

The Role of NGOs In the Resolution of The Ongoing Anglophone Conflict From 2016 To 2021

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Abstract: The gruesome and perpetual violation of human rights in Cameroon is alarming and a call for concern especially from 2016 to 2021 during the ongoing Anglophone conflict. The government has tried to curb human rights violation in the country but its measures seem ineffective. This has caused the researcher to investigate the role played by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the resolution of the ongoing conflict. A detailed study and interviews done on the activities of some selected NGOs who have been very active in monitoring, documenting and reporting issues of the conflict was carried out. Findings reveal that they have recorded greater achievements in their role by bringing to the lamplight the situation of human rights violations in the country despite the numerous challenges they face in their functioning. Based on the findings, the paper highlights some positive policy recommendations that may help improve their important role in conflict resolution.

Introduction

Africa as a continent is covered with a lot of conflicts. It is true that international law has always considered as one of its fundamental purposes the maintenance of peace¹. Conflicts are inevitable and no matter their nature, they are often accepted as a regular part of human relations. The major problem is always how to resolve them. The history of the African continent is characterized by conflicts, which usually occurs around the border between two states, and a majority of the conflicts are equally intra state like the Anglophone conflict. Most of these conflicts occur after the states become independent, when each becomes eager to know and secure its territorial boundaries with neighbours². It is for this reason that many scholars have considered Africa as the home of conflict, and Cameroon which is referred to as Africa in miniature as a replica of the African continent in that it places host to many conflicts, the Anglophone conflict being our focal point.

The prime value in contemporary Cameroon today is peace. It is the most valuable public good, but yet the most elusive.³ The close to five years of civil war and disturbance in various parts of the country, precisely in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon are at different levels of intensity and peace settlement. These have wrecked devastating effects on Cameroon in terms of considerable loss of human life, human suffering, the destruction of infrastructural facilities, the disruption of economic, educational, social and agricultural activities and the coming anarchy that threatens not only the Cameroonian internal peace and security but also the internal peace in Africa and beyond. Alarmingly most of these areas of conflict lack the political will to maintain past peace agreements and have fallen prey to continuous armed clicks and ethnic conflict.⁴ Peace has therefore become the most pressing challenge faced by Africans at large and Cameroon in particular. This is evident by the plethora of conflicts scattered all over Africa. This situation is partly due to the unwholesome merger of multi-ethnic people by the colonial masters and partly as a result of ineffective conflict resolution. Despite some efforts by the government, corporate bodies, civil society, national universities commissions and non-governmental organizations to

¹ J. Merrills, 'Themosacic of international Disputes Settlement Procedures: complementary orcontradictory. *54 Netherlands International Law Review* 2007 Pg. 361

² Sone P, interstates border disputes in Africa: their resolutions and implicationto human rights and peace. *African Security Review journal* 2017 vol. 26, Pg. 325-339.

³ Francis, D.J. 'Uniting Africa: Building Regional Peace and Security Systems' (2006). Aldershot: Ashgate.

⁴ Monty G. Marshal. Peace and Conflict: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-determination Movement and Democracy. College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland.2003.

reduce situation of conflict in the North West and south west regions of Cameroon, peace has continued to elude the Anglophone regions and consequently sustainable development.

The Legal Justification for NGOs to Resolve Conflict.

By virtue of the charter of the United Nations which is a working document for conflict resolution by states, it provides in its art. 2 that states have the primary responsibility to maintain peace and security, and that once there is conflict, they have to resolve it peacefully. Stemming from this article, there is the art. 33 which provides the pacific means through which conflicts can be resolved, is also Article 32 of the same charter gives primary responsibility to states and secondary responsibility to international organizations and non-state actors to protect human rights. These non-state actors are the NGOs. Furthermore, NGOs have as responsibility to act as mediators in conflict resolution, they play an advisory role and make recommendations which even though are non-binding but if followed can effectively resolve conflicts. Their involvement has been tested in many conflicts around Africa and world and has proven successful.

Over the years there has been a tremendous increase in the number of NGOs, so also the variety of their activities and their geographical spread. Because most of the NGOs are involved in work relating to development, relief and advocacy, which are of direct and visible benefit to the people, they have achieved a high degree of good will. In addition, many of the NGOs have skilled personnel who can intervene in conflict situations creatively in order to bring resolution. This fact has been recognized by the United Nations as well as international funding agencies like the World Bank who now bank upon the resources of NGOs for conflict resolution, particularly in areas like early warning, third party intervention, reconciliation and peace building. The UN General Assembly recognized the role of NGOs and called upon the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) to work with NGOs interested in communicating information about the United Nations. In continuation of the General Assembly resolution, the NGOs and Institutional Relations Section was established within DPI to provide information and other liaison services to the growing number of NGOs accredited to the United Nations. In 1968, the UN Economic and Social Council formalized its consultative relationship with NGOs. However it is to be noted that NGOs were not given any formal status in the General Assembly or other powerful bodies like the Security Council. Now NGOs have become key partners in development assistance especially to less developed countries from international agencies like the UN, the European Union and the World Bank. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary General of the UN affirmed that NGOs "are an indispensable part of the legitimacy without which no international activity can be meaningful.

The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution.

Wars leave societies destroyed and post-conflict recovery requires a lot of financial resources. Currently, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, nearly 60 countries are in conflict or have recently come out of conflict; for the most part, these countries are the poorest on the planet⁵. Helping these states in their reconstruction processes is one of the most complex challenges that the international community faces. The majority of these conflicts and the eventual reconstruction processes take place in fragile states, which do not have the necessary resources and require external financial assistance in order to get through this phase. States fail when they cannot provide political goods to their society and lose legitimacy in the face of their citizens. Approximately half of the states of the world are in a weakening process, that is, they are becoming fragile. Some like Somalia have reached collapse. The governments of most of these states confront armed revolts, with long-term violence (like in Angola, Burundi, Sudan and Cameroon), directed towards the government and justified by demands for political or geographical autonomy, discrepancies between different communities for ethnic, religious or other reasons, and/or the attempt to control the scarce resources available. The presence of Non Governmental Organisations in conflict zones is hardly a new phenomenon⁶. The International Committee of the Red Cross has cared for the victims of modern conflict situations for some time. More recently, a number of international humanitarian organisations like Care International, Oxfam, Action Aid among others have been highly visible players in coping with disasters.

⁵Human Security Center, *Human Security Report 2005. War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Canada, 2005.

⁶ Robert I. Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-State Failure', *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2002.

What is different about the human rights NGO activism in zones of conflict is that many groups are now playing a leading role in trying to defuse nascent or full blown conflicts, as opposed to just cleaning up the human suffering that results⁷.

NGOs have developed a wide range of conflict prevention and resolution activities including monitoring conflict and providing early warning of new violence; opening dialogue between adversarial parties; playing a direct mediating role; strengthening local institutions for conflict resolution; and helping to strengthen the rule of law and democratic processes in countries affected by violent conflict.

After the Cold War, new forms of conflict have broken out around the world. NGOs have emerged as important partners to both national governments and international agencies engaged in diplomacy and conflict resolution in dealing with conflict and reconstruction. Also, these NGOs have played a critical role in seeking to turn loose talk about "global civil society" into a concrete reality on the ground⁸. Like international relief agencies, NGOs focusing on conflict resolution respond to major failures on the part of the international community to deal effectively with global problems. Too often, intergovernmental bodies and agencies have proved too slow and cumbersome in dealing with emerging urgent crisis situation as demonstrated in Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, DRC and Darfur. Also, both international agencies and governments often have institutional and political limitations that hamper their effectiveness in situations of enormous complexity and delicacy.

NGOs facilitate up to date extensive fact-finding missions, engage in dialogue with a wide range of groups involved in conflicts, map out strategies for defusing conflict and galvanize action by national governments and international organisations to help stabilize tense situations. Situations in Burundi, Northern Uganda, Southern Sudan, Darfur, DRC and Rwanda provide examples of where NGOs have played a decisive role in heading off major conflicts.

In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the role NGOs can play as partners with government and intergovernmental organisations in the conflict resolution and peace-building agenda⁹. Against this backdrop, it is important to examine the diverse interventions that Non-governmental organisations undertake especially in crisis such as the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon that will be worthy of replications in other warring countries and situations. Perhaps an interesting perspective for the reader might be to access the level of interventions that NGOs have done since the crisis started and how they have been felt across the Central Africa's sub region.

As concerns the Anglophone conflict, protest marches by Anglophone lawyers in September 2016, expressing their grievances on the practice of Common Law in Cameroon, was the herald of the Anglophone crisis. The absence of an English version of the OHADA documents, the creation of two separate divisions of the Common Law and Civil law, protecting the Anglophone minority as stated in the Constitution given the bi-juridical, bilingual and bi-cultural nature of Cameroon, the absence of a Common Law section at the supreme court, the absence of English law in the judicial system and the non-appointment of notaries in the Anglophone regions¹⁰, were calls for concern. Again, they complained about the inequality in representation and recruitment of legal staff. The Minister of Justice, Laurent Eso, confirmed this by declaring in 2017 that the legal body had 1542 magistrates made up of 39 on Secondment, 91 at the ministry and 1412 in courts. Within these personnel were 1256 Francophone magistrates for 227 Anglophones, 554 judicial officers with 499 being Francophones and 15 Anglophones. Even in the Anglophone regions, there were mostly Francophone magistrates with civil law background not respecting the common law background of the regions. For instance, of the 128 magistrates in the North West, 67 were Francophones, of the 27 magistrates in Bamenda, 21 were Francophones¹¹.

Convincingly, NGOs through their justifiable claims has a huge role to play in the Anglophone conflict. Their demands which were only seriously addressed several years later came as an accumulation of

⁷Ndung'uWainaina, 'The Role of NGO's in Conflict Prevention Crucial', *Kenya Times*, May 2006.

⁸Upsit

⁹ Barnes, C. Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing Wars & Building Peace, The Hague: Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2006.

¹⁰ Ngoh, V. Cameroon 1884-Present (2018) The History of a People. Design House: Limbe.(2019)

¹¹ Relief Web. (2017). The Anglophone Dilemma in Cameroon. Retrieved from, <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/anglophone-dilemma-cameroon> Accessed on 9 April, 2021.

several levels of frustrations and led to the escalation of the crisis. The frustration-aggression theory propounded by Dollard and Doob et al¹² in 1939 propounds that frustration can emerge when people of a community, group, or an individual does not have enough means to survive and this sets the bedrock for conflict or because of a feeling of inequality or marginalization. From a psychological point of view set up by proponents of the theory, human beings rarely like being frustrated for a long period and when it occurs, they forget about their liaison with those causing the frustration¹³. This therefore marks the important role of NGOs, for Cameroon specifically; it would have been easier for the government to attend to those needs/demands when they were repeatedly tabled before 2016. All attempts made to stop the crisis since 2016 have not yielded positively till present 2021. The government has quite attended to certain demands and made provisions to improve some faulty areas, but the conflict has been more damaging both for the inhabitants of the regions and the government.

Having highlighted the role of NGOs in the outbreak of the Anglophone conflict, one might be left with some questions about how these roles were undertaken by these organisations. We have therefore focused on some pertinent activities that can be undertaken within the crisis:

Protection

Although the function of protection of lives and property is the primary responsibility of government, NGOs have often been supporting the government in contexts where it cannot perform this primary function because of armed conflict. Civil society initiatives frequently emerge during the conflict and its aftermath to protect citizen life, rights and property against threats by conflict actors or the state. Protection functions are performed by International Non-Governmental Organisations (I-NGOs) that support domestic civil society either indirectly, through their presence as monitoring watchdogs¹⁴, or directly through international accompaniment. Eviota¹⁵ notes that Peace Brigades International, for example, sends outsiders into conflict zones to protect national peace or human rights, activists. Other examples are communities in the Philippines and Colombia that have negotiated zones of peace where no arms are allowed. This was the work by institutions such as CRS and other International NGOs in Cameroon.

TRESA (2005)¹⁶ also declares that another aspect of protection is supported to security-related interventions such as defining, small arms control, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants. In Mozambique, churches launched a follow-up demobilization campaign after the official UN demobilization process had ended. More frequently, however, CSOs collaborate with government or donor-led efforts. The capacity of NGOs to perform the protection function is limited by contexts with a high level of violence and coercive state with a dysfunctional rule of law institutions.

Monitoring and Early Warning

The primary provider of services (including health and education) in any state is government. To enhance the provision of such services, NGOs have to monitor the actions and policies of government to ensure it stays faithful to government's core objective of providing the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. In conflict contexts, NGOs observe and monitor the activities of conflict actors to enhance accountability and a precondition for the protection and the advocacy/public communication functions of civil society. The primary focus of monitoring during armed conflict is on human rights violations. International and local groups can monitor the conflict situation and recommend decisioning-

¹² Dollard, J., Doob, L., Miller, N., Mowrer, O., & Sears, R. Frustration and Aggression. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT. (1939)

¹³ Breuer, J., & Elson, M. Frustration-aggression theory. In: Sturney, P. The Wiley Handbook of Violence and Aggression (1-12). Wiley Blackwell: Chichester. (2017)

¹⁴ Camilla Orjuela, "Building Peace in Sri Lanka: a Role for Civil Society?". Journal of Peace Research, 2003, vol. 40, issue 2, pg 195-212

¹⁵ Eviota, D. "Grassroots and South-South Cooperation: Bantay Cease-Fire in the The Philippines." In: P. van Tongeren, et al., eds., People Building Peace II, Successful Stories of Civil Society, (2005) 388-93. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner. Exclusion Dichotomy' Negotiation Journal 30 (2014), 69-91.

¹⁶ TRESA (2005). "Civil Society Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons Control," Training and Education on Small Arms (TRESA), BICC, Bonn

makers, provide information to advocacy groups, and provide inputs for early warning. This NGO function is relevant in all conflict phases, and its impact is maximized when all actors coordinate closely. To strengthen the early warning function, there is increasing cooperation between local, national and INGOs but also with regional organizations.

Advocacy and Public Communication

Advocacy according to Aall¹⁷ is one of the core functions in peacebuilding and primarily a role for domestic civil society. NGOs can articulate the interests of social groups, especially marginalized groups, and create communication channels to raise public awareness and facilitate the inclusion of issues in the public agenda. Most peacebuilding schools assume that the influence of NGOs on conflict management is indirect and limited to an advocacy and communication role, and applying pressure on negotiating parties and advocacy for specific issues. Advocacy is not only very relevant to peacebuilding but is also mainly conducted most times by NGOs with high levels of effectiveness. Advocacy is relevant in all phases of conflict, but its nature will vary according to conflict phases. During the conflict, NGOs advocates for peace agreements, against violence and human rights violations, for broad-based participation in the peace process, and specific issues.

In the post-conflict phase, NGOs advocacy focuses on implementing the peace agreements, or specific conflict issues such as violence, gender, or the need for a culture of peace¹⁸. Independent media play an important role in peacebuilding by reaching a broad range of the population, facilitating public communication, expanding the audience for advocacy campaigns and raising awareness on the need for and feasibility of non-violent solutions. Disseminating objective and non-partisan information (on mass killings, human rights violations, and truth and reconciliation efforts) is a critical media contribution to peacebuilding. Richmond (2006) also declares that the media, however, can also perpetuate ethnic stereotypes and fuel further hostilities and violence. In Rwanda, for example, radio Milles Collines preached hatred and helped orchestrate the genocide. The most effective form of advocacy is mass mobilization for large-scale change, such as the end of the war or authoritarian rule. The main limiting factors for advocacy are linked to the shrinking space for NGOs to act and a highly restricted media.

Socialization

The socialization function is not only performed by NGOs as leadership for socialization is provided by other institutions including the school, church, political parties and the family. The socialization function of NGOs aims to inculcate a culture of peace in divided conflict societies by promoting attitude change toward peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation. Most activities adopt a conflict resolution approach and include dialogue projects, reconciliation initiatives, peace education, exchange programs and peace camps, conflict resolution training and capacity building. Research suggests that civil society initiatives which support attitude change and a culture of peace are only effective when they can reach a critically large number of people¹⁹. The precondition for effectiveness of socialization initiatives is low level, or the absence of, violence. NGOs, in supporting the socialization process, engage with influential pre-existing institutions such as schools. The main limiting factors for socialization revolve around the shrinking of space for NGOs to act and policies against freedom of association.

Social Cohesion

It is logical for conflict contexts to be sharply divided between distinct groups that often transcend the main adversarial groups. Enhancing social cohesion is, therefore, an important NGO role in peacebuilding, as conflict usually destroys bridging social capital. Restoring bridging social capital can help

¹⁷ Aall, P. "What Do NGOs Bring to Peacemaking?" In: Crocker, C., F. Hampson, and P. Aall, eds., *Turbulent Peace*, (2001)365-83. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press

¹⁸ Camilla O, "Civil Society in Civil War: the case of Sri Lanka, *Civil Wars*,(2005), 7:2, 120-137

¹⁹ Anderson, Mary B. and Lara Olson, with Kristin Doughty. *Confronting war: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*. Cambridge, MA: CDA, 2003

to curb inter-group violence, and revitalize group interactions, interdependency and solidarity²⁰. Putnam²¹ maintains that engagement and participation in voluntary associations have the potential to build and strengthen social capital, but rather than building bonding ties within groups, the aim should be to build bridging ties across adversary groups i.e., a ‘conflict-sensitive social cohesion’ function.

Research in India found that ethnically mixed organizations were effective in building bridging ties across ethnic groups, leading to an institutionalized peace system that facilitated the control of violence²². The precondition for the effectiveness of social cohesion initiatives is again a low level, or absence of, violence. It enhances the effectiveness of social cohesion when initiatives are aimed at bringing people together for a common cause. The main limiting factor for social cohesion is extreme levels of violence.

Intermediation and Facilitation

An important NGO function is to intermediate between interest groups and the state. Local facilitation by NGOs is highly relevant during all phases of conflict peacebuilding. This is often performed by community leaders (such as traditional or religious leaders) or by Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) who facilitate dialogue between conflict parties and the community or between community and returnees. In peace-building, intermediation and facilitation can take place not only between the state and citizens but also between conflict parties, within groups and on different levels of society. The major activities within this function are facilitation initiatives (formal or informal) between armed groups and between armed groups and communities or development agencies. Intermediation can be performed by international and/or domestic civil society. Paffenholz²³ declared that domestic civil society has little involvement in direct facilitation between conflict parties, especially when it involves actual peace negotiations, as this role is primarily played by external parties, especially governments (Norway in Sri Lanka) or multilateral agencies (UN in Guatemala).

He further revealed that sometimes this role can be taken up by international NGOs as with Comunita di Sant’Egidio in Mozambique or the Geneva-based NGO Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, which facilitated the first negotiations in Aceh²⁴. Domestic NGOs can play a facilitation role at several levels, including between civil society and conflict parties at the village or district level (e.g., civil society representatives negotiated the release of citizens by armed groups in Nepal); to bring conflict parties to the negotiation table (e.g., the Inter-Religious Council in Sierra Leone got government and rebels to agree to peace talks in the late 1990s), to negotiate peace zones or violence-free days (e.g., the churches in El Salvador negotiated peace days in order to carry out a child vaccination campaign; between aid agencies and conflict parties to deliver services directly to communities²⁵. Jeong²⁶ revealed that in some conflict zones, local civil society acts as mediators or facilitators where the government or foreign aid structures cannot operate (e.g., Nepal) or where national or I-NGOs need facilitation to better understand the local context. NGOs have unique potential in peacebuilding, but analyzing NGOs from an actor-oriented perspective denies one a deeper understanding of its contributions to peacebuilding.

An appropriate starting point for more effective engagement of NGOs in peacebuilding is that NGO is viewed not from an ‘actor-oriented’ perspective but from the perspective of their functions. In view of this, the strategy must therefore seek to build the capacity of the civil society sector as much as those of their government and must emphasize a sustained rather than ad hoc engagement. We should structure the basis

²⁰ Camilla Orjuela, “Building Peace in Sri Lanka: a Role for Civil Society?”. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2003, vol. 40, issue 2, pg 195-212

²¹ Putnam RD. *Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance*. In: *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 2002

²² Ashutosh Varshney. “Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life”. Yale University Press 2002.

²³ Thania Paffenholz. *Civil society, civic engagement, and peacebuilding*. Social development papers, conflict prevention and reconstruction. Paper No. 36, October 2006

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Camilla Orjuela, “Building Peace in Sri Lanka: a Role for Civil Society?”. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2003, vol. 40, issue 2, pg 195-212

²⁶ Ho-Won Jeong. “Peacebuilding in postconflict societies:Strategies and Process” (2005)

for this strategy to promote mutual benefit and respect and seek to draw on their wide outreach and mobilizing capacity to support peacebuilding initiatives. Ultimately, it should be based on recognition of the fact that to sustain peacebuilding efforts, all available capacities in the polity need to be mobilized. The civil society sector is a critical resource. Despite the functions of NGOs in peacebuilding, its support cannot replace political actions, particularly in the areas of protection, socialization and service delivery.

The Role of NGOs in the Anglophone Conflict.

The concept of political liberalization which acted as part of the globalization process that was unleashed in Africa following the collapse of the Cold War²⁷, led to political reforms being introduced in majority of countries to promote and protect human rights²⁸. After the end of the Cold War across the world, there was a need for rapid development in various countries. This led especially in the western nations, to the collaboration between states and the religious associations in the provision of humanitarian aid to less privileged regions.

In Africa, NGO's have been a sphere where persons in the community can group themselves into associations so as to have a collective voice, as their individual voices are ignored and their rights to protest against oppression is subdued. J.C. Alexander suggests that NGO's can be seen as a solidarity sphere, in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes to be culturally defined and to degree institutionally enforced²⁹.

NGO's have grown over the years in Cameroon after the institution of the law on Freedom of Association in 1990. This law is set in accordance with international human rights instruments and the 1996 Constitution of Cameroon. In a bid to strengthen NGO's in the country, and to foster development in different sectors, the government has instituted several laws which regulate different facets of his blossoming side of the society.

NGO's are the most prevalent part of the civil society in Cameroon. They are regulated by Law No. 90/053 of 19th December 1990 relating to Freedom of Association, amended and supplemented by Law No. 99/11 of 20th July 1999, Law No. 99/014 of 22nd December 1999 to govern NGOs and Decree No. 2001/150/PM of 13th May 2001 relating to the organization and functioning of the technical commission in charge of NGO activities.

In accordance with the rule of the Triple Pronged Theory by Henry Shue 1980, the primary duty bearer to uphold the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights under international law is the state. The state of Cameroon in our context has the obligation not only to promulgate laws but also to set up institutions to follow up the process of human rights obligations in the country.

NGOs generally play a vital role in the promotion, protection of human rights and equally to resolve conflicts in Cameroon as they serve as secondary bearers of this duty and they remind the state of its obligations and highlight lapses in the process. These are achieved via human rights monitoring, investigation, documenting and reporting.

Monitoring human rights is the process of systematically tracking and assessing state performance against clear benchmarks and targets. The process requires data collection and analysis, involving not only official statistics, but possibly also field observation, investigation and even fact-finding delegations. In addition, NGOs as an important arm in the society play vital role in monitoring human rights through organizing seminars and campaigns to raise awareness in the area of human rights and conflict resolution and equally expose abuses of human rights in the country.

Some of the role they generally perform are to indicate whether a state is meeting its obligations or not and provides a basis for holding the state accountable as well as identify the source and nature of human rights violations. They equally identify the problems involved in realizing the enjoyment of human rights;

²⁷ The cold war was a period after the second world war between 1947 to 1991 which was characterised by tension and armed race between the Eastern Bloc and powers in the Western Bloc. These two blocs never engaged in an all-out war but provided support to proxy wars which were to their gain. There was growth in authoritarian rule in the third world countries and failing economies among other things. The end of the Cold War brought a wave of democracy and respect for human rights.

²⁸ Appiagyei-AtuaKwadwo. 'Human rights NGO's and their role in the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa', *International journal on minority and group rights*, 2002 vol. 9 No. 3, pp265-289.

²⁹ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The civil Sphere*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p31

identify priorities for action and suggest where resources need to be allocated. Moreso, they support legislative advocacy and policy formulation, engaged in public awareness and education campaigns, promote principled policy-making that incorporates a human rights perspective and processes that facilitate public accountability. The results they obtain from monitoring are often used to pursue actions to obtain remedies from the courts and they provide the basis for reports and submissions to national and international bodies.

NGOs are engaged in the collection, verification and dissemination of information on human rights abuses and these abuses are rampant during conflicts. Local human rights NGOs are better placed to have such information because they are closer to the people than international organisations in the country. In a bid to collect relevant information for exposing human rights abuses and violations, they work with a loop of international and domestic ties and feed-back loops between intergovernmental organisations and branches of government³⁰.

Local human rights NGOs such as the Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), Modern Advocacy, Humanitarian, Social and Rehabilitation Association (MAHSRA), Finders Group Initiative (FDI) and Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) amongst others, collaborate with international NGOs such as Amnesty International, International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, to provide information on human rights violation on the on-going conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon and the human rights violation which have ensued so far. Reports published by the above NGOs such as “Human rights violation committed by the military between May and August 2020 in the north west and south west regions of Cameroon” by CHRDA, have helped in exposing the human rights situation in Cameroon and this has motivated the international community to caution the government to investigate and ensure the proper protection of human rights of its citizens and to effectively resolve the ongoing conflict through free, fair and meaningful dialogue. All of these activities have made NGOs to be described as “watchdogs” in charge of monitoring and assessing the situation of human rights protection in Cameroon.

The Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) and the resolution of the Anglophone Conflict.

The Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) is an apolitical, non-governmental organisation created with the mandate to promote human rights and democracy in African. It was created in 2005 with headquarter in Buea, Fako Division of the south west region of Cameroon. CHRDA also has an office in the North West region of Cameroon. It has the following departments: human rights, legal, humanitarian affairs, gender, democracy, communication and a department for projects. It has as mission the promotion and respect for human rights, rule of law, and democratic principles, promoting democracy and good governance void of conflict through on and off line campaigns, developing strategies and gathering resources in securing compliance with human rights norms, working with government authorities to improve human rights situations, to keep abuses to a minimum, and to encourage ratification of international treaties and agreements related to human rights, providing legal services to victims of human rights violations at national and international level, provide legal assistance to victims of human rights abuses by working in close collaboration with members of the legislative, judiciary and executive branches so as to bring the necessary legal changes, serving as a liaison with other NGOs focused on human rights.

In the wake of the Anglophone conflict affecting the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, the Center has witnessed an alteration of gender roles especially within the local communities. Owing to the indiscriminate male massacres, sexual violence in conflicts, physical infliction of unlawful force, psychological violence, summary extrajudicial execution, arbitrary arrest and detention. CHRDA has through its various departments advocated to the respect of fundamental human rights at various levels both nationally and internationally (advocacy and lobbying); the Center has also reached out to Internally Displaced Persons in the southwest region and northwest region, with food and non-food items and basic WASH dignity kits. They also visited the refugee camp in Nigeria In 2018 which hosted about 50.000 refugees from the English-speaking regions of Cameroon fleeing the violence.

³⁰ Keck M. & Kathryn E.S., *Activities Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998,p9

As a conflict prevention and radicalization cum violent extremism mechanism, the Center organized a two days sensitization campaign aimed at combating hate and dangerous speech in Cameroon from the 16th to 18th of November 2018 which brought together respective stakeholders including the Consul General of Nigeria to Cameroon for the northwest and southwest, representatives of the university community, state agents, youth leaders, media activists and other CSOs. This ended with the adoption of a 10 point declaration which intimated the state representatives, bloggers and citizen journalists to shun the use of hate speech especially within the conflict situation. Following interview with the governance officer of CHRDA, the Center has visited several times, hundreds of IDPs hosted in Malale village in Buea sub division precisely after muea town in 2018 and 2019. The Gender Taskforce of the Center also organized workshops in the northwest and southwest regions on combating gender based violence. The Center organized those workshops in order to sensitize the population on the need to foster peaceful co-existence in the society and the very importance of securing the rights of all regardless of sex or any other status in the society.

CHRDA is a principal stakeholder in the conflict has been very active since the outbreak of the conflict through monitoring, documenting and reporting the human rights violations in the country since the conflict began. It has several publications like: Cameroon Unfolding Catastrophe June 2019; Human Rights situation Report of the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon between October 2020 and February 2021, published in March 2021 just to name but a few.

Following interview with the Human Rights Coordinator for CHRDA, it was discovered that the Center participated in the Grand National Dialogue of 2019 as an organisation living at the epic center of the conflict, were it made several recommendations to the state on how the conflict can be efficiently resolve and the return to normalcy.

The Center has equally been engaging with the international community through its reporting, it work with the United Nations through its diplomatic offices in the country through monitoring and reporting. The Center has taken part in the Paris Peace Conference and the Oslo Human Rights Forum where it made meaningful contributions as to the way forward for the state out of this conflict.

Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and the Resolution of the Anglophone conflict.

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Bamenda (JPC) was established in December 2002 and is part of the universal network of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, including at continental level, the Justice, Peace and Good Governance Department of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, (ACERAC); the Justice and Peace Departments at regional level, the Association of Episcopal Commissions in the Central African Republic and at national level the Episcopal Conference of Cameroon. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Bamenda strictly observes the mandate assigned to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace established by Pope Paul VI on January 6th 1967, which reads inter alia, to: promote justice and peace in the world, in the light of the Gospel and the Social Teaching of the Church; deepen the social doctrine of the Church and attempt to make it widely known and applied, both by individuals and communities; promote the development of peoples and protect human rights; foster relations with Catholic organizations and other bodies, be they Catholic or not, that are sincerely committed to the promotion of the values of justice and peace in the world.

The creation of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bamenda was underpinned by the inter-ethnic conflicts in the Cameroon's Northwest Region and the importance the Catholic Church attaches to the promotion of justice and peace in the world. The Northwest Region of Cameroon, which corresponds with the area covered by the Archdiocese of Bamenda, has been hit by many inter-ethnic conflicts since colonial times, with some traced back to the pre-colonial period³¹. According to Mbah³², these conflicts occurring between village groups in the region are mostly land/boundary disputes resulting from conflicting ownership claims and boundary disagreements. Though most of these conflicts have their roots in European colonialism, successively under Germany and Britain, the disputes heightened during the post-colonial period due to the administration's inability to tame them. The conflicts have caused

³¹ Nkwi, Paul Nchoji, and Jean-Pierre Warnier.. Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields. (1982) Yaounde: SOPECAM

³² Mbah, Emmanuel. "Disruptive Colonial Boundaries and Attempts to Resolve Land/ Boundary Disputes in the Grasslands of Bamenda, Cameroon."(2009) African Journal on Conflict Resolution 9 (3): 11-32.

economic hardship, population displacement, loss of human life, and destruction of property. Some of the injurious conflicts include Bali Nyonga and Bawock, Balikumbat and Bafanji, Oku and Mbessa, Balikumbat and Bambalang, Esimbi and Musaka, and Baligham and Awing. As these conflicts dragged on in a context of failing government initiatives, authorities of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, whose followers also suffered from the violence, saw the need to promote peace through conflict management and peacebuilding. As such, discussions on the creation of a faith-based institution to be given such a task began in the Archdiocese.

The work of JPC covers conflict resolution, training, access to justice and human rights monitoring. The JPC postulates the Christian principles of love, justice and freedom, and addresses itself to issues regarding social, economic, political and religious justice as well as the respect for human rights.

The organization bases its work on three overall objectives: to discover and make public human rights violations; to promote respect for human rights, democracy, justice, and peace; and to promote dialogue, tolerance, and co-existence among all sections of the society.

As far as the Anglophone conflict is concerned, JPC has been very active. In October 2020, JPC organize workshop on stress management, Trauma healing and resilience. These three days' workshop, facilitated by Wango Y. Bennaka and George V. Minang of mission 21, ran from Sunday the 18th to Wednesday 21st of October 2020. The workshop had as objective to help participants know the differentiate between trauma and stress, understand the causes, symptoms and effects of trauma, understand the different types of trauma, understand the different response to trauma, be able to understand what happens when trauma is ignored. This was triggered by the ongoing armed conflict in the Anglophone zones of the country. Still in October 2020, JPC supports over 10 female IDPs with Start Up Capitals for income generating activities; a major step in its early recovery programme from the ongoing Anglophone conflict. This came after business plans submitted to the JPCs office by these IDPs were analyzed, monitoring visits made to their respective business sites for assessment.

The month of March 2021, JPC has trained over 50 persons on justice and peace issues, monitoring, documenting and reporting human rights violations. They have equally made visits to inmates at the Bamenda Central prison. They have been very vocal in condemning the human rights abuses that are recurrent in the region since the inception of the Anglophone conflict. It has been reporting the situation in the Anglophone regions that has witnessed a continuous rise of violent confrontation between the military and separatist fighters.

The Role of the Church.

From the start of the conflict, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (CENC) has spoken out on behalf of the Catholic Church, the most credible institution in the country, to call for dialogue and a halt to the violence³³. On several occasions, it has called on the government to make efforts to understand the frustrations of Anglophones and their demands for more autonomy. The Church has also offered to mediate, but the government has not accepted this offer. Twice in 2018, the Episcopal Conference asked for an audience with the President of the Republic to discuss the Anglophone crisis, but in vain.

The International Community.

International actors do not have a common view of the Anglophone conflict and not all of them are involved to the same degree. But as a group, they are taking a tougher line against the violence, are calling for dialogue and some have individually proposed their mediation or technical support. Most of them are asking Cameroon's government to consider Anglophone demands for autonomy without, however, openly proposing a particular model (decentralisation, regionalism, or federalism). Several countries recognize in private that it will be difficult to get the government to agree to more than genuine regionalism or decentralisation.

The U.S. has been the harshest vis-à-vis the Cameroonian government. The State Department issued a first statement in December 2016, followed by five others, condemning human rights violations and asking the government to better consider the Anglophones' claims to autonomy. In May 2018, the U.S. ambassador

³³ See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°138, Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue, 25 April 2018.

to Cameroon condemned security forces burning villages in the English-speaking areas. The U.S. Congress is also concerned about the situation, and held two hearings (in the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and in the House Foreign Affairs Committee) on Cameroon in June 2018³⁴. Members of Congress have played an important role in putting pressure on the Departments of State and Defense to reduce U.S. military aid to Cameroonian security forces. Some senators like Richard Durbin, Ben Cardin, Amy Klobuchar, Elizabeth Warren, and Kamala Harris are intent on an assessment of whether the U.S. government should impose additional conditions on security assistance, and on asking it to put in place sanctions on individuals found to have committed gross violations of human rights³⁵. Most other Western countries, particularly Germany, Canada and the UK have condemned separatist and security force violence and called for dialogue. While the executives of these countries are trying to criticize both sides equally, their parliaments have taken a more strident attitude toward Cameroon's government. In Germany, the Bundestag has organized debates on Cameroon and some 50 deputies have called on the government to suspend economic cooperation with Cameroon in the event of further human rights violations in the Anglophone regions³⁶. The Canadian and British parliaments have also debated the issue.

The positions taken by France have stood out. It initially kept a low profile and perhaps even supported the government's approach. Faced with the escalation of the crisis, it called for a political solution and, like other Western powers, encouraged the organizers of the Anglophone General Conference. In private, it supports decentralisation and rules out federalism. In order to convince Yaoundé to accelerate decentralisation and calm the situation, France is presenting itself as its protector against international pressures, while underlining those other European countries might demand more and the Americans might impose sanctions. It has obtained some concessions. In November 2018, Biya received the French ambassador for three hours and made a series of promises. The president has delivered to some extent (release of 289 Anglophone detainees and the creation of a disarmament committee) but has done little to encourage the Anglophone Conference, reshuffle the government or speed up decentralisation. There are historical reasons why France has more clout, but it is the involvement of the French at the highest level of government that has made the difference: telephone conversations between Presidents Macron and Paul Biya in June and October 2018 and in February 2019; private letters to Biya; and the 2018 visit of the head of the Elysée's Africa Unit and the Quai d'Orsay's number two³⁷. France is then able to counterbalance the EU's political role by vaunting the success of what it describes as its "more measured" diplomacy and pointing out that it is the only country that Biya listens to.

Switzerland has not taken an open position since the beginning of the crisis, but is apparently pushing in private for regionalism. Since late 2018, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (a Swiss NGO) increased its engagement with Anglophone's federalist leaders and some separatist groups, in order to move toward dialogue between them and the Cameroonian government. In March, the president of Switzerland travelled to Cameroon to offer his country's mediation to president Biya. During the audience granted to the Swiss ambassador in April, Paul Biya reportedly responded in an ambiguous way: he has neither rejected regionalism nor formally approved it.

At the multilateral level, the UN is at the forefront. The UN has asked both sides to guarantee humanitarian access to zones affected by the conflict, end the violence and agree to dialogue. It has offered

³⁴ The House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing, entitled "Crisis in the Republic of Cameroon" on June 27, 2018. See <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings?ID=11262B96-5691-47AAB828-69200B680E05>; a video of the hearing's proceedings can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyj_gCwOjDw.

³⁵ In December 2018, ten members of the U.S. Senate, all from the Democratic Party, sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calling for "the imposition of sanctions on individuals found to have committed gross violations of human rights, consistent with the law. In addition, we will work with our colleagues in the Senate to assess whether additional conditions should be imposed on security assistance to Cameroon". See www.cardin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/cardindemocratic-senators-raise-alarm-over-human-rights-in-cameroon. Crisis Group interviews, staff of the U.S Congress and American diplomats, Yaoundé, Washington DC and New York, October 2018, February and March 2019.

³⁶ "Präventionernstnehmen: Die Krise in Kameruneindämmen", Liberal Democrat (FDP) motion to the German parliament (Bundestag), 27 June 2018.

³⁷ "Etoudi : l'entourage de Paul Biya jubile après le coup de fil de Macron", camerounweb.com, 2 July 2018; "Le secrétaire d'Etat français aux affaires étrangères attendu au Cameroun", Journal du Cameroun, 28 June 2018.

its good offices for the purposes of mediation. But the Anglophone question has not yet appeared on the Security Council agenda, due to disagreements between permanent members and lobbying by Cameroon's diplomats.

Conclusion.

However, despite the critical role that NGOs have continuously played in helping to stabilize the conflict situations, the future engagement of NGOs within the international agencies and governments, remains vague. Partnerships between NGOs and governments or international agencies are inherently difficult and awkward. NGOs are on one hand strong critics of these agencies and government policies and yet on the flip side they provide first-rate in-depth analysis of deteriorating conflicts.