



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 2872nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 14 April 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Shepherd

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined twenty-second and twenty-third periodic reports of Cameroon (continued)
([CERD/C/CMR/22-23](#); [CERD/C/CMR/Q/22-23](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Cameroon joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Stavrinaki** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would like to know the status of the studies that were being carried out with a view to officially identifying minority groups and indigenous peoples and the extent to which relevant stakeholders, such as the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, had been involved in designing those studies. She would be interested to know what measures had been taken to build trust and reduce conflict between different communities and to restore public trust in government institutions. With regard to the laws adopted following the 2019 Major National Dialogue on the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, she wished to know how those laws were being applied and what specific measures had been taken at the local and regional levels. She would also welcome information on the implementation of the national action plan for the protection of vulnerable indigenous peoples that had been adopted in 2020.
3. Given that there were reportedly many obstacles to birth registration and that around 2 million people in Cameroon had no birth certificate, she wondered whether there were plans to simplify the birth registration procedure and to abolish the associated fees, and what steps were being taken to increase access to birth registration for indigenous peoples and to ensure access to identity documents for internally displaced persons and in areas where there was a lack of security.
4. It would be helpful to know what measures were being taken to reduce internal displacement, to protect internally displaced persons and to ensure access to public services for such persons, especially those without identity documents. She would like to know whether the State party was working on a strategy to enable internally displaced persons to return safely to their regions of origin or to provide them with alternative solutions.
5. She would like to invite the delegation to provide disaggregated data on persons who had been prosecuted and sentenced for acts of terrorism and to comment on reports that members of minority groups had been killed or subjected to violence or enforced disappearance in the fight against terrorism. It was estimated that 220 people were currently on death row in Cameroon, of whom almost half had been convicted of terrorism. The Committee would be interested to know whether the State party was considering abolishing the death penalty and what measures were being taken to ensure that persons accused of terrorism had access to legal assistance and to avoid situations where, owing to problems related to birth registration, the death penalty was imposed on persons who had been under 18 years old when the crime was committed. In view of reports that some population groups were subjected to violence at both military and separatist checkpoints, she would like to know what steps were being taken to protect those groups, as well as to ensure that survivors of sexual violence received psychosocial, medical and legal support, regardless of their status and origin.
6. In the area of employment, she would like clarification as to what stage had been reached in the amendment of the Labour Code and whether a time frame for its amendment had been agreed upon; what measures were being taken to ensure effective implementation of the principle of equal opportunity and equal treatment in employment; whether the legislation that excluded women from certain areas of employment had been repealed or amended; and what steps had been taken to increase the representation of minority groups and indigenous peoples in the civil service. In view of reports that members of indigenous groups in the north of Cameroon had been subjected to forced labour, she wondered what had been done to investigate those reports, to bring the perpetrators to justice and to protect the groups concerned.
7. She would like to know whether the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 reflected a human rights-based approach; what measures had been taken to improve school

infrastructure and to increase access to education for indigenous peoples; whether the Intercultural and Multilingual Education Project had been rolled out nationwide; and what efforts had been made to assess and improve the language policies that were being pursued. She would welcome statistics on schools and universities in the North-West and South-West regions.

8. She wished to know what was being done to protect health facilities and populations in the North-West and South-West regions from attacks. It would also be helpful to know what measures had been taken to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, especially on vulnerable groups, and how the State party ensured that its response to the pandemic benefited all members of the population without discrimination.

9. She would appreciate up-to-date information on the representation of minorities at the highest levels of government, particularly in the education sector and the judiciary, as well as information on any measures that were being taken to increase the participation of indigenous peoples and minority groups in elections and to increase the availability of public services and access to justice for indigenous peoples in remote areas.

10. In view of reports that hundreds of Nigerian refugees and asylum seekers had been forcibly returned to their country by the Cameroonian authorities, that asylum seekers had been subjected to violence, including acts of torture, in remote border areas and that disproportionate restrictions on freedom of movement had been introduced in the one official camp for Nigerian refugees, she would like to know what was being done to prevent such conduct and to protect refugees and asylum seekers.

11. Lastly, it would be helpful if the delegation could clarify what was meant by the French term “*assimilation*” in paragraphs 160 and 175 of the State party’s report. In order to comply with the Convention, States parties should adopt an approach that supported the integration of migrants, rather than one that required them to conform to an existing national model. The Committee would welcome more information on the situation of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in Cameroon and the protection of their social and economic rights.

12. **Mr. Diaby** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to know what was being done to prevent conflicts over land use between indigenous peoples, especially Mbororo pastoralists and Bantu crop farmers; what remedies were available to Mbororo communities whose claims to land had been rejected by their Bantu neighbours; how many disputes of that kind had been brought before the courts; what was being done to inform Mbororo communities of their rights and to ensure that their lack of knowledge of land legislation was not exploited; what remedies were available to Mbororo communities in cases where Bantu farmers had obtained land titles for unregistered pastoral land; and what steps were being taken to create livestock corridors. The Committee had received reports that, since 2016, the Mbororo people in the North-West region had been subjected by separatist groups to acts of violence that threatened their very survival, including cattle rustling, abduction and murder.

13. He would be interested to know whether the indigenous peoples of the forests received any of the profits generated from the exploitation of the resources in their environment by multinational companies and what was being done to protect those communities from land grabbing. He would like to invite the delegation to comment on reports that those communities were subjected to labour exploitation and faced restrictions on access to the natural resources that were necessary for their survival. He would welcome information on any steps taken to safeguard the right of indigenous peoples to be consulted on procedures affecting them and the principle of free, prior and informed consent, as well as on the mechanism for the provision of compensation to communities who had been removed from their lands.

14. The Committee would appreciate information on the mandate and activities of the ad hoc committee that had been set up to examine proposals made by traditional leaders on land, forest and mining reforms. It would also be interested to know whether a mechanism for consultations with indigenous peoples had been established; to what extent the land registration procedure was compatible with the customs and traditions of indigenous peoples; and what measures had been taken to ensure that the procedure was accessible to indigenous peoples.

15. It would be helpful to know how many people in Cameroon were stateless or at risk of being considered stateless, whether a commission had been set up to deal with the issue of statelessness, and whether the State party planned to ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

16. He would welcome information on measures taken in the areas of education and culture to combat racial discrimination, prejudice and intolerance; the extent to which school textbooks dealt with the issue of racial discrimination; and the way in which different communities were represented in those books. He would like to know what steps had been taken to provide training to civil servants and members of the judiciary on racial discrimination and how many judges had received training on the provisions of the Convention.

17. In view of the reported increase in hate speech against ethnic and linguistic minorities on social networks, he wished to know whether any regulatory bodies had been set up to deal with the issue, how many cases of online hate speech had been investigated and prosecuted, and what the outcomes of those cases had been. He would be interested to know the extent to which minority groups were represented in public media and whether those groups had access to community media. Lastly, given the high numbers of internally displaced persons, he wondered whether there were plans to enable people to obtain official documents anywhere in the country.

18. **Mr. Amir** said that he would like to know more about the relationship between customary law and statutory law. He would also like to know what was being done to protect indigenous communities from displacement caused by deforestation.

19. **Mr. Guissé**, noting that a specific definition of indigenous peoples was not desirable owing to the unique nature of each community, said that common characteristics should nevertheless be defined to facilitate their identification, and consideration should be given to the processes that marginalized and stigmatized them. He wished to know whether the State party adhered to the principle of self-identification. The report made repeated use of the term “Pygmy”, which was pejorative and should be replaced by the names of the various indigenous peoples present in Cameroon.

20. **Ms. Tlakula** said that she wished to know whether the recommendations of the ad hoc Interministerial Committee appointed to address the concerns of the English-speaking teachers’ trade unions had been implemented; whether the measures to respond to shortcomings in the administration of justice in English-speaking regions mentioned in paragraph 93 of the State party’s report had been implemented; and whether the Intercultural and Multilingual Education Project had reached its target of enabling 1,554 children to use Baka as a language of study in primary school.

21. **Mr. Rayess**, noting that the rapid democratization seen in many African countries had led to institutional gaps and overlaps, and that some bodies enjoyed civil society status despite their political nature, said that thought should be given to resolving those issues, including consideration of how civil society was perceived and a reassessment of institutional systems.

22. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** said that the circumstances surrounding the death in detention of Samuel Wazizi were troubling; the State had not provided notification of his death until nine months after the fact, his body had yet to be returned to his family and the outcome of the resulting investigation had not been disclosed. He wished to know who had led that investigation.

23. **Ms. McDougall** said she was concerned that the Government’s efforts to define indigenous and minority groups and human rights defenders and workers risked infringing their rights to freedom of speech, protest and self-identification. The State party could perhaps consider the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities before making such determinations. She asked whether a dedicated mechanism for implementing the recommendations made by the Committee and other treaty bodies had been established.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.

24. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon) said that the studies to identify and define indigenous peoples and minority groups were under way. While awaiting the results, many government ministries had established categories based on international criteria, and the debate on which groups could be considered indigenous was ongoing. He agreed that the term “Pygmy” was pejorative and that indigenous peoples should be referred to by name. Inclusive regional development was a vital tenet of his Government’s policy. Decree No. 2017/383 provided for social protection for minority groups; measures in that regard involved a broad range of ministries and included advocacy, the promotion of indigenous culture, monitoring of the implementation of international standards for the integration of vulnerable indigenous peoples, and economic activities. Indigenous peoples and minority groups received information on their rights from a number of government bodies in local languages, via numerous community radio stations.

25. An interministerial committee had been established to monitor the measures adopted in relation to indigenous peoples, and a national protection policy that considered the causes of vulnerability had been adopted in December 2017. The effective representation and participation of minority groups and indigenous peoples in public life were bolstered by measures that included awareness-raising campaigns and action at the local and municipal levels. Numerous steps had been taken to ensure access to education for all, including indigenous peoples. All Cameroonians, regardless of origin, could choose freely whether to send their children to English- or French-speaking schools, and the number of bilingual schools was increasing. Public education was free at the primary level, and free teaching materials were distributed to students displaced by the crises in the North-West and South-West regions. The Ministry of Secondary Education provided education to displaced students, taking into account the specific needs of those with disabilities.

26. The Cameroonian Constitution and legislation, as well as several international instruments ratified by the country, guaranteed access to justice for all persons without discrimination. Courts of varying levels had been established throughout the country, and mobile courts could be set up in locations inhabited by indigenous peoples and minority groups. Justice was free of charge, with the exception of some administrative fees, and legal assistance was available for defendants with insufficient financial resources. No distinction was made between anglophones and francophones; all citizens were Cameroonian and enjoyed the right to interact with the justice system in their preferred language, with the assistance of a certified interpreter where necessary. Social workers were present in all courts and police stations to inform defendants of their rights and assist them in submitting applications for legal assistance, for example. The parties in property cases could choose whether to bring a case under customary or modern law. While cases in the modern law system could progress all the way to the Supreme Court, progression in the customary law system was limited.

27. The Major National Dialogue had sought solutions to the social crisis in the North-West and South-West regions and had resulted in measures that had brought peace there. In response to the demands of English-speaking lawyers and teachers, a common-law chamber had been established within the Supreme Court, and judges received training in common law. Claims that the authorities were waging a war against the Cameroonian population were untrue; the security and defence forces had protected the country’s population and assets in the face of violence and destruction by certain groups.

28. The National Civil Status Office had been created partly to respond to the need to protect Cameroonian nationality owing to the large number of ethnic groups residing in the country and in cross-border regions. The Office was also evaluating civil registrations and organized awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building workshops. The problem of unregistered births affected not only the indigenous communities but also other persons living in vulnerable situations. In order to remedy the problem, mobile courts took statements from traditional leaders and family members so that births could be certified. The Office was currently working to digitize and index birth records throughout the national territory. Obstacles to birth registration included the lack of information technology in certain areas, sociocultural attitudes, poverty, and restrictions on movement imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. According to official statistics, over 367,000 national identity cards had been issued as of February 2022. The number of cards distributed varied from

region to region. In Cameroon, censuses did not gather data on race or ethnic affiliation as such data were considered to be irrelevant and discriminatory. However, the fourth general population and housing census, which was currently under way, included indicators related to language, indigenous communities and immigration.

29. Like many countries in the world, Cameroon faced a number of internal and external security problems. Conflicts with Boko Haram were taking place in the Far North region, while armed separatist movements operating in the North-West and South-West regions had engaged in suicide bombing, kidnappings, pillaging and the destruction of public buildings and assets. As a result of the crises that the country had experienced, the number of refugees had risen significantly. There had been more than 933,000 internally displaced persons at the end of 2021, more than half of whom had been in the Far North and North-West regions. Now that the situation had stabilized in the North-West and South-West regions, measures were being taken to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons.

30. Conscious of the fact that terrorist activities had seriously disrupted economic and social activities in the country, the State had taken numerous legal, strategic, political and other measures to re-establish security and ensure that all citizens could enjoy their rights without discrimination. Where legal measures were concerned, State agencies worked relentlessly to ensure that terrorists, and State actors who violated human rights, were held accountable for their actions. On 10 September 2021, for instance, a military court had sentenced seven persons who had broken into a classroom and killed a number of students. A military court was currently prosecuting members of the security services who had killed a number of civilians in the North-West region. The Minister for Defence at the Office of the President had sent a letter to remind all the defence and security forces that torture was absolutely prohibited.

31. **Mr. Bosse** (Cameroon), responding to a question about the death of the journalist Samuel Wazizi, said that Mr. Wazizi was not only a journalist but also a terrorist. Although no restrictions were placed on the rights of peaceful separatists, those who took up arms against the State and its institutions were classified as terrorists and dealt with accordingly. Mr. Wazizi had admitted to having been trained in handling arms and explosives and had actively participated in logistics operations on behalf of armed terrorist groups. Contrary to reports indicating that he had been executed, he had died in hospital following an illness. The delegation was interested to know why the Committee insisted on asking about the death of Mr. Wazizi but made no mention of the many cases in which children, teachers and other State officials had been murdered by terrorists.

32. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon) said that, as Mr. Bosse had stated, Mr. Wazizi was a terrorist. He had passed information on potential targets to armed separatist groups, who had used that information to carry out killings and kidnappings. The Government had been disappointed by the international community's muted response to the terrorist atrocities committed in Cameroon. If the international community failed to respond to such atrocities, its silence could be interpreted as tacit support for terrorist groups.

33. Sexual violence was strictly prohibited under national law and all perpetrators of such violence were prosecuted and punished. No plans were currently in place to abolish the death penalty, which was provided for in law but never applied in practice. The death penalty served as a deterrent to potential criminals and was supported by a significant proportion of the population as a punishment for terrorists. The number of persons who had been sentenced to death was far lower than the figure of 220 cited by the Committee.

34. The Government had developed action plans and made budgetary adjustments with a view to implementing the National Development Strategy 2020–2030, which was based on the Sustainable Development Goals. The reform of the Labour Code was intended to protect the national labour market while incorporating all the international conventions on labour relations signed by Cameroon. There was no gender discrimination in the labour market. Women and men had equal opportunities to enter the civil service, recruitment to which was based on competitive examinations. In 2020, women had accounted for 47 per cent of persons joining the civil service, which clearly showed that they were not subject to any discrimination. Women and men also had equal access to higher education.

35. All political parties who presented candidates for local or national elections were required to consider the gender perspective. As a result of the measures taken to promote women's participation in political life, the number of women members of the Government had risen significantly in recent years. Women occupied senior positions in the armed forces and the police force and also worked in mining, engineering and agriculture. Prior to the local and regional elections held in 2020 and 2021, respectively, media campaigns had been conducted to raise people's awareness of their right to vote and political parties had been encouraged to put forward women candidates. Although women accounted for only 10 per cent of the persons elected to local government positions in 2020, that figure was higher than the proportions elected in 2007 and 2013. Despite restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had continued to implement programmes for empowering women.

36. The Government had taken a wide range of measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although fewer than 10 per cent of the population had been vaccinated, all persons living in Cameroon, including refugees, had benefited from the protective measures taken to curb the pandemic, which included the distribution of masks and the establishment of rules on social distancing.

37. Indigenous persons enjoyed customary land rights and were not subject to any discrimination that restricted their access to land. Nevertheless, conflicts over land use sometimes broke out. For instance, livestock belonging to the Mbororo people, who were generally nomadic, sometimes strayed into cropland, giving rise to conflicts. Measures were being taken to tackle the problem and the situation was improving.

38. A regional conference on issues related to refugees would be held the following week under the aegis of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Stateless persons received legal and administrative support to help them obtain the documentation that they required. Although deforestation occurred in certain areas, the rights of border populations and indigenous persons were guaranteed. Special measures were taken to ensure access to education for Pygmies and other indigenous peoples. The recommendations made by the Committee following the constructive dialogue would be used to strengthen mechanisms for the protection of human rights in Cameroon.

39. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that the Government's recognition that members of the military had been involved in the deaths of women and children in the village of Ngarbuh showed that not all violence was the work of non-State groups. It was the responsibility of the State to protect all persons within its jurisdiction from violence committed by all actors, which was why the Committee would appreciate information on all relevant investigations and their outcomes.

40. As the six criteria used to define as peoples as indigenous had been discussed during the State party review in 2014, it was reasonable for the Committee to request further details of government efforts to gather additional data and of indigenous groups' access to their rights.

41. While it was positive that all children could have access to education, children who were displaced, unregistered or otherwise without official documents were often unable to sit examinations. She wished to know whether the Government would take steps to ensure that all children nationwide could have access to examinations, regardless of their status or registration.

42. **Mr. Diaby** said that the State's responsibility to protect must be properly implemented and that, under article 8 ("War crimes") of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, there was a clear chain of responsibility that allowed war leaders and separatists to be prosecuted. In that regard, the establishment of four military courts in Cameroon was a positive development.

43. An estimate of the number of stateless persons in Cameroon would be appreciated; the figure could have increased as a result of recent displacements and crises. It was hoped that Cameroon would ratify the United Nations statelessness conventions. Regarding internally displaced persons, he wished to know whether official documents could be issued

in locations other than places of birth, in order to ensure that no one was left without documents.

44. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon) said that he agreed that the State bore the responsibility to protect in all cases, including those of separatist violence. The situation in the North-West and South-West regions of the country was improving significantly, and he was grateful for the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that regard; the High Commissioner had visited the country in 2019 and she and her team had provided effective assistance, advice and means of regularizing the situation.

45. It was difficult to estimate the number of stateless persons in Cameroon, but further consideration would be given to ratifying the statelessness conventions. The State took steps to provide and care for all people within its borders, as evidenced by the fact that stateless and displaced children could benefit from education. However, the absence of documentation remained an issue, especially for displaced children no longer in their native areas. By law, births must be registered in the nearest civil registry; however, during crisis periods accommodations were made and registration could take place at diplomatic missions, for example. There were also other legal and administrative mechanisms that could be used to ensure that all Cameroonian nationals were registered.

46. **Mr. Diaby** said that it was advisable to establish a clear legal definition of human rights defenders to avoid confusion for the State, civil society and other actors. The Committee could share the legislation on human rights defenders of other African countries so that equivalent Cameroonian legislation could be drafted.

47. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon), noting that Cameroon was a developing country, said that all assistance in strengthening national legislation was welcomed. Peace must be central to any definition of human rights defenders. In the case of Samuel Wazizi, for example, although he was unarmed, he had passed information to separatists who then carried out attacks, so peace had been destroyed. A robust and unambiguous legislative framework was needed, with clearly defined terms and a delineation of responsibilities, covering not only human rights defenders but also entities or concepts such as civil society.

48. **Mr. Rayess** said, although it was possible for legislation and customary law to coexist, some countries might need to move away from traditional ideas in order to make progress. The relationship of individuals to the law was fundamental, and a country's laws must be respected by all of its citizens. The aim of the State was to provide stability, and civil society must be apolitical.

49. **Mr. Amir** said that the concept of assimilation was of concern; it could alienate people from their roots and had caused great harm in colonial eras. Further explanation of the concept would be welcomed.

50. **Ms. McDougall** said that she was troubled by the definitions of legitimate civil society actors and human rights defenders, and the idea that they could be recategorized as separatists or terrorists if they disagreed with certain assimilation requirements. Although the matter did not fall entirely within the Committee's mandate, it should be raised as a human rights issue.

51. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that significant changes had taken place since the previous State party review in 2014, including the deterioration of the security situation in the north of the country, a significant increase in internally displaced persons and the impact of antiterrorist measures on the civilian population. It was important to relieve intercommunity conflict, lead effective investigations to find those responsible for acts of violence and bring them to justice, and ensure that trust was restored within the population. It should be noted that capital punishment had harmful consequences, even if it was not used.

52. The National Plan of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and the National Development Strategy 2020–2030, as well as other national and regional human rights instruments, should be implemented and regularly assessed, so that all persons under Cameroonian jurisdiction could benefit from progress made in combating discrimination. At the institutional level, the independence of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission should be maintained, while ensuring that it represented all segments of the population and had

adequate resources. The Commission on Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism should also be strengthened as part of efforts to implement the Convention.

53. There was a continued absence of legislation on hate crime and no means of assessing the implementation of legislation against racial discrimination. The Labour Code should be amended to reflect the prohibition of all forms of racial discrimination, but it should be noted that an exclusively criminal approach to racial discrimination did not guarantee full implementation of the Convention. Full implementation also required the adoption of legislation that clearly defined the Convention's ambit, rights holders and means of protection and reparation for violations in cases of racial discrimination. In respect of international law on minorities and indigenous people, the State party must specify special measures to guarantee the development and protection of those groups and ensure that they had access to their rights.

54. It was hoped that the State party's welcome efforts to integrate refugees and migrants would continue, but problems remained concerning the lack of data on the country's diversity and the difficulties of displaced children and others without documents in accessing the official school system and examinations. The State should redouble its efforts to give free access, without bureaucratic red tape, to documents related to civil registration and birth registration for all indigenous groups, minorities and displaced people.

55. Eliminating racial discrimination required all persons under a State's jurisdiction to be able to grow and prosper in safety with a feeling of belonging. In the case of Cameroon, effectively combating racial discrimination could create a unity based on respect and recognition of diversity in law and practice.

56. **Mr. Eheth** (Cameroon), expressing his thanks to the Committee, said that the comments and recommendations made in the present review would help to solidify the rule of law in Cameroon, promote and protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens, and create a society free from discrimination.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.