cameroonian government, led by President Paul Biya, is the main state actor in the conflict. It views Anglophone separatists as illegal insurgents threatening national unity and has relied largely on military force to suppress them, deploying the armed forces and imposing curfews and security measures. The government maintains that Cameroon is indivisible and rejects negotiations on secession. While it organized the 2019 Major National Dialogue and promised Special Status for the Anglophone regions, critics argue these measures were largely symbolic and did not address core grievances. The government has been accused of serious human rights abuses by its security forces, including arbitrary arrests, village burnings, and extrajudicial killings, which it justifies as counter-insurgency actions. International mediation efforts have largely been resisted, leaving the government both central to any solution and a key barrier to progress.

Ambazonian Separatist Groups

Opposing the government are Anglophone separatist groups seeking independence for "Ambazonia." These groups are fragmented, consisting of multiple political factions and armed militias such as the Ambazonia Interim Government and the Ambazonia Defence Forces. Leadership divisions have weakened coordination, but separatist fighters continue guerrilla warfare, particularly in rural areas. Their tactics include ambushes, kidnappings, roadblocks, and enforced strikes and school boycotts. While separatists claim to defend Anglophone communities, their actions have often harmed civilians, especially through prolonged school closures and violent punishment of perceived opponents. Their fragmentation complicates peace talks, as no single authority clearly represents the movement.

Nigeria

Nigeria, Cameroon's western neighbor, has been directly affected by the crisis, hosting tens of thousands of Cameroonian refugees. While it has ethnic and historical ties to the Anglophone regions, Nigeria officially supports Cameroon's territorial integrity, partly due to its own concerns about separatism. In 2018, Nigeria cooperated with Cameroon by arresting and extraditing Anglophone leaders, though this was later ruled illegal by Nigerian courts. Nigeria has called for a peaceful resolution but has largely maintained a cautious, low-profile role, prioritizing regional stability and security cooperation with Cameroon.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The UK has historical links to the Anglophone regions and has raised concerns about the crisis through Parliament and the Commonwealth. It has supported humanitarian aid, dialogue, and international discussion of the issue, including at the UN Security Council. While its direct influence is limited compared to France's, the UK continues to advocate for de-escalation, human rights, and political dialogue.

United States

The United States has shifted its approach due to the Anglophone crisis, condemning abuses by both government forces and separatists. In 2019, it reduced military aid and removed Cameroon from AGOA trade benefits over human rights concerns. The U.S. has supported mediation efforts and faces domestic pressure from the Cameroonian diaspora to act. It seeks both to promote human rights and to prevent wider instability in a strategically sensitive region.

African Union (AU)

The African Union has taken a cautious stance, emphasizing non-interference while calling for dialogue and respect for human rights. It supported Cameroon's 2019 national dialogue and decentralization efforts but has avoided direct intervention or sanctions. AU human rights bodies have raised concerns, though enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Overall, the AU has played a background rather than leadership role.

United Nations and Humanitarian Organizations

UN agencies and international NGOs play a major role in responding to the humanitarian crisis, providing aid to displaced persons and refugees. The UN has repeatedly called for dialogue and restraint, while human rights organizations have documented abuses by all sides and raised

international awareness. Although they are not combatants, these actors shape international pressure and remain central to humanitarian relief and accountability efforts.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Explanation
1 October 1961	British Southern Cameroons joined the Republic of Cameroon to form a two-state federal system, granting the Anglophone regions limited autonomy over local affairs.
20 May 1972	A national referendum abolished the federal system and created a unitary state, centralizing power in Yaoundé. Anglophones widely view this as a violation of the 1961 agreement.
October 2016	Anglophone lawyers and teachers began peaceful protests against the erosion of the English-based legal and education systems and broader political marginalization.
1 October 2017	Separatist leaders declared independence for "Ambazonia." Security forces used lethal force against protesters, marking the shift from unrest to armed conflict.
January 2018	Key separatist leaders, including Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, were arrested in Nigeria and extradited to Cameroon, increasing separatist radicalization.
30 September - 4 October 2019	The government held a National Dialogue on the crisis, which resulted in proposals for Special Status but was rejected by separatists for excluding key actors.
December 2019	Parliament passed legislation granting Special Status to the Anglophone regions, though implementation remained limited and violence continued.
14 February 2020	The Ngarbuh massacre, in which security forces killed civilians, drew international condemnation and highlighted the conflict's human rights toll.

2020-2021	The conflict continued with lockdowns, abuses by both sides, and failed ceasefire attempts. International calls for mediation increased without major progress.
2024 - Present	The conflict remains unresolved, characterized by stalemate, ongoing violence, and severe humanitarian consequences for civilians.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Early attempts at dialogue took place in 2016-2017 between the government and Anglophone lawyers' and teachers' unions. These talks collapsed quickly due to the government's refusal to make substantial concessions and continued security force repression. Subsequent government measures, such as establishing a National Commission on Bilingualism and translating some legal texts into English, were widely viewed as insufficient and poorly timed.

In 2019, President Biya convened the Major National Dialogue to address the crisis. While it included government officials, religious leaders, and selected civil society members, it excluded armed separatists and prominent Anglophone leaders. The dialogue led to proposals such as granting Special Status to the Anglophone regions and creating regional councils, which were later adopted into law. However, many Anglophones criticized the process as non-inclusive and symbolic, and separatist groups rejected its outcomes outright. Violence continued largely unchanged.

The government also launched a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program to encourage separatist fighters to surrender. Although some ex-combatants participated, the program has had limited impact due to distrust and the absence of a broader political settlement.

Several international actors have attempted to mediate the conflict. In 2019, Switzerland offered to facilitate talks between the government and separatists and held consultations with various factions. However, the Cameroonian government did not fully commit to the process, and the initiative stalled.

In 2020, informal talks between imprisoned separatist leaders and government representatives raised hopes for confidence-building measures such as ceasefires and prisoner releases. These proposals were not implemented, and the talks collapsed without progress.

A renewed effort emerged in early 2023 when Canada announced it was facilitating a peace process involving both sides. Days later, the Cameroonian government publicly denied granting any mandate for foreign mediation, effectively ending the initiative. This abrupt reversal reinforced the stalemate and damaged trust among separatist groups.

Regional and multilateral organizations have played a limited role. The African Union and other African leaders have called for dialogue but avoided direct intervention, largely due to concerns over sovereignty. The United Nations has encouraged peaceful resolution and raised humanitarian concerns but has not launched a formal mediation process.

Humanitarian and human rights efforts have focused on mitigating civilian suffering rather than resolving the conflict. UN agencies and NGOs have pushed for humanitarian access and accountability for abuses, while some countries have applied pressure through aid cuts and sanctions. These measures have raised international awareness but have not significantly altered the behavior of the warring parties.

Despite numerous initiatives, peace efforts have failed due to lack of inclusivity, mutual distrust, government resistance to external mediation, and ongoing reliance on military solutions. As a result, the conflict remains unresolved, with civilians continuing to bear the greatest cost.

Possible Solutions

A central priority is launching an inclusive peace dialogue involving the Cameroonian government, Anglophone political leaders, separatist factions, and civil society. The UNSC could support UN-backed or neutral third-party mediation to revive talks, framing discussions around enhanced autonomy rather than secession to encourage government participation. Confidence-building measures should precede negotiations, such as temporary ceasefires by both sides and the release of non-violent political detainees. Amnesty or safe passage for separatist negotiators would also help create trust. The dialogue should address core political issues, including decentralization, protection of Anglophone legal and education systems, and power-sharing arrangements. The UNSC could reinforce this process by appointing a Special Envoy or working with regional organizations to legitimize mediation.

Meaningful decentralization is key to addressing long-standing grievances. The Special Status granted to the Anglophone regions should be fully implemented by transferring real decision-making authority and financial resources to regional bodies and legally protecting the use of English in administration, courts, and schools. Delegates could propose international monitoring mechanisms to ensure reforms are carried out. If full federalism is politically unrealistic in the short term, intermediate steps, such as strengthening regional councils or guaranteeing Anglophone representation at the national level, could serve as compromise solutions. International partners could support these reforms through technical assistance and conditional development aid.

Improving human rights protection is essential for sustainable peace. The UNSC could urge Cameroon to allow independent human rights monitoring, including a field presence by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Greater transparency may deter abuses by all parties. Delegates could also support investigations into major atrocities and promote accountability through special investigative mechanisms. Targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for serious abuses, whether state officials or separatist leaders, could be considered if violations continue. Ensuring humanitarian access and respect for civilian protection obligations should remain a priority.

Addressing civilian suffering can help build confidence in peace efforts. The international community should expand humanitarian assistance and push for unimpeded access to affected areas. Delegates may propose localized ceasefires or humanitarian corridors to allow aid delivery and essential services. While a full peacekeeping mission may be unlikely, international civilian observers or fact-finding missions could help deter violence. Support should also be increased for refugees in neighboring Nigeria to prevent long-term displacement and instability.

Restoring education in the Anglophone regions is critical. A "Safe Schools" approach could involve agreements to end attacks on schools and lift boycotts, alongside commitments by the government not to militarize educational facilities. Community reconciliation initiatives should also be encouraged to address local tensions and trauma caused by the conflict. International donors could support trauma counseling, peace education, and youth programs to reduce the risk of further radicalization.

The UNSC and international partners can apply a mix of pressure and incentives to encourage progress. Targeted sanctions and diplomatic pressure may be used if abuses persist, while incentives, such as development aid, restored trade benefits, or increased international cooperation, could reward genuine reform and engagement. Encouraging moderate Anglophone voices and emphasizing the regional and international costs of continued conflict may help shift calculations on both sides.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions stands as a sobering example of how historical grievances and governance failures can spiral into a severe humanitarian and human rights crisis. The Anglophone minority's quest for recognition and equal treatment, met with repression and then radicalization, has led to a war that neither side can win militarily without catastrophic consequences for civilians. Over the course of this report, we have reviewed the origins of the conflict, rooted in Cameroon's colonial past and post-independence centralization, and examined the key actors and events that have shaped its trajectory. The United Nations Security Council, as the guardian of international peace and security, now faces the task of fostering a path to peace for a

conflict that has long been deemed "internal" but whose impact transcends borders and basic human rights norms.

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