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Paul Eric Kingue Dies of COVID-19

By Ariane Fogueum | March 22, 2021

The death has been announced of Paul Eric Kingue, Mayor of Njombe-Penja, Mounjo Division of the Littoral region of Cameroon. According to reports the politician, National President of the Patriotic Movement for a New Cameroon party died in the early hours of this Monday March 22 at the Mouna Clinic in Douala Bonanjo of the deadly Coronavirus pandemic. The population of Njombe-Penja that is yet to come to terms with the sudden passing away of their Mayor has crowded his residence in Bonaberi since the death announcement. Family sources say the late Mayor succumbed to the killer pandemic after battling with it for three weeks. His corpse is said to have been deposited at the mortuary of the Bonanjo Military Hospital and an inquiry opened into his death. Paul Eric Kingue was Maurice Kamto's campaign manager during the 2018 Presidential elections. During the February 9 2020 twin elections, he resigned from the opposition party as the latter decided to boycott the elections and joined the ranks of the ruling CPDM to grab the post of Municipal Councillor. He quits the scene aged 55.

No More Half Measures in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

By Paul-Simon Handy and Félicité Djilo | March 23, 2021

From 16 January to 7 February, Cameroon hosted the African Nations Championship. Some games were played in the town of Limbe in the South-West region, which is in the grip of an armed conflict between government forces and secessionist militias. The absence of secessionist violence during the championship may have given the impression that the Anglophone crisis had been resolved – but that isn't true. After four years of conflict, the figures are telling: refugees rose from 20 485 in January 2018 to 63 235 in January 2021. In November 2020, the number of internally displaced people stood at 705 000 compared to 679 000 a year earlier. This is paradoxical as secessionist armed groups have struggled to exert military control over the North-West and South-West regions, even if their social hold is real. Defence and security forces have managed to contain secessionist groups' territorial footprint, particularly in urban centres. National forces are using people's fear of the separatists' criminal activities against these groups. Despite these favourable developments, the growing number of refugees and displaced people indicates a volatile security situation in the regions. Moreover, Cameroon's partners are increasing the pressure on the government to find a political solution. Local political actors and activists seeking to embarrass the government have echoed these calls. Cameroon's approach to the crisis has always encompassed both political and military dimensions. At stake here is the quality of the political agreement on offer and the impact of solutions favoured by the Cameroonian government to date. Although the military has achieved results, abuses against alleged separatists by security forces have tarnished Cameroon's reputation internationally. The government's prioritisation of military responses has probably swollen the ranks of secessionists to the detriment of those actors advocating for a federal state as the solution. Up to 2016, most English-speaking citizens favoured a Cameroonian nation, regardless of the political regime. Today it's clear that prioritising military action won't resuscitate the fragile sense of national belonging of many English-speaking Cameroonians. Instead, the military response has likely crystallised the 'imagined English-speaking community,' which will undermine any recent gains in the future. Cameroon's efforts at finding a political solution haven't been fruitful. Separatist fever persists despite various efforts such as

UN Security Council needs A3's Leadership on African Crises

By Carine Kaneza Natulya and Louis Charbonneau | March 23, 2021

The security council is the most powerful body of the United Nations. The three elected members from Africa on it for the next two years — Kenya, Niger and Tunisia — should use the considerable power they wield to ensure scrutiny of serious humanitarian and human rights crises affecting the African continent. They should start with Ethiopia and Cameroon. ... Then there's the ongoing crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Since 2017, separatists have targeted civilians, including aid workers, students and teachers, while continuing to enforce a boycott on education. Security forces have also committed a litany of abuses including the killing of civilians, destruction of property, sexual violence and torture. The A3 should act at the security council to ensure that rights abuses by all parties in Cameroon's Anglophone regions get the international scrutiny they deserve. Without this scrutiny, the victims' hopes for justice and accountability may be dashed. ... UN member states have various justifications for not adding crises to the council's agenda. One is that regional organisations are better placed to handle them. But sometimes global solutions are more effective than regional ones. That's why the world created the UN in 1945 in the wake of the most destructive war humanity has ever known. If regional organisations were doing their job, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Myanmar and China would all be under intense pressure for human rights crimes that may rise to the level of crimes against humanity. Another excuse is that human rights discussions supposedly belong exclusively at the Geneva-based Human Rights Council and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. But the hundreds of human rights officers attached to UN missions mandated by the security council make it clear that rights are a central part of UN peace and stability operations. The A3 doesn't need to take their marching orders from the permanent council members. The A3 can take the lead on African conflicts by highlighting rights abuses and putting pressure on the security council to demand that those responsible for rights abuses are held accountable. This would not only resonate with the AU's founding principles, but it would strengthen the security council's peace and security agenda by actively addressing situations before they escalate into cycles of grave abuses and mass atrocities. The A3 have power and influence on the security council. They should use it.

commissions to promote bilingualism and multiculturalism, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, the establishment of a special status for English-speaking regions, and sentencing separatist leaders. Both the method and scope of these measures are to blame. Rather than holding talks with the insurgents, the government came up with the steps unilaterally. The national dialogue organised in October 2019 also suffered from a lack of prior consultation. Any political agreement will need the support of a majority of stakeholders to be sustainable. A lasting solution to the Anglophone crisis requires a change in Cameroonian political practice, which is based on the myth that the government and civil service are infallible. Government officials see themselves as above the people, who they consider as subjects to be 'administered' rather than citizens who can manage their own affairs. In terms of scope, the political handling of the Anglophone crisis has mostly followed the 'administrative' path that characterises Yaoundé's political culture. Indeed, the symbolic provisions of the English-speaking regions' special status were considered inadequate because they benefited only the administrative elites concerned. The conflict in the North-West and South-West isn't driven by these elites but by poor and relatively educated young men. These youth are determined to fight with rudimentary weapons against well-armed and trained defence forces. They also clash with elites who they accuse of having little concern for their fate. Any viable political solution must prioritise these active minorities who prevent the return of stability in the former Southern Cameroons. Military successes shouldn't lead Cameroon into complacency. South Sudan's experience indicates that few secessions in Africa have resulted from military victories but rather a shift in external political dynamics. Cameroon faces a situation in which military gains are nullified by mounting pressures for political negotiations from outside the country. To date, Cameroon's fight against separatist forces has benefited from the leniency and even cooperation of the Nigerian government leadership. There is no guarantee that this situation will endure, particularly as the new United States administration could take a tougher stance on human rights. To revive national cohesion, Cameroon's government needs a political solution that encourages active minorities to lay down their arms and turn away from secession. For this to happen, the administrative half-measures put in place must end, and the problem treated with more than lip-service and slogans. Rejecting a return to federalism in the name of territorial integrity is one such slogan often used by civil servants and government representatives. More than ever, dialogue with all sectors of the English-speaking minority and even the option of federalism must be on the table. Cameroon must avoid sacrificing national cohesion for the obsession with formal territorial integrity. Instead, the country needs innovative ways to forge unity and celebrate its cultural diversity. Cameroonians themselves must reinvent this new form of living together.

Out of Sight: Cameroon's Downward Spiral of Violence and Displacement

By Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre | March 22, 2021

Families of Victims Need Access to Cameroon Massacre Trial

By Ilaria Allegrozzi | March 17, 2021

The trial of three members of security forces accused of involvement in the killings of 21 civilians in Ngarbuh, in Cameroon's North-West region, is due to resume tomorrow. The trial, which began on December 17, 2020, and adjourned twice, takes place before the military court in the capital, Yaoundé, about 380 kilometers from Ngarbuh, making it difficult for family members of victims to attend. Family members' lawyers are concerned about how challenging it is for their clients to participate in the trial, as is their right as civil parties in the case under Cameroon law. They would prefer the trial be held at the military court in Bamenda, closer to Ngarbuh. "Our clients don't have the financial means to travel to Yaoundé," Richard Tamfu, one of the lawyers, told Human Rights Watch. "The court sitting in Bamenda would fit with the key principle of meaningful access to justice, bringing it closer to the victims." The attack on the village of Ngarbuh on February 14, 2020, was one of the worst by Cameroonian army soldiers since the crisis in the Anglophone regions began in late 2016. Soldiers killed 21 civilians, including 13 children and a pregnant woman, and burned 5 homes in a reprisal attack aimed at punishing residents suspected of harboring separatist fighters. Two soldiers and a gendarme have been arrested in connection with the massacre and charged with murder, arson, destruction, violence against a pregnant woman, and disobeying orders. Seventeen members of a vigilante group and a former separatist fighter have also been charged but remain at large. On February 3, some families of the Ngarbuh victims received food items and 5 million CFA (US \$9,000) each as compensation for the destruction of their property from the Governor of the North-West region, on behalf of President Paul Biya, a move criticized by lawyers representing the families who said it is up to the court to decide on reparations. The participation of victims of gross human rights violations in criminal proceedings is an essential way of giving them a voice. Cameroonian authorities, with the support of international partners, if necessary, should ensure that the victims' families can attend and participate in the trial so that their rights to justice and reparations are upheld.

A combination of deadly attacks by non-state armed groups in the Far North region and growing violence in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions continue to trigger massive but underreported displacement in Cameroon. Most displacement associated with conflict in Cameroon has historically occurred in the Far North, the poorest region of the country and the one that suffers the most from the Boko Haram insurgency. In 2020, however, seven in ten internally displaced people (IDPs) in Cameroon were forced to flee because of violence in the English-speaking regions. "Since 2017, UN agencies have been warning of a tragedy in the making in Northwest and Southwest regions," says IDMC director Alexandra Bilak. "Reports of thousands of new displacements since the beginning of the year and school attacks that have left children dead show that this is now a reality." Non-state armed groups fighting to secede from the rest of the country have been targeting schools and teachers they say are sponsored by the central government in French-speaking Yaoundé. Entire families are being forced to flee repeatedly to avoid kidnappings and harassment. "Many IDPs look for a safe haven in Cameroon's largest cities. But there they face a new set of challenges in accessing services and employment and often end up displaced again as a result of disasters," explains Alexandra Bilak. In August 2020, the worst coastal flooding in decades rendered nearly 5,000 people homeless in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital. Last year, floods also swept through the semi-arid Far North region, where they forced people already displaced from conflict areas to move again. The total number of new displacements in Cameroon nearly doubled in 2020, compared to 2019. Over one million people are now internally displaced. The country also hosts around 435,000 refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic. If displacement continues at this rate and goes unreported, humanitarians will not be able to evaluate people's needs and deliver effective assistance. "Without evidence, you cannot prevent, respond, or find lasting solutions to this neglected crisis", warns Alexandra Bilak.

Catholic Charity says World 'Too Silent' on Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

By Ngala Killian Chimtom | March 20, 2021

After five years, the international community has been "too silent" about Cameroon's Anglophone crisis, according to a leading Catholic charity. "So far, the international community remains too silent considering the gravity of the crisis," said a representative of Franciscans International, who wished to remain unnamed for security reasons. "For political, historical and economic reasons, States remain reluctant to take the lead on an international condemnation of the ongoing violence occurring in Cameroon," the official told Crux. Since the crisis begun, a few countries, including the United States, have recognized and condemned atrocities committed in Cameroon, but the Franciscan International official said international actors "remain too shy as the issue has not been deeply discussed at the UN Human Rights Council." "Cameroon's diplomatic force knows how to use its political links to slip below the radar of certain international institutions, which is the case with the UN

Security Council. Despite pressure from civil society organizations and a few states, the issue was never discussed by members of the Council,” he told Crux. “The [UN Security Council], beyond putting the problem on its agenda, should take concrete measures to condemn crimes and sexual violence perpetrated during a conflict. The lack of international attention to the Anglophone crisis is one of the factors which perpetuate the ‘feeling of international impunity’ on the part of the Cameroonian authorities. A stronger media exposure would increase international pressure on the country to change the situation quickly,” he said. Recently, Human Rights Watch reported that at least 20 women were raped in the village of Ebam in the country’s South West region on March 1, 2020. The report said the women were raped by government soldiers in an operation in which one man was killed and 35 others arrested. “One year on, survivors of the Ebam attack are desperate for justice and reparations, and they live with the disturbing knowledge that those who abused them are walking free and have faced no consequences.” said Ida Sawyer, deputy Africa director for Human Rights Watch. The Franciscans International official told Crux that the HRW report “sadly illustrates the gravity of the so-called Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, and I will analyze it through a human rights lens.” “The report perfectly shows how the Cameroonian government commits a set of gross human rights violations by act and omission,” he said. “In Ebam, the national state army was responsible for murders, physical attacks and sexual assaults against women. This constitutes direct violations of several human rights provisions included in the Cameroonian national constitution preamble such as the right to life, to physical and moral integrity; the inviolability of the home and the protection of minorities, here the Anglophone minority,” he added. Noting that Cameroon was signatory to various international instruments that guarantee human rights, he said the country’s government was failing to live up to these expectations. “The state can be held responsible for omissions by the lack of access to physical and psychological health for victims of sexual assault, as well as through the absence of proper investigation, prosecution, reparation and compensation for victims condemning the crimes, even though we may consider the lack of governmental action as a deliberated act from the government,” he said. “Access to justice and effective remedies, as fundamental procedural rights, constitute a safeguard allowing reparation when the State fails to fulfill its material human rights obligations. The lack of prosecution of the authors of the crimes illustrated by HRW thus shows the gravity and depth of the human rights crisis,” the Franciscans International official said. He said the Ebam attack once more highlighted the “gross violation of women’s rights” taking place during the Anglophone crisis. “Women and girls are directly targeted through arsons, property destructions, and rapes. These attacks against women constitute a violation of several international human rights law instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Cameroon,” the official added. “This repeated sexual violence against women intends – according to the military’s logic – to weaken a so-called opposing party and to affect the whole communities. But of course, the first victims are civilian women and girls, who do not have any link with the separatist forces and are deeply wounded physically and mentally,” he said. The Vatican’s top diplomat, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, visited Cameroon, including the Anglophone North West Region, at the end of January to call for peace and reconciliation in the country.