

# KLW BRIEFING

## Updates for the Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations

**The Southern Cameroons Incident Tracker:** <https://reportscatrocities.info>

### Cardinal Who Worked for Peace in Cameroon has Died

By Courtney Mares | April 3, 2021

Cardinal Christian Wiyghan Tumi, Cameroon's first cardinal and a dedicated advocate for peace in the country's Anglophone crisis, has died at the age of 90. Archbishop Samuel Kleda of Douala announced in a letter on the morning of April 3 that the cardinal had died. Tumi had been active in seeking a peaceful resolution to Cameroon's violent Anglophone crisis. He dedicated much of the decade after his retirement as archbishop of Douala to peace efforts and is credited with helping to create the Anglophone General Conference, a framework for dialogue between all parties to the conflict. The cardinal made headlines last November when he was kidnapped by armed separatists in Cameroon's Northwest Region. He was held overnight by his captors, who recorded a video of the cardinal being interrogated. In the video, one of Tumi's captors confronted the cardinal about his calls for fighters in Cameroon to lay down their arms and then instructed him to share the separatists' message with the public. To this, the cardinal responded: "I will preach what is the truth with pastoral conviction and Biblical conviction." "Nobody has the right to tell me to preach the contrary because I was called by God," Cardinal Tumi said. At another point in the video, the cardinal told his captors: "When I speak, I speak like a pastor and that I can never stop doing. If I stop doing that, then I will not be faithful to God, the Almighty." ... Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin visited Cameroon in February and said that the Holy See is working to see an end to the protracted conflict in the two Anglophone regions. ... Cardinal Tumi received the Nelson Mandela Prize in July 2019 for his efforts in promoting peace and human rights. Tumi published a memoir in at the end of 2020 entitled, "My night in captivity," in which he wrote: "All I want is for the guns to fall silent and for peace to return to the country."

### Open Letter to United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the "Anglophone Crisis" in Cameroon

By Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations | April 6, 2021

**Dear Secretary Blinken,**

We, the undersigned human rights, civil liberties, social justice, and faith leaders, experts, scholars, and organizations, write to congratulate you for your Senate confirmation and appreciate your focused statements about democracy and human rights in Cameroon and Africa as a whole.

We write to express our deep concern with the ongoing armed conflict in Cameroon, and especially atrocities and gross human rights violations against the Anglophone minority population in the country. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Situation Report No. 25 of 30 November 2020, three million people are affected, which is approximately 50 percent of the entire Anglophone population of the country; and 1.4 million need immediate humanitarian assistance. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported over 70,000 refugees have fled to neighboring Nigeria, and over 711,000 IDPs now live in other regions of the country as of November 2020. Thousands of civilians have been killed, and more than 300 villages have been burnt. As a result of the ongoing conflict, Anglophone Cameroonians have become the leading asylum seekers from Africa at the U.S. Southern border with Mexico.

The armed conflict is stressing a region already facing violent extremism in the Lake Chad basin and, if allowed to fester, would seriously jeopardize on-going international efforts to curtail cross-border terrorism and combat Boko Haram and ISWAP. It also has the potential of threatening regional peace and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

As you may be aware, attempts by the government of Cameroon to resolve the crisis have failed because of its unwillingness to address

## Cameroon: Growing Security, Economic Ties

By Emmanuel | April 5, 2021

Cooperation ties between Cameroon and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are currently witnessing an acceleration and diversification. Parliament in the ongoing March 2021 ordinary session has passed the bill to ratify Ordinance No. 2021/1 of January 2021 to extend the effects of the Cameroon-European Union Partnership Agreement to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. To maintain stable relations with UK, the ordinance extends for six months as from January 1, 2021, the effects of the Stepping Stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its member States, on the one hand and the Central African Party on the other hand which entered into force on 4 August 2016. This has come after Cameroon and United Kingdom signed an Economic Partnership Agreement in London on March 9, 2021 whose terms indicate that trade deals will continue on bilateral basis between the two countries even with Britain's exit from the European Union. After discussions in Yaounde, the Minister for the Armed Forces at the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, James Heappey on April 1, 2021 visited the Far North Region to boost the morale of Cameroon defence and security forces in fighting against the Boko Haram terrorist group. He said Britain was out to share experiences in the domain of fighting terrorism through training and logistics support. The Minister for Africa at the UK Foreign Office, James Duddridge earlier on March 25, 2021 during his visit to Cameroon strengthened cooperation ties between his country and Cameroon in the areas of trade. Relations between Cameroon and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also extend to the areas of education where Britain has been awarding scholarships as such the Chevening, supporting in building Cameroon's democratic institutions and environmental protection, especially the protection of endangered species and forest landscapes. UK has also helped Cameroon in the fight against the current COVID-19 pandemic at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

head on the root causes and its resort to military force to address otherwise political grievances of citizens. In a historic show of bipartisanship, the US Senate recently adopted Resolution 684 on January 1, 2021, calling on the government of Cameroon and the armed separatist groups to end all violence, respect the human rights of all Cameroonians and pursue inclusive dialogue to end the conflict. The Resolution further stipulates that "attempts at conflict resolution have failed to bring all parties to the table, as high levels of deaths, brutality, and suffering continue". This Resolution details valuable insights to the conflict and abuses, and recommends short and long term measures for durable peace to return in Anglophone Cameroon.

Mr. Secretary, we believe, strongly, that the Department of State and the Biden Administration should lead efforts to bring this conflict to an immediate end. We particularly believe peace can be achieved if you take the following urgent measures:

1. Name a Special Envoy to facilitate the State Department's lead within the inter-agency process and its efforts to engage all international and local stakeholders whose contributions are needed to bring an end to the conflict, as laid out in Resolution 684.
2. Impress upon the warring parties to negotiate, without any preconditions, for an end to the conflict and engage allies of the United States, notably France, to play a more constructive role in ending the conflict.
3. Engage more firmly the African Union and agencies of the United Nations system to assist Cameroon address the root causes of the conflict and to uphold freedoms and universal rights.
4. Initiate an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to allow unfettered access for humanitarian assistance, and protect humanitarian workers and the Anglophone civilian population who desperately need assistance. We ask that the US lead efforts by the international donor community to increase humanitarian support in order to meet the urgent and growing needs of IDPs and refugees.
5. Demand an independent international investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Council of massacres, atrocities and gross human rights abuses in Anglophone Cameroon in order to account for and hold perpetrators of rights abuses accountable, and to prevent a culture of impunity that breeds more abuses to the civilian population.
6. Champion an interagency response to sanction perpetrators of gross human rights abuses in order to curb impunity and curtail ongoing atrocities by both sides.
7. End arms sale and military assistance to the Government of Cameroon, as there is ample evidence that military equipment provided by the US has been used to commit atrocities to the civilian population in Anglophone Cameroon.
8. Grant Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for Anglophone Cameroonians currently resident in the US. This community represents the highest number of Africans fleeing violence, torture

## Congress: Addressing the Crisis in Cameroon

By Alessandra Parker | April 4, 2021

On February 17, 2021, in an effort led by Maryland senator, Chris Van Hollen, more than 40 members of Congress submitted an appeal to Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and President Joe Biden on behalf of Cameroonians residing in the United States. The letter requests an 18-month Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Cameroonians by reason of the crisis in Cameroon and the human rights abuses continuing to unfold in the country. ... The letter brought forth by Congress has nevertheless evoked an obligation to discuss the dire state of Cameroon as the ongoing crisis seems to go practically unnoticed by much of the world. With widespread violence costing more than 3,500 lives and 1.8 million displacements within the country, Cameroon is regarded as the world's most neglected displacement crisis today. Separatist fighters and government forces have imposed stay-at-home orders, not in fear of the virus that has plagued the world, but rather, the violent consequences of the civil war. Most schools and businesses shut down since the start of the conflict in fear of massacres and kidnappings. This has caused pervasive impoverishment in the country. ... There are a number of organizations working to improve the conditions of the country. Three notable acts, in particular, will have a direct effect on the state of Cameroon. The World Bank has recently provided \$45 million to aid COVID-19 recovery efforts, in addition to improving the dire state of education in Cameroon. The World Bank stated that it would continue to improve access to education and help with the educational consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also address forced displacements and the refugee crisis. UNICEF submitted an appeal to increase funding for its humanitarian work in the region as it cites the need to address the consequences of the conflict. The organization intends to scale up its operations to improve its delivery in hard-to-reach areas. It aims to provide measles vaccinations and improved water and sanitation, among a number of other essential services. The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has spoken out against attacks that were recently carried out in Cameroon. In the statement, Guterres urged Cameroonian authorities to take immediate action and bring justice to those who have been affected. While Cameroonians in the United States have a chance to avoid conflict through this Congressional act, one cannot say the same for those residing in the war-torn region. To address the crisis in Cameroon and give people a fighting chance at survival, humanitarian efforts need to increase.

and persecution from a majority Francophone government, and reliable information confirms that many of the individuals deported by the previous Administration are currently in detention and facing abuses.

9. Capitalize on the provisions of Senate Resolution 684 of January 1, 2021, the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 and other tools at your disposal to bring the civil war in Anglophone Cameroon to a negotiated end.

Respectfully,

**Cameroon Humanitarian Relief Initiative, Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations, Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations, JuventudesXLaPaz, Nuestra Agenda/Our Agenda, Presbyterian Church (USA), Refugee Council of Australia, Sam Soya Center for Democracy and Human Rights, The Global Campaign for Peace & Justice in Cameroon, Torture Abolition And Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC International), World Council of Churches (WCC)**

## Getting US-Africa Relations Back on Track with a Focus on Human Rights

By Andrea Prasow and Carine Kaneza Nantulya | April 4, 2021

In his first foreign policy speech, President Joe Biden made clear that human rights will be central to U.S. efforts to rejoin the community of nations. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's March 10 appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee outlined important areas of focus for U.S. engagement with the world. But beyond a few country-specific references to Ethiopia, Mozambique, and a handful of others, the administration has yet to articulate a broader policy toward Africa. Those plans should provide for robust engagement on Africa alongside regional partners. Concrete policy changes would go a long way toward restoring relationships with civil society organizations and grassroots movements across the continent, and make clear that the United States supports the African people, not just African governments. ... Other conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa further highlight the need for renewed engagement on human rights in countries where the United States previously fostered strong development, humanitarian, and military ties. Examples include the fragile transition in South Sudan after eight years of internal conflict, the crisis in Cameroon over violent clashes between separatist groups and government forces, the armed Islamic insurgency in northern Mozambique, and the deteriorating situation in Uganda, among others. ... In Cameroon, the violent crisis in the anglophone regions is compounded by the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's Far North, a threat that also spills across borders. U.S. engagement with the continent, including in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, and more recently in northern Mozambique, has long been dominated by counterterrorism, largely with security assistance. For example, the recently announced U.S. Special

## **The Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon Strongly Condemns the Attack on a United Nations Convoy**

By OCHA Cameroon | April 3, 2021

The Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon, Mr. Matthias Z. Naab, strongly condemns the attack perpetrated by a non-state armed group on 26 March against a United Nations convoy in Ikata village, in the South-West region of Cameroon. The UN convoy, composed of two vehicles with seven staff members, was conducting a monitoring mission to Munyenge village in the South-West region. Shortly after entering Ikata village, a group of armed men opened fire on the convoy with automatic weapons. The attack did not lead to any loss of life nor injuries among the mission participants, but the two vehicles were seriously damaged. This attack is the first of this kind on a UN convoy since the beginning of the North-West and South-West crisis. However, several humanitarian workers have been threatened, abducted, injured, and killed to date in the two regions. The general insecurity, especially attacks on civilians, aid workers, and essential social service providers, increases the population's suffering and undermines humanitarian actors' capacity to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance timely. On behalf of the humanitarian community, the Humanitarian Coordinator calls on all parties to the crisis to abide by their obligations under international human rights law and to refrain from any attacks against humanitarian organizations, educational and health care facilities and their personnel and assets. The United Nations calls for perpetrators of these attacks to be held accountable. "Safe, timely, and unhindered access of humanitarian organizations to deliver life-saving aid to the affected population needs to be guaranteed," said Mr. Naab. Mr. Naab stressed the humanitarian community's commitment to continue to support crisis-affected populations in Cameroon.

Operations Forces training program for the Mozambican military to "prevent the spread of terrorism and violent extremism" must include strict follow-through to ensure that U.S. pledges to prioritize "the respect for human rights, protection of civilians, and engagement with civil society in all security assistance" are carried out. The State Department should condition more of its security assistance across the continent (not to mention globally) on accountability for rights abuses, adherence to the rule of law, freedom of expression and association, political pluralism, and the ability of civil society organizations to operate freely and independently. The Biden administration also now has the benefit of the nascent Global Fragility Act, adopted by Congress in 2019. It lays out ways the U.S. government can partner with communities and governments in fragile states to address the drivers of conflict, such as human rights abuses, social and economic exclusion, corruption, and impunity. The effort is led by the State Department, in conjunction with the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Defense Department, and other government agencies. ... In addition, U.S. military engagement in Cameroon, the Sahel region, and other countries where American forces contribute support to peace operations and counterterrorism efforts should include rights-respecting strategies, public denunciations of serious human rights violations, and calls for prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into alleged abuses. These include abuses by government security forces such as widespread destruction of property, extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, and sexual violence. The United States, alongside the African Union and regional blocs like the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States, should be looking for ways to boost support for human rights in counterterrorism assistance. It should ensure enforcement of cooperation agreements on counterterrorism operations that include specific clauses setting out human rights standards — such as the Leahy Law, which prohibits military assistance to rights-abusing military units. U.S. bilateral and regional engagements would be most effective if led by special envoys in key areas. Blinken has announced the appointment of an envoy for the Horn of Africa, an important step toward ensuring appropriate attention to the region. But he should also name envoys for the Great Lakes Region, where persistent instability and entrenched repression have undermined human rights and the rule of law, and the Sahel, where armed Islamist groups and state security forces alike have committed atrocities against civilian populations. As Biden has already recognized, the AU should be a focal point for U.S. engagement. The United States should support an overarching human rights agenda within the AU's Peace and Security architecture by investing in conflict prevention and management and rights-focused responses to emerging crises. It should also pursue constructive engagement with African members of the U.N. Security Council. When engaging with the AU, the U.S. government would do well to recognize the growing political influence of the diaspora, which the AU has long considered its sixth region. The United States will need to engage with the diaspora with humility, recognizing that it is only beginning to grapple with the legacy of slavery. Thus it is essential to maintain robust support for the mandate of the U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for needed international scrutiny on systemic racism and police violence. In addition, the U.S. could benefit from promoting strong partnerships between U.S. agencies and local human rights organizations, as well as among

U.S.-based, Africa-focused human rights groups. Overall, U.S. policy toward Africa would be most effective for both ends of that spectrum if it is premised on engaging African regional bodies and the African people themselves. For the Biden administration to fulfill its commitment to craft a foreign policy centered on human rights and democracy, it needs to ensure that solutions it offers for African challenges are Africa-led, inclusive, multilateral, and multifaceted.

## Violence in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis Takes High Civilian Toll

By Jess Craig | April 1, 2021

Worsening violence in Cameroon's Anglophone regions is taking an increasingly heavy toll on civilians, with renewed attacks against schools and a spate of incidents involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and extrajudicial killings documented in recent months. These attacks are the latest escalation in the nearly five-year conflict between government security forces and armed separatists which has displaced more than 700,000 civilians and forced another 63,800 across the border to Nigeria, according to a United Nations report this week. Overall, the UN estimates three million of the four million people in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest have been impacted. ... In the first years of the conflict, there was a clear "cycle of violence", according to Chris Fomunyoh, a senior associate and regional director for Central and West Africa at the National Democratic Institute. "Every time the armed groups attacked the military and someone in uniform was killed, then the military goes into that vicinity or that neighbourhood 'in pursuit of the boys' and mows down civilians". However, during the past year, the number of clashes between separatist groups and security forces has declined while there has been an uptick in attacks against civilians, according to data collated by the United Nations and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project. "The [conflict] dynamics keep changing every day," said Esther Njomo, a human rights advocate based in the Southwest region. Separatist groups, in particular, have intensified targeted attacks against civilians and aid workers, Njomo said. Since January 2021, separatists have been accused of abducting a local physician, burning down public infrastructure, such as markets and post offices, and killing at least five civilians, according to media reports and NGOs. On February 13, suspected separatists killed three traditional village leaders and kidnapped 30 civilians. In the same timeframe, separatists have also carried out at least 27 attacks involving IEDs in 13 towns across the two regions, more than all previous years of the conflict combined, according to UN reports and ACLED data. Attacks with IEDs usually target military personnel, convoys, and buildings. Twelve documented attacks occurred in Bamenda, the capital of the northwest region. At least 10 government security personnel have been killed and four civilians wounded in these attacks. Fombat Forbah Dieudonne, a spokesperson for the Ambazonia Restoration Forces, a separatist group linked to the interim government, denied that any groups involved in the separatist movement have carried out abductions or killed civilians. "As concerns the IED[s], I have no knowledge of our people being capable of manufacturing such. However, we shall defend using any means possible, according to international law, ourselves for as long as this colonialism and genocide continues," Dieudonne said. Government security forces have also faced accusations of raiding villages, burning homes and arbitrarily arresting and killing dozens of civilians, according to local and international NGOs. In January, military forces raided Mautu village in the southwest region and killed nine civilians, including a woman and a child, Human Rights Watch said. A month later, a video of government security forces brutally beating the brother of a suspected separatist in a town called Ndu circulated on social media. Widespread condemnation of the video led to the Cameroonian government arresting eight officers involved. A spokesperson for the Cameroonian military declined to comment on the continuing crisis. In October 2020, the lifting of school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic sparked renewed attacks targeting learning institutions. Between October and December 2020, the UN recorded 35 attacks on schools including the "killing, torture and abduction of students and teachers, as well as arson of education facilities", according to an internal report provided to Al Jazeera. Of those attacks, 30 were carried out by separatist groups resulting in 10 civilian deaths and 67 abductions. The five other incidents involved government security forces including the "accidental discharge of weapons" near schools and resulted in five civilian injuries. Schools have been a main point of attack since the beginning of the conflict when separatists called for a boycott on education to draw attention to the increased use of French in the classroom and reliance on monolingual French-speaking teachers. Human Rights Watch previously documented that separatists set fire to schools and attacked students and staff who did not comply with the ban. Dieudonne denied that separatists ever banned school attendance. "We have continually said that the security situation does not provide the

enabling environment for schooling.” He also denied that any groups tied to the separatist movement have ever attacked schools. Once considered a beacon of stability in Central Africa, Cameroon is now facing three protracted humanitarian crises. In addition to the Anglophone conflict, Cameroon is struggling to respond to an influx of more than 200,000 refugees to its East, Adamawa, and Northern regions from neighbouring Central African Republic. In the Far North region, there has been a spike in attacks carried out by Boko Haram. The United States, a main defence partner to Cameroon, has reduced its funding for military assistance due to continuing human rights violations in the country for the past two years. The International Crisis Group has also documented “rising ethno-political tensions” after controversial 2018 presidential elections pitted ethnic Bulus, to which long-running President Paul Biya belongs, and the closely related Beti people against the Bamileke people, to which Biya’s main opposer, Maurice Kamto, belongs. “The state of fragility of Cameroon as a state has grown exponentially for five years,” Fomunyoh said. “I don’t see an easy outlet in the short-to-medium term unless a political settlement is arrived at soon.”

## Cameroon Police Crack Down on Opposition

By Moki Edwin Kindzeka | April 3, 2021

For the second consecutive time, heavily armed police dispersed an opposition leaders’ meeting held to propose reforms they say are needed to democratically change the more than four-decade-long rule of 88-year-old Cameroonian President Paul Biya. Opposition leaders, including three former presidential candidates, say the crackdown is the latest setback in their attempt to pave the way for peaceful transition of power from Africa’s second-longest-ruling president. Seven opposition leaders said they were forcefully evicted from a meeting held in Yaounde Wednesday as they were pressing for reforms to rescue elections from the strong grip of Cameroon’s long-serving president, Paul Biya. The leaders issued a formal statement on April 3. Among the attendees was Prince Michael Ngwese Ekosso. He is the president of the opposition United Socialist Democratic Party and said he took part in the meeting with hopes of easing tensions after allegations of election rigging. Opposition leaders say post-election tensions have risen after claims of fraud, with results skewed toward Biya’s Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement party. “It was a need for us the political leaders to see that the electoral code resembles the aspirations of Cameroonians in general,” Ekosso said. “We are living a country where democracy is not implemented. They (the government) do not want political leaders to hold meetings and they (the police) always come to disrupt. And also, it was a need for us to be able to discuss those things that have hampered true democracy, and then talk about the need for opposition parties to be able to form a reasonable platform to address some of the key issues,” he added. Ekosso said the leaders avoided possible brutality and assault by peacefully leaving the hall when the police ordered an immediate stop to the meeting. The government said it ordered the meeting to be ended because the opposition leaders failed to obtain an authorization, as stipulated by Cameroonian law. Ekosso said the law requires an authorization only when there is a political rally. He said he and his peers were simply taking part in a meeting of seven opposition leaders. Three candidates who lost the country’s October 7, 2018, presidential poll were in the meeting. Maurice Kamto, who claims he won the election and that Biya stole his victory, said the decision to stop an opposition meeting was another step in a crackdown on the democratic process. Cabral Libii, a former presidential aspirant and lawmaker of the opposition Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation, and Joshua Osih, former presidential candidate and vice president of the Social Democratic Front, said the decision to stop the meeting was an affront to democracy. Cameroon’s Higher Education Minister under Bia, Jacques Fame Ndongo, says there is no need for changes in the electoral code now. He said Cameroonians gave Biya 71% of their votes in the 2018 presidential election, an indication that they agree with all of Biya’s policies and laws. He said people are expecting Biya to concentrate on developing Cameroon in fulfilment of the promises he made before the 2018 presidential poll. Ndongo said political parties can make suggestions as to the changes they want in the electoral code for Cameroon’s Parliament to examine when lawmakers deem it necessary. Mamoun Njoya of the Cameroon Civil Society group, which advocates for good governance in the country, says any opposition bill to change the electoral code will be thrown out of Parliament by majority lawmakers controlled by Biya. He said Biya and his Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement party have drifted from the policy and values they promised the Cameroon people when the party was founded in 1985. He said Biya and his party are not ready to enact laws that will stop election rigging and the siphoning state funds. Biya has been in power in Cameroon for 45 years, seven as prime minister and 38 as president. In 2008, he removed term limits from the constitution, allowing him to serve indefinitely. He has won all of Cameroon’s elections, but the opposition has always contested his victory, saying Biya prepared the electoral code to favor him and his CPDM party. Biya is the second-oldest serving president in sub-Saharan

Africa after his neighbor, Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, who has been in power since 1979. When Biya's latest term is finished, he would be 93 years old.

## Is Franck Biya the President's Son and Successor?

By Jean Marie Ngong Song and Ineke Mules | March 31, 2021

In recent years, the debate over who will succeed Cameroon's long-time president, Paul Biya, has become a point of political contention. The 88-year-old, who has held the top office since 1982, is due to end his latest term in 2025. Until recently, Biya's eldest son kept a relatively low profile. Most Cameroonians knew little about Franck Biya, who has worked as a businessman and entrepreneur. But now, speculation is mounting that he may be preparing to take over his father's role as leader. Social media has been flooded with images of Franck Biya as he allegedly gathers support for his own political party. Some of the videos are calling for his candidacy. A group of businessmen, politicians and government allies has even formed The Frankistes Citizen Movement for the Peace and Unity of Cameroon. Led by businessman Mohamed Rahim Noumeau, they are calling on Franck Biya to run for the presidency in the next general election. Across the country, opinions vary on Franck Biya's possible ascension to power. But it's the manner of the transition that has most Cameroonians concerned. While some think it's possible that Franck Biya will go through the democratic process, others believe a free and fair power changeover is simply a pipe dream for the central African nation. "It has been normal in Africa and in the Francophone system, which France has harnessed and upheld, that [authorities] always work with the children as successors of various presidents," political analyst Ako John Ako told DW. Franck Biya's presidential ambitions don't come as a total surprise in the context of the region. Togo's current president Faure Gnassingbe was immediately installed as the nation's leader in 2005 following the death of his father, President Gnassingbe Eyadema, who ruled for 38 years. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), incumbent president Felix Tshisekedi was elected to lead the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) after his father, former president Etienne Tshisekedi, died in 2017. As with these similar cases on the continent, Ako says it is likely that Franck Biya's run for his father's job will provoke resentment among many in Cameroon and even worsen the country's current crises. "Franck Biya becoming president will anger many Cameroonians and may provoke other conflicts," he says. "From fighting Boko Haram in the north, the Seleka [rebels] in the east and the [Anglophone] crisis in the north-west and south-west. It will keep Cameroon in pieces." But not everyone agrees with this outlook. Njang Denis, the leader of Cameroon's Popular Action Party (PAP) says there's nothing inherently wrong with Franck Biya eventually becoming president of Cameroon. However, he stresses that he must be elected through a democratic process, otherwise his rule would be in violation of Cameroon's constitution. "I will have a problem when it becomes unconstitutional, where it becomes a backdoor game," Denis told DW. Cameroon's constitution stipulates that if the president leaves power before the end of his term, the president of the senate will ultimately succeed him. Since its independence in 1961, Cameroon has only had two heads of state. Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo appointed Biya as president of Cameroon in 1982 following the latter's resignation. Biya later consolidated power in a staged attempted coup in 1983-84 in order to eliminate his rivals. He eventually introduced a multiparty system in the early 1990s, but opposition politicians have long alleged voting irregularities. Biya has now held his position for almost 30 years and has amended his country's constitution to allow him to stand for reelection indefinitely. Denis is wary of Cameroon's next president following the same path. "We do not want the same scenario where Ahidjo prepared the terrain for Biya to come in... I do not want a situation where it looks like we are in a monarchy," Denis said. However, not everyone is as concerned with the possible pitfalls of Franck Biya's candidacy. For Cameroonian history teacher Kedia Robert, anyone has the right to stand for election — and Franck Biya should not automatically be discredited because he is the president's son. "Franck Biya is a Cameroonian," Robert told DW. "He has his legitimate right and political right to step in for any position. We could not discredit him because his father is a president." Robert points out similar situations around the world in which the children of a former sitting president ultimately took on the same role, including the Bush family in the United States and Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who was elected following his father's death in 2009 — albeit amid accusation of voting irregularities. "It will not be a problem in Cameroon," Robert said. "That is democracy. If people vote for him, then it's good."