



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Input for the UPR on Cameroon
Office of the Special Representative of the
United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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Background

Armed groups such as Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, including Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna (JAS) Lidda'awati wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continued to target civilians, including children who were particularly affected by improvised explosive device (IED) and explosive remnants of war (ERW) incidents. From 2018 to 2022, continued abductions, killing and maiming, and targeted attacks on schools, hospitals, teachers, and humanitarian personnel took place. While the overall number of grave violations against children decreased from 2018 to 2022, the abduction of children and attacks on schools and hospitals increased.

2021 was marked by clashes between JAS and ISWAP and by security forces' military operations against those groups, which had a direct impact on the protection of children. The resurgence of attacks by armed groups and military operations in the division of Mayo-Tsanga led to the displacements of more than 10,000 civilians, including children, increased the vulnerability of women and girls and drastically reduced the capacity to monitor grave violations against children. Additionally, 2022 witnessed ISWAP's territorial expansion resulting in further population displacement in the division of Mayo-Tsanaga.

The impact of the crisis on the education sector in the North-West and South-West regions remained a major concern. Armed groups have violently opposed Government-administered education since September 2017. Armed groups have also enforced weekly stay-at-home and "lockdowns" in the North-West and South-West regions, which, in addition to extended bans on road movements, affected children's access to livelihood, education, and health services. More recently, out of 6,515 schools, 46% were functioning and 54% of students were enrolled for the 2022-2023 academic year in the 2 regions as of the end of 2022. Since the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, except for the armed groups-imposed lockdown that delayed the start of the year for 2 weeks, schooling has been proceeding in most relatively safe urban and peri-urban areas in the two regions.

The Government of Cameroon pursued efforts to end and prevent grave violations against children. Following an attack by Cameroonian armed forces in Ngarbuh, North-West Region, on 14 February 2020, which resulted in the death of 14 children, the Government created a commission of inquiry. In June 2020, the Government announced the arrest of two Cameroon Armed Forces soldiers and of a gendarme, whose trial began in December 2020. In 2021, police officers, including in the North-West and South-West regions, were trained by the United Nations on child protection in emergencies with a specific focus on the protection of children in armed conflict and on the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors. The Government continued the reintegration of children formerly associated

with Boko Haram, including unidentified affiliated or splinter groups, through a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration center in Meri, Far North Region.

Recommendations to the Government of Cameroon

- Comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and continue to pursue efforts to strengthen the protection of conflict-affected children.
- Ensure that all schools being used are swiftly vacated and that further military use of schools is prevented.
- Ensure accountability for grave violations against children and bring perpetrators of grave violations to justice.
- Ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes consider the specific needs and rights of children formerly associated with armed groups and allow child protection actors access to all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration centres.
- Ensure that all children formerly associated with armed groups are primarily treated as victims and handed over to civilian child protection actors. In that regard, sign with the United Nations a handover protocol for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors.
- Use the detention of children only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and release all detained children. Ensure that children are not detained or prosecuted solely for their association with or membership in any armed group and that any prosecution of children respects internationally recognized standards of juvenile justice.
- Expand child protection training to all Government defence and security forces.