

## Opinion

### **Cameroon: four priorities to strengthen protection for internally displaced persons**

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As Cameroon has released the Presidential election results, I call upon the Government to urgently tackle the current crises in which thousands of civilians have been internally displaced amid violence in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's Far North and armed separatists in the North-West and South-West regions (so-called Anglophone regions).

In the Far North region, the security situation remains dire, with continued attacks and incidents involving Boko Haram elements. While the number of such attacks have decreased over the last years, the situation there remains fragile and the humanitarian situation bleak, with some 227,581 people internally displaced<sup>1</sup>.

In the South-West and North-West regions, the recent escalation of fighting between non-state armed groups and defence and security forces has also led to major destructions of villages, infrastructure and instilled a climate of insecurity with negative impact on the civilian population and the enjoyment of all of the human rights. As a result, about 350,000<sup>2</sup> people are estimated displaced across the South-West and North-West regions of Cameroon, living mostly in surrounding forests and villages in search of safer areas. Others are living in host communities scattered in other parts of the country including urban areas. An additional 26,891<sup>3</sup> have been forced to flee into neighbouring Nigeria. These populations are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Their deteriorating living conditions, including inability for children to attend schools, difficulties to access food, water, health and other basic needs and services coupled with reports of gender-based violence faced by women IDPs, and other abuses and human rights violations require robust action to address their situation.

The Government must prioritize addressing the plight of the internally displaced populations living in these regions, ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind, and also support host communities who have been impacted as well. The international community must also be able to reach out to these communities to support their humanitarian and protection needs.

Four priority areas, based on the global Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for Internally Displaced People 2018-2020<sup>4</sup>, can allow the new Government to play a critical role in strengthening protection for its internally displaced populations. As

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Cameroon Factsheet, September 2018, accessible at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/66448.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> According to OCHA and local organizations

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Nigeria Emergency Update, Cameroonian refugee situation, 16-30 September 2018, accessible at <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/66356>

<sup>4</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: A Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for Internally Displaced People 2018-2020, 23 May 2018, accessible at <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/assets/files/20180523-gp20-plan-of-action-final.pdf>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, I call upon the Government to consider adopting the following recommendations and to work with all partners to implement them as a matter of priority.

- 1. Facilitating and strengthening participation of IDPs.** The [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) restate the right of IDPs to participate in programmes and decision-making processes affecting them. In the context of the legislative and municipal elections, planned for 2019, the Government must ensure that IDPs face no barriers to their rights to political participation, including access to documentation, voting and standing for office. An information and awareness raising campaign to inform IDPs about their right to vote and the process to do so could therefore be organized. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that IDPs who may be particularly vulnerable or marginalized, including women, non-accompanied children, older persons, persons with disabilities and persons belonging to minority groups are included.
- 2. Promoting the development and implementation of laws and policies on internal displacement.** I encourage the Government to expedite the process of domesticating the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), to which it formally acceded in May 2017, and to incorporate its provisions into national law and policies. Linking such law and policies to national development strategies and targets, and monitoring their implementation, can help identify solutions for IDPs.
- 3. Producing quality data and analysis for preventing, responding to and finding solutions for internal displacement.** Cameroon will need adequate baseline figures and data on IDPs disaggregated by age, gender, location and diversity to confirm that they have not been left behind in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as pledged. I strongly recommend Cameroon to improve its statistics on the displacement situations across the country, with the overall goal of providing an improved evidence base for more informed and joined up action to resolve internal displacement.
- 4. Addressing protracted internal displacement and supporting durable solutions.** In the context of protracted displacement in the Far North, I urge the new Government to include IDPs and host communities in its national development plan and social safety nets, to increase income-generating and livelihood opportunities for IDPs and host communities, and address housing and land disputes. I stand ready to engage in a dialogue with the Government to ensure that the authorities prioritize durable solutions to internal displacement in their national and local planning, and factor in displacement in their SDGs' implementation plan.

Let me end by emphasizing the important role that humanitarian organizations play, on a daily basis, in supporting the Government of Cameroon to better protect and assist the country's most vulnerable populations. I therefore urge the Government to grant full and unhindered access to all conflict-affected regions to humanitarian organizations. I am at the convenience of the authorities to assist them more concretely, including through a country visit. The Government has a unique opportunity to contribute to stronger protection and assistance to IDPs, and I am confident they will be able to seize it.

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