



## ARCHDIOCESE OF BAMENDA

### DECLARATION OF THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF BAMENDA ON THE TORTURE AND ABUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NORTH WEST AND SOUTH REGIONS

1. **PREAMBLE:** What began in October 2016 as an Anglophone Lawyers' Problem, and moved to an Anglophone Teachers' Problem, is now, effectively and undoubtedly, a problem that touches every village, town, and city of the North West and South Regions. The consequences of the problems, especially due to the lack of attention by the right persons, are many and damaging. This declaration, which is not unconnected with the Anglophone Problem, is about the curfews recently imposed on the North West and South West Regions, leading to intimidation, mass arrests, torture, killings, and disappearance of many persons and corpses to unknown destinations. It is a case of violation of human rights on an unimaginable scale, which is unacceptable to God and to humanity. But what really happened?

#### 2. THE CURFEWS IMPOSED ON THE NORTH WEST AND SOUTH WEST REGIONS

1. Ban of Governors of North West and South Regions on circulation, assemblies, from September 29<sup>th</sup> 2017 to October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017.
2. Militarization of the Zone under the pretext of providing peace and protecting the citizens and their property from harm. That is what the populations were made to understand. However, what happened was very different.
3. The ban did not forbid religious worship. However, the application of this rule on the ground was totally different.
4. People could move about, but not in groups of more than four. However, the application was not the same. Even single individuals were chased away with threats.

5. Movement was restricted within Divisions of the Regions. Yet, even to move from Mile 2 Nkwen to Amour Mezam Agency in Bamenda was not allowed. The Archbishop was stopped thrice on his way to Bambui. Yet, why were the curfews imposed in the first place?

### **3. WHY THE CURFEWS WERE IMPOSED**

1. The heart of the matter is the ongoing Anglophone Problem which the Government has persisted failed to address adequately, resulting in deep and mounting resentment and bitterness among the population. The delay in addressing the problem has distanced many citizens of these two Regions from the rest of the country.
2. The demonstrations of Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2017 across the two Regions seem to have opened the eyes of many, including the Government, to the scale of the problem. While the demonstrations were largely peaceful, there were a few incidents that led to some deaths. We, the Bishops, condemn all acts of violence by any one.
3. **Intoxication and exploitation.** Some propagandists had excited the populations of the two Regions to march to palaces and celebrate the Independence of the two Regions on Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017. This is manipulation and is something to be discouraged. Right reason informs us that this is not how nations attain their independence.
4. The same propagandists told the populations to march into government offices and take back their country. They were to take any DO or Governor who had not resigned and hand to the palace. This was likely to result in confrontation. This is irrational and unacceptable propaganda. Sadly, the result of such an action, has been the torture, arrest and killing of so many innocent people.
5. **Deception and Lies** by the official state media, lack of adequate reporting of the reality on the ground only shows that the government is not prepared to address the problem.

### **4. HOW THE CURFEWS WERE IMPLEMENTED**

1. The Government's response to the planned demonstrations and supposed take over of the two Regions was to introduce a curfew on the two Regions, banning meetings of more than four, assemblies, groups, and public gatherings.

2. There was heavy militarization of the same regions in the lead up to the 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017. This was followed by threats on the official media from some government officials that any one who came out to demonstrate on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017, would face the law in its full force. Military men and women and machinery were stationed in all towns and cities of the Regions with frightening presence. Military helicopters were also dispatched.
3. Although the curfew did not include religious worship, and the Archbishop of Bamenda had contacted the Governor to make sure that that was the case, many clergy and Christians were prevented from going to church. In some cases, Christians were caught and beaten up. In Mbve in Kumbo Diocese, tear gas was thrown at Christians as soon as they left the church. In Momo Division in the Archdiocese of Bamenda, the Senior Divisional Officer sent his communiqué, forbidding religious worship, and, by so doing, contradicting the order of the Governor. The Archbishop's cook, Jeanclaude, was arrested near his house in Meta Quarter, Bamenda, on his way from church. Jean Claude was tortured by forces of law and order, using machets, and locked up at Public Security. Jean Claude was released when the Governor was called to intervene and was bleeding on his head. He tells the story of people being beaten who had bullets on their bodies.
4. People were told to stay at home for their safety. Majority of the people who did stay were then visited by forces of law and order who were intimidating, arresting, torturing, and taking people away. In Kumbo and in Bamenda, it was rampant. In Bamesing in Ndop, some young men were caught and shot on the legs. There are gruesome pictures of the acts of violence committed against unarmed civilians during the period.
5. Some people who were killed were carried away and it is not known where their bodies were taken to. The bodies of the prisoners who were escaping from Kumbo Prison and were shot dead were taken to Shisong and then taken away. No one knows where they are now.

## **5. SOME IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE SITUATION**

The massive turn out of people for the demonstrations on Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2017 and on Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017, have, among other things, the following implications:

- a) The Anglophone Problem is now truly one that touches the hearts of very many people in all villages, towns and cities of the North West and South West Regions.

- b) It is not longer just a problem of a few disgruntled Anglophones in the diaspora, as some people have tried to play it down.
- c) It is no longer just a problem of lawyers and teachers, as it seemed to be at the beginning last year.
- d) It can no longer be taken lightly or ignored.
- e) It needs urgent attention, so to avoid the growing genocide.

Among the consequences for the problem, the following must be mentioned:

1. People have lost loved ones to brutal killings and do not even know where their bodies are at the moment. Every one individual who is killed increases the number of aggrieved persons and families and the resentment and anger, that are very difficult to address.
2. It is reported that truckloads of people have been arrested and carried to Yaounde. This is to add to those arrested earlier in the year who the populations have been urging the government to free. This only makes a bad situation worse.
3. Citizen of these two Regions have been branded as terrorists and are being treated as such. It is hard to believe that the hundreds of thousands of children, men and women, who came out to demonstrate peacefully on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September and on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2017 are all terrorists.
4. Genocide is effectively under way as every Anglophone who is thought to differ with the government is a target to be eliminated. Those who have raised serious issues for discussion have either been arrested or have had to flee for safety. Breaking into people's homes, arresting and shooting them is tantamount to genocide. That helicopters were shooting people with live bullets from the air is an act of war, declared against one's own people.
5. Anglophones living in Francophone Cameroon are now targets. The military have broken into some of their homes, searched and arrested people. The mere fact of being an Anglophone now looks like a crime in itself.
6. The very fact that the government organized a meeting of Senators and MP's in Yaounde on the same 1<sup>st</sup> October under the pretext of celebrating National Unity, when its military were intimidating, torturing, arresting and killing people in the North West and South Regions, is a mockery of the Anglophone, and a sign that the Government is insensitive to their lives and welfare.

7. Businesses have been grounded in these Regions. The economy is badly hit by this crisis and things are likely to get worse.
8. The growing lack and loss of faith in the administration, customary and church authority does not help anybody. What can be done?

## **6. WHERE THE CHURCH STANDS**

1. The church has always stood for frank and meaningful dialogue. The Memorandum called for dialogue. The position has not changed.
2. Respect for the human person and respect for all human rights. Therefore, the church condemns the abuse of human rights and torture in the strongest terms.
3. Freedom of worship as a fundamental human freedom. This was grossly violated by forces of law and order last weekend. That was against the Orders of the Governors and a violation of the Cameroon Constitution and International Law.
4. The church believes that the school as a place of learning should always remain open, no matter what problems the people are undergoing. The reason is that learning is absolutely essential for the better mastery and resolution of the same problems. And, precisely because such problems can take years to resolve, the best way for children to be involved in the struggle is by being in school, by studying. Many are aware of this, and have sent their children to other regions of the country and even abroad, so that they continue their education. However, the vast majority of people are unable to send their children elsewhere, which is why we, the Bishops, urge and encourage everyone to stand by all the schools in our regions so that our children are not left behind through our own fault.

## **7. WHAT CAN BE DONE**

1. We call on all Christians to intensify their prayers for peace. Pray also for meaningful dialogue. Clergy and Christians must refrain from divisive and poisonous behaviour and language. Utterances that are demeaning, insulting, or derogatory are to be discouraged. As St. James says, the tongue must not set fire to the forest.
2. Release all those arrested in connection with this crisis. No meaningful dialogue can take place while those people remain in prison.

3. Account for all those killed during this curfew and the whole crisis whose bodies have not been returned to their families.
4. Demilitarize the regions as soon as possible. Stop all forms of threats and intimidation on individuals living in any part of the country.
5. Stop deceptive stories and false propaganda through the media. The church advocates for responsible journalism and the right use of media houses. Irresponsible and misleading propaganda by individuals, groups or the state, is unacceptable.
6. Engage in honest and meaningful dialogue with the right people to determine the type of state.

## CONCLUSION

In 1992, Archbishop Paul Verdzev wrote condemning torture which, had been rampant during the State of Emergency imposed on the North West Province. Twenty-five years on, in 2017, we have experienced torture and killings at a much bigger scale than in 1992; this time in the North West and South West Regions. The church condemns threats, intimidation, wanton arrests, torture, and killings in the strongest terms.

We ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, to pray for us.