

The Human Rights Implications of Arbitrary Arrests and Political Imprisonment in Cameroon between 2016 and 2019

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Abstract : Cameroon is a bilingual and bijural country in West and Central Africa. The current president has been in power since 1982, which makes him the longest-serving president in the world. The length of his presidency is one of the major causes of the ongoing political instability in the country. The preamble of the Cameroonian constitution commits Cameroon to respect international law and human rights. It provides that these laws should be translated into national laws, and respected by all spheres of government and public service. Cameroon is a signatory of several international human rights laws and conventions. In theory, the citizens of Cameroon have adequate legal protection against the violation of their human rights for political reasons. The ongoing political crisis in Cameroon erupted after the Anglophone lawyers and teachers launched a protest against the hiring of Francophone judges in Anglophone courts; and the hiring of Francophone teachers in Anglophone schools. In retaliation, the government launched a military crackdown on protesters and civilians, conducted arbitrary arrests on Anglophones, raped and maimed civilians, and declared a state of emergency in the Anglophone provinces. This infuriated the Anglophone public, causing them to create a secessionist movement, requesting the Independence of Anglophone Cameroon and demanding a separate country called Ambazonia. The Ambazonian armed rebel forces have ever since launched guerrilla attacks on government troops. This fighting has deteriorated into a war between the Ambazonians and the Cameroon government. The arbitrary arrests and unlawful imprisonments have continued, causing the closure of Anglophone schools since November 2016. In October 2018, Cameroon held presidential elections. Before the electoral commission announced the results, the opposition leader, a Francophone, declared himself winner, following a leak of the polling information. This led to his imprisonment. This research has the objective of finding out whether the government's reactions to protesters and opposition is lawful, under national and international laws. This research will also verify if the prison conditions of political prisoners meet human rights standards. Furthermore, this research seeks detailed information obtained from current political prisoners and detainees on their experiences. This research also aims to highlight the effort being made internationally, towards bringing awareness and finding a resolution to the war in Cameroon. Finally, this research seeks to elucidate on the efforts which human rights organisations have made, towards overseeing the respect of human rights in Cameroon. This research adopts qualitative methods, whereby data were collected using semi-structured interviews of political detainees, and questionnaires. Also, data was collected from secondary sources such as; scholarly articles, newspaper articles, web sources, and human rights reports. From the data collected, the findings were analysed using the content analysis research technique. From the deductions, recommendations have been made, which human rights organisations, activists, and international bodies can implement, to cause the Cameroonian government to stop unlawful arrests and reinstate the respect of human rights and the rule of law in Cameroon.

Keywords : arbitrary arrests, Cameroon, human rights, political

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