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Cameroon - Maximilienne C. Ngo Mbe is One of the 2021 Women of Courage for US State Dept

By US State Dept | March 04, 2021

Maximilienne C. Ngo Mbe has demonstrated extraordinary leadership, courage, and perseverance through adversity in promoting human rights in Cameroon and Central Africa. She has been an outspoken voice among civil society actors, often sacrificing her personal safety, in the push for a peaceful solution to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. She has called for an end to human rights abuses committed by separatists and security forces in the Northwest and Southwest regions and by security forces in the Far North. Maximilienne has also spoken out against the increased constraints placed on civil society, journalists, and political opposition by the Government of Cameroon. Her commitment to promoting human rights has been unwavering despite the intimidation, threats, and assault she has endured.

Cameroon's Biya is Africa's Oldest President: Assessing His 38 Years in Power

By Beth Daley | March 09, 2021

Cameroon's President Paul Biya celebrated his 88th birthday recently, making him the oldest president in Africa. He has been in power for 38 years. Birthday celebrations held across the country were met with protest by the opposition, demanding that he step down. So,



President Paul Biya during a visit to China in 2018.

how has he acquitted himself in office, and what has been his legacy for Cameroon? Cameroonians welcomed Biya when he became president in November 1982. The peaceful transfer of power by his predecessor Ahmadou Ahidjo won Cameroon praise as an example to emulate in Africa, where leaders either held on to power for too long, through duplicity and violence, or were forced out. Ahidjo was ruthless, authoritative, and vicious. He ruled by intimidation. Under him rivals were hunted down, tortured, killed, or forced into exile. He was the "source of all power in the state". Biya was seen as a breath of fresh air, and he stepped in saying the right things to different groups. He visited the nation's Anglophone regions, spoke in English, and even referred to Bamenda, a major city in the Northwest region, as his "second home". It was a marked difference from his predecessor, whose policies severely undermined English as a major part of the nation's bilingualism. Biya's early actions were received with cheers. He pledged a "new deal" to restore integrity and eliminate corruption. He also announced that although he was of the Beti/Bulu ethnic group, he was born a Cameroonian and would govern as such. His policies extended elementary and secondary education to rural areas. He allowed press freedom. In his book *Communal Liberalism* he emphasised the importance of creating a "more open, more tolerant and more democratic political society". But those promises and pronouncements were short-lived. By the

Courage in Journalism Winner Designs New Career Path as Central Florida Dressmaker

By Samantha Dunne | March 09, 2021

"Women are powerful, more than any creature on Earth," said Agnes Taile, a Cameroonian journalist turned Central Florida-based African fashion designer. She would know. She was the 2009 recipient of the International Women's Media Foundation Courage in Journalism award before she immigrated to the United States a decade ago, trading in pen and paper for fabric and scissors. Taile earned the accolade for her reporting on political corruption, human rights issues and gender inequality in Cameroon, as well as her February 2008 coverage of the escalating conflict in a war-torn Chad. "It was exciting," said Taile, of reporting in the field, at times amidst the chaos of raining bullets, burning buildings and an exodus of refugees. "You want to get closer to the action because you are people's ears and eyes. You have to put the fears aside to be able to do that. I was not thinking about anything else but to get the story done in the right way." To Taile, that's the only way to report -- boots on the ground, talking with the afflicted and fighting to capture the truth alongside her fellow soldiers armed with pen, paper and camera. Taile said she saw her people suffering and dying, so doing what she could to lead a revolution was only natural, even in a country where journalists like her face termination, prison or death. "For me, journalism was about putting out what I know to save lives. It takes courage to lift your pen and write the truth," Taile said. "It just attracts you the more you get to know what it is." She got to know the craft in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital, and fell in love with it when she hosted her own radio show, "A vous la parole," which means "Have your say" in English. Taile's show was famous for lobbing criticisms against the country's corrupt, often untouchable government. Paul Biya, who has served as Cameroon's president since 1982, was a frequent target of her reports. She reported the truth about Biya and other political officials, knowing the key to resolving every human rights issue starts with the government. "The government is everything when it comes to change," Taile said. "It starts with the laws that we have to put in place. If you cannot start from the roots, there is no way you can fix the branches." Even after leaving Cameroon and journalism due to threats on her life, Taile continued to draw attention to her culture, and particularly its women, in creative ways. In 2016, she started her own African-inspired clothing line, CamericaCreations, in Orlando. Taile said the problems facing American women and Cameroonian women may be different, but one thing remains the same for all women. "We build the world. When we want to build, we do. We do it with our heart, with our mind. We do it with everything," Taile said.



Agnes Taile, manager of CamericaCreations, poses with her team.

end of Biya's first year in office, he had reverted to his predecessor's tactics, a practice which intensified after the attempted coup in 1984. He remade the nation's only political party, Cameroon National Union, in his image, renaming it the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. He packed his administration with people from his ethnic group and drove a solvent economy into insolvency. His policies targeted and undermined groups like Bamilekes, Anglophones and Northerners. He changed the name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon, a clear indication that Anglophone concerns did not matter. He went to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for help to revive an ailing economy. But, after three decades of intervention by these institutions, the economy remains on the brink of collapse. The nation's currency was devalued on his watch in 1994, bringing misery to many. Corruption became endemic. Cameroon is often ranked as being among the most corrupt countries in the world. Biya circumvents the country's multiparty political system at will. He has repeatedly amended the constitution to tighten his grip on power. One amendment, in 2008, was to eliminate presidential term limits. As a response to protests against excessive centralisation of decision making in Yaounde, Biya signed a decentralisation decree in 1996 to empower regional and local authorities. But 25 years later, that initiative has not been realised. Another failed initiative was the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism created in 2017 in response to the Anglophone protest. After billions of francs CFA were squandered, the commission has achieved nothing substantive. Biya's Achilles heel is the ongoing Anglophone crisis. He has overstayed his term in office, using underhand manoeuvres to cling to power. His nearly four decades' rule has robbed Cameroon of its credibility as a stable and peaceful country. Nations such as the US have repeatedly imposed advisory travel bans on Cameroon. Four years ago, a peaceful protest against the marginalisation of English-speaking people turned violent as Biya's military responded with arrests and torture. Some responded with a call for secession of the Anglophone regions and created a virtual Ambazonia Republic. They formed a military wing, Ambazonia Defence Force, and used it to attack Biya's military and disrupt economic and social services in the region. My work in Cameroon brings me to the conclusion that the Anglophone crisis degenerated into violence because of miscalculations by Biya's regime. The resulting crisis has devastated entire communities. The region's economy has also been crippled, resulting in a wave of crime, and burning of businesses and public facilities. Cameroon is now a no-go country in many respects. My research shows that Biya's most enduring achievement has been in his conduct of foreign policy. He remains influential in the African Union, and maintains good relations with France, the US and China. Cameroon was part of the multinational joint task force which conducted military operations to contain Boko Haram. Biya was key in convincing major powers that Boko Haram posed a global threat. He settled Cameroon's conflict with Nigeria over the Bakassi Peninsula and placed relations between the nations on a good footing. Biya also diversified foreign policy from a focus on France to expanding relations with China (though by 2007 he had begun to regret China's economic domination in Cameroon). He has encouraged American businesses in Cameroon too. Even after Cameroon was excluded from the African Growth and Opportunity Act, a programme that allows African nations to export their goods to the US duty free, for human rights violations, US-Cameroon military collaboration continued. Given Biya's

CDC Yet to Find Its Prior 2016 Momentum with 10,000 Tons of Bananas Between June 2020 and Feb 2021

By Business in Cameroun | March 05, 2021

State-owned agribusiness corporation Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) exported 9,521 tons of banana since June 2020 when it resumed exports, according to the Banana Association of Cameroon (Assobacam). This is significantly lower than the about 113,610 tons it exported in 2016. Comparatively, the largest volume of banana it exported within a month since its resumption was 1,785 tons, in February 2021, while in 2016, it exported an average of 9,467.5 tons monthly. All these figures are proof of the toll the anglophone crisis, raging since late 2016, took on the agribusiness giant that exploit banana plantations, oil palms, and hevea trees in the Southwest and the Littoral. Indeed, after a 20-month suspension (September 2018 to June 2020) of its banana segment, the firm (which is the second-largest employer in the country, with 22,000 employees) is still unable to reach its prior 2016 momentum. This is notably due to the financial constraints caused by the Anglophone crisis. According to the Technical Commission for the Rehabilitation of Public and Para public Sector Companies (CTR), between 2016 and 2018, CDC lost 60.9% of its revenues due to the said crisis. For Christopher Ngalla, manager of the group's banana segment, in 2018, CDC lost XAF32 billion. Because of the so-called Anglophone crisis, some of CDC's facilities have been burned down and its employees were assaulted by separatist militants. This led the top management to suspend operations, notably on the banana segment whose plantations and processing plants are located in the crisis-stricken Southwest region. In mid-2019, CDC management explained that the group would need XAF29 billion from its sole shareholder (the state of Cameroon) to effectively resume operations. The management's request has not been approved yet by the government due certainly to the government's cash flow problems (rise in security expenses, and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on revenues) in recent years and the ongoing anglophone crisis despite relative stability in those two regions (the Southwest and the Northwest).

unwillingness to step down from power, the global community needs to exert pressure on him to solve the Anglophone crisis. The crisis exposes the hypocrisy and weaknesses of the current global system. The major powers make noises about human rights, yet fail to stop abuses by Biya's government. What happens with the Anglophone crisis may turn out to be the most significant determinant of Biya's legacy.

Cameroon's Authoritarianism Fuels its Anglophone Separatist War

By Rogers Orock | March 10, 2021

Cameroon is dealing with a deadly though insufficiently reported civil war in its two English-speaking (minority) regions of the North-West and South-West. Since 2017, Anglophone separatists have been fighting for a new "Republic of Ambazonia", derived from the Amba Bay area in the Gulf of Guinea. On 10 January 2021, Cameroon's soldiers killed at least nine civilians in the South-West region, and injured four more. In the second week of March there were further reports of the army killing many more civilians, although the army disputes this. International efforts to encourage Cameroon's reclusive octogenarian president, Paul Biya, to seek a peaceful resolution have failed so far. On 2 February 2021, the Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, completed a five-day visit to the country, and met with Biya over the Anglophone separatist crisis. This follows previous statements from the European Union and US Senators asking for peaceful solutions. Ignoring these calls, Biya has resolutely pursued a military solution to the conflict. The conflict originated from peaceful protests in Anglophone Cameroon over longstanding grievances against the discrimination and marginalisation of the North-West and South-West regions. Anglophones' principal complaints include poor resource allocation and lack of effective political representation. They claim that there is a deliberate cultural project of "Francophonisation" of the state. In late 2016 Anglophone lawyers' and teachers' unions specifically decried the appointment of French-speaking teachers, judges and prosecutors to schools and courts in Anglophone Cameroon. Spurred by social media, these protests lasted almost a year. But in October 2017, the violent repression of these protests, including branding the protesters as "terrorists" and authorising the use of deadly force on unarmed civilians, was a major factor in escalating this Anglophone dissent into a full-blown revolt and civil war. In his end-of-year address to Cameroonians in December 2020, Biya suggested the country had "returned to peace". From a leader who has not visited any areas affected by the conflict, this claim is a patent denial of the reality of this conflict, or wishful thinking at best. In truth, the war appears to no longer rile political authorities in the capital

Yaoundé as it did before. But the conflict remains a deadly reality for civilians caught in the cross-fire between government forces and separatists. In the January 2021 joint report on the conflict by the African Leadership Centre of King's College London and the Research Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations at Coventry University, Kiven James Kewir and his colleagues write that the conflict has resulted in "over 3,000 people killed, more than 200 villages burnt, over 750,000 people internally displaced and 1.3 million people in need of assistance". They conclude that "there is an urgent need to resolve the Cameroon Anglophone conflict". Cameroon scarcely makes it onto the radar when African conflicts are catalogued. Anglophone grievances in Cameroon date back to 1961, when former British Southern Cameroon voted in a United Nations' plebiscite to join the newly independent French Cameroon to attain its own independence. Soon after the reunification of the two Cameroons, the country's authoritarian leader then, Ahmadou Ahidjo, vigorously dismantled key democratic institutions and extended the brutal police state in French Cameroon to the Anglophone areas. Notwithstanding a few changes, including the bloody struggle for a return to multiparty politics in 1990, Cameroon's authoritarian character has remained largely unchanged since Biya came to power in 1982. In the ongoing civil war, government troops and Anglophone separatists wage campaigns of terror violating international norms of warfare. The war has been marked by controversial killings and gross violations of human rights variously attributed to both sides. These controversies and abuses include extrajudicial executions, abductions, torture, detentions, everyday harassments and extortions of the civilian populations, and even burning of houses with residents in them. Government troops, much more than the separatist forces, have rightly come under greater scrutiny and criticism for impunity for their violence, putting Yaoundé on the defensive. Government has repeatedly rushed to deny accusations against its troops. This conflict persists largely because of the entrenched violence of authoritarianism in Cameroon. As Cameroonian historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe remarked, this "useless" war could have been prevented if Cameroonian authorities had responded "more intelligently and less brutally". This intelligent response would have required political authorities to investigate and seek accountability for the causes of Anglophone grievances. However, Cameroon's authoritarian state has resisted any efforts at accountability. The Anglophone Cameroonian diaspora in countries like South Africa, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States plays a key role in this conflict. A considerable part of this diaspora is either sympathetic to or promotes the separatist cause as a lasting solution. On 17 February 2021, 61 members of Cameroon's National Assembly wrote a letter to the US Congress, partly to complain about the role of this Anglophone diaspora in the conflict. However, Cameroonian authorities would be well served to look inward. Biya's pursuit of a military option cannot bring a lasting solution to the deep-seated causes of Anglophone marginalisation, resentment and disaffection. Rather, real peace will require a robust parliamentary inquiry and hearings on the war for a start. Unfortunately, Cameroon's parliament is not independent; it is willed and directed by Biya. Ultimately, the United Nations and the African Union will need to establish a joint framework for the pursuit of political negotiations to end the war. Discussions within this framework must also focus on Anglophone demands for reform of the Cameroonian state, whether this is a return to the federal option adopted in 1961 or a new, more creative and internationally guaranteed option that would grant Anglophones autonomy on the management of their resources and public services.

Cameroon Military Accused of Killing Civilians in New Attacks on Separatists

By Moki Edwin Kindzeka | March 07, 2021

Cameroonians are complaining of increasing human rights abuses as the central African state intensifies raids on English-speaking rebel camps. The military says within the past week, at least 23 separatist rebels and three soldiers have been killed, but local people say most of those killed were unarmed civilians. The military is denying the accusations. There are growing calls for investigations of alleged human rights abuses by troops. General Valere Nka, commander of the Cameroonian troops fighting separatists in the English-speaking North-West region, said within the past seven

days, 400 troops have attacked at least 15 separatist camps. Nka said in Bui, an English-speaking administrative unit in the North-West region, more than 15 rebels were killed, and hundreds of weapons seized. He said he has instructed the military to remain professional and respect human rights as they destroy all separatist camps and kill rebel fighters who refuse to drop their weapons. He said people should cooperate with troops risking their lives to protect civilians. He said peace must return to Cameroon's English-speaking regions. Nka said two soldiers were killed and another died after a roadside bomb damaged a military vehicle in the town of Kumbo. The general said a self-proclaimed separatist general called Assan died during the raids while 11 rebel fighters were arrested. The government said another self-proclaimed general called Elangue Godwin

surrendered to troops fighting rebels in the South-Western town of Kumba. Separatists have acknowledged the attacks and the killing of their general on social media. They also acknowledged that one of their fighters surrendered but said only three fighters died. The separatists said they killed nine troops in Kumba. This is not the first time Cameroonians soldiers have been accused of human rights abuses. Last week, Cameroon described as grossly exaggerated a Human Rights Watch report that its military raped 20 women, including four with disabilities, and arbitrarily arrested and beat men, but the abuses went unreported for a year. HRW said the victims did not report the abuses for fear of reprisal from the military. Cameroon said the report lacks credibility. Officials acknowledged that 35 men were arrested in the English-speaking southern village of Ebam, but denied there were abuses. Separatist have been fighting since 2017 to form an English-speaking state within the majority French-speaking country. Rights groups accuse both the military and rebels of atrocities during the conflict in the English-speaking western regions, which the U.N. says has left over 3,000 people dead and more than half a million displaced.



Cameroon military displaying weapons seized from separatists in Bamenda, March 4, 2021. (Moki Edwin)