

## The impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on education in the Far North Region of Cameroon

Mofor Nangekeang Kingsly Nkeomboh<sup>1</sup>, Wilson NY Tamfuh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD student, Department of English Private Law, Faculty of Law and Political Science at The University of Bamenda, Bamili, Cameroon

<sup>2</sup> Professor. Wilson N.Y Tamfuh, Lecturer Faculty of Law and Political Science University of Bamenda, Bamili, Cameroon

### Abstract

Deathly threats perpetrated by the Nigeria-based extremist group Boko Haram extended into the Far North region of Cameroon, leading to several attacks on students, schools, and teachers, not living out military occupation of schools. Hundreds of schools have been closed due to insecurity. Islamist group known as Boko Haram in the Far North region of Cameroon have sought to remove students and pupils from enjoying their rights to education. This paper also aims at showing the impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on the right to education. The questions of this study are: (1) what is the right to education all about? (2) What are the obligations of state and non-state actors in preserving the right to education in the Far North region of Cameroon? (3) What are the effects of terrorism and counter-terrorism on the right to education in the Far North region of Cameroon? This paper uses data from research conducted in the Far North region by the researcher, Amnesty International, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Global Terrorism Database to examine the impact of Boko Haram's terror campaign in the Far North region of Cameroon on education. Based on interview reports and questionnaires, we observed that low level of exposure to terrorism had little or no effect on school attendance. Meanwhile, high levels of exposure to terrorism reduced school attendance in the Far North region especially among boys. Although Boko Haram terrorist group prefer students to attend Quranic schools rather than secular schools, we found no evidence that this led to increase in school attendance coupled with the fact that some of the schools are now used as military camps to counter-terrorists.

**Keywords:** human right, terrorism, education

### 1. Introduction

Over the years, countering terrorism while protecting human rights in general and the right to education in particular has proven to be a difficult equation to balance. The United Nations in Resolution 1456 passed in 2003 enjoins states to comply with international law standards when countering terrorism<sup>[1]</sup>. States should comply with their obligations under international law to respect international human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law when combating terrorism. The reason for this is that states should not use the opportunity of combating terrorism to infringe on the rights of their citizens as it has always been the case.

After the president of the Republic of Cameroon launched war against terrorism in the Far North region of Cameroon, terrorism has had a devastating effect on many civilians and also on school children. It has also impeded the enjoyment of the right to liberty, life and physical integrity of the victims. Terrorism in this part of Cameroon has brought untold damages to the government of Cameroon and the security forces by jeopardizing peace and security thus limiting social and economic development which is in line with Security Council Resolutions 1373<sup>[2]</sup>. States are called

upon to curb terrorism by their citizens<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, Cameroon should not engage in policies or activities that will deprive students the enjoyment of their human rights. This has been the illustration of Hoffman which demands that "history shows that when societies trade human rights for security, most often they get neither"<sup>[4]</sup>. Terrorism could therefore be defined as, "strategic means to attain certain goals and objectives through the spreading of fear or threat by any means"<sup>[5]</sup>.

Cameroon has the obligation to protect the citizens from terrorism and contribute to the maintenance of peace and security in times of terrorist attacks. The United Nations in order to emphasize the importance of state's obligation to protect human rights during countering terrorism has articulated some key principles which states should adhere to. In order to achieve this goals, counter-terrorism laws and practices must comply with human rights law; counter-terrorism law and practice must be established by due process; counter-terrorist measures seeking to limit rights must be justifiable and necessary; counter-terrorist measures seeking to limit rights must be proportional<sup>[6]</sup>. The Special

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1456 (2003) adopted on 20 January 2003 UN Doc S/RES/1456 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1377 (2001); General Assembly Resolutions 48/122, 49/185, 50/186, 52/133, 56/160 and 58/174, as well as its Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism Resolution 49/60; Commission on Human Rights Resolutions 2001/37 and 2004/44, Human Rights Council Resolution 6/28 and the Resolution on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism (28 March 2008).

<sup>3</sup> T Becker Terrorism and the State Rethinking the Role of State Responsibility (2006) 2. 3 P

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman „Human Rights and Terrorism“ (2004) 26(4) Human Rights Quarterly 934.

<sup>5</sup> Nur Khan. (2007), "Impact of Terrorism and Counter Terrorism on Human Rights" Ain o3Salish Kendra (ASK) newsletter <http://ejp.icj.org/IMG/ASKSubmission.pdf> (accessed 11 February 2020).

<sup>6</sup> UN Commission on Human Rights, Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, E/CN.4/1985/4 Annex (1985); UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 29, States of Emergency (Article 4),

Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (SRCT) has compiled good practices on legal and institutional frameworks and measures that ensure respect for human rights by intelligence agencies while countering terrorism<sup>[7]</sup>.

So many people in the Far North region of Cameroon since early 2014, has been displaced by Boko Haram and this group has committed crimes punishable under international law and human rights abuses, including willful killings, attacks directed against civilian objects, misappropriation, looting, burning down of schools, and abductions of students. In addition, about 81,000 people have been forced to flee from their homes. The Cameroon government increased its security presence to counter these growing attacks and threats. However, while the Cameroon government has put in much effort to defend people threatened by Boko Haram, the approach of the Cameroonian security forces has too often been heavy-handed and has failed to put in place all necessary safeguards to prevent crimes under international law and human rights violations being committed during their operations. As a consequence, many Cameroonians have been victims of attacks from both parties. Students of terrorist origin and those suspected of collaborating with Boko Haram have been arrested and taken to prison without following due process of the law. Some are even executed on the way, while others are locked up in detention centres incommunicado.

Violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and armed counter-offensives have prevented thousands of children from receiving an education in the Far North region. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported that the ongoing war in the Far North region has jeopardized the future of children and exposed them to recruitment by terrorist groups and criminal gangs. More than five years since the first attacks was carried out by Boko Haram in Cameroon, about 23,000 school-aged children are school dropped out, while about 93 pre-schools and primary schools remain closed in the Far North region. According to interview reports, teachers and students who fled Boko Haram-affected areas have not returned because many of the schools have been burned, destroyed by bombs, and in some situations used as counter-offensive bases. Most of the schools lack benches, desks, chairs and chalkboards for effective learning to take place. Some even sit under trees to study. In some localities, there are no schools and this has caused many children not to have access to education. This explains why only about 54 percent of the schooling ages are effectively enrolled in school. The Norwegian Country's Director based in Cameroon reported that "the conflict and the lack of schooling in the Far North region are destroying the opportunities and possibly the future of thousands of children. He added that children who were six years old when the conflict began are now ten years. Many of these

children have not been able to return to school at all<sup>[8]</sup>

## 1.2. The scope of the right to education in the far north region of Cameroon

The right to education has been one of the fundamental rights protected by human rights conventions. Taking into cognizance the importance attached to education, there are three main human rights conventions that protect the right to education such as; Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights of 1956, and Article 28 and 29 of the CRC. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its article 13 stipulates that the right to education is a universal right and should be given to everyone without discrimination. Thus, an individual has the right to choose the kind of education to carry out be it private or public. The state on her part is responsible for providing education to the citizens and makes available programmes which are sufficient and should be operational. Educational facilities need sanitation facilities clean drinking water, adequate teaching and pedagogic materials, qualified and trained teachers. In Cameroon it is also require that educational facilities should be accessible to everyone without discrimination<sup>[9]</sup>. The curricula and teaching methods should be favourable and accepted to enable students and pupils prepare for the future.

This has not been the case with the presence of the armed group known as Boko Haram, which is translated in the Hausa language to mean "Western education is forbidden". This has accelerated attacks in the Far North region since 2014<sup>[10]</sup>. Between 2014 and 2020, Boko Haram carried out more than 800 attacks on civilian infrastructure, not living out more than 80 suicide bombings carried out by mostly children<sup>[11]</sup>. Suicide bombers in Cameroon were mostly who had been recruited and forced to carry out attacks by Boko Haram<sup>[12]</sup>. This terrorist group also raided villages where many children were recruited, some abducted, others beheaded. Most of these raids affected people and their properties, including teachers, students and schools<sup>[13]</sup>. The fear and insecurity caused by threats from Boko Haram in the region caused more than 240,000 civilians to abandon their homes between 2014 and 2018<sup>[14]</sup>.

### 1.2.1. Military Use of Schools

So many schools in the Far North region of Cameroon had been occupied by the cameroon's defence forces, for military purposes. In some of the cases, the schools had

<sup>8</sup> Report by Mr. David Manan, Norwegian Country's Director in Cameroon.

<sup>9</sup> F Coomans The Core Content of the Right to Education (2002) in D Brand & S Russell (eds) Exploring the Core Content of Socio-economic Rights: South African and International Perspectives 182

<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," S/2017/304, paras. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Child Soldiers International, Submission to the 75<sup>th</sup> pre-session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child CAMEROON (London: Child Soldier International, August 2016). International Crisis Group, Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram" (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2018), p. i.

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, "Cameroon," p. 11, 13.

<sup>13</sup> US State Department et al., Cameroon 2016 Human Rights Report, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2017/2018: The State of the World's Human Rights-Cameroon (London: Amnesty International, Feb. 2018).

CCPR/C/21/ Rev.1/Add.11 (2001), reprinted in Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 (2003) at 186; UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights, E/CN.4/2002/18 Annex (2002) ("Proposals for "further guidance" for the submission of reports pursuant to paragraph 6 of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001): Compliance with international human rights standards").

<sup>7</sup> Report to the General Assembly A/HRC/14/46/Add.1 (17 May 2010). 1.

reportedly closed due to insecurity prior to the occupation and threats from Boko Haram. The use of schools for military gains puts educational infrastructures at risk of damage in case there is an attack on the soldiers present at that moment. At least 2 schools were attacked following occupation by the military. The United Nations stated that in May 2017, about 15 schools were occupied by the security forces for an indefinite period of time. The occupation of these schools denied about 8,000 children access to education<sup>[15]</sup>.

### 1.2.2. Negative consequences for students, Teachers, society

Cameroon at moment already faced major challenges in providing education for all children, due to factors such as poor school infrastructure, poverty, poor access, insufficient number of trained teachers, especially in remote areas like in the Far North region where teachers refused to assume duty upon transfer. This has left many schools in that area of the country to operate without train teachers. This explains the reason why the Far North region records the lowest percentage in public exams such as the First School Leaving Certificate, GCE ordinary and advanced levels. Most of the students have resorted to agriculture and pastoral nomadism with a good number of them joining terrorist groups just to earn a living. Also, additional barriers include gender bias, high levels of child marriage, and sexual violence and harassment in and out of school. The education-related threats coupled with insecurity alongside the recent COVID-19 pandemic have increased the challenges, causing a decline in school attendance.

Attacks on educational infrastructures and the disruption of classes have reduced drastically the quality of education students receive and has also put many students behind in their studies. One student said that she had failed her exam after an attack forced her to escape to a safer locality. Attacks from terrorist group have caused extensive fear and has induced many students and pupils to withdraw from schools, as well as psychological trauma for students who desire to further their studies. "Many students don't want to attend school again," said one teacher<sup>[16]</sup>. Besides, some students, no matter the circumstances and barrier, are longing to return to school. "I want to go to school because I love it"<sup>[17]</sup>, said a 20 year-old girl who had been out of school for almost two years. In their huge appetite for studies, many students affected by school closure enrolled in school in bigger cities like Maroua and Garoua away from home. Some began commuting long distances, exposed to risks on the road. Others move to the refugee camps in Maroua, and Mora to live in groups of children, without any adult family member, putting them at risk of exploitation and violence. Children of this nature often struggle to eat and pay fees.

This paper also documents cases of child labor emanating from the closure of schools. A visit to the city of Maroua in the Far North region had proven that a lot of out-of-school children are working in the markets as domestic workers, in farms and some begging on the streets. Also, the level of child marriage has increased over the years in that area of

the country. Many boys now prefer to join Boko Haram just to earn a living.

Teachers in the Far North region of Cameroon, have also suffered devastating consequences as a result of attacks, including trauma, physical problems, and loss of their belongings due to looting and burning down of houses. Most teachers belonging to the Christian faith are afraid to go there for fear of being killed since Boko Haram is against western education. Many teachers are reported to have fled as a result of increase in violence in the Far North region. According to Voice of America, the government of Cameroon stated that more than 500 teachers each academic year failed to assumed duty.

Attacks on education can have long-term effect on society. Majority of children have missed out on the educational platform which serves as the pillar of every society. This has open doors for armed terrorists to recruit more children easily. That is why the terrorists want children to remain ignorant, so that they can influence them and put whatever they want in their minds.

The government of Cameroon has deprived children of the right to education by the closing down of dozens of schools in the Far North region. Between January and September 2017, more than 30 schools were burned and several damaged which created panic and made other schools to be closed down. The government has to ensure that there is security at all times. About 140 primary schools in the department of Logone and Chari, Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga remained closed because of insecurity. Looking at the situation, eight of these schools have been occupied by the military which further causes panic in the minds of the pupils.

### 1.2.3. Sexual violence by armed men en route or from school

In the Far North region, the International Crisis Group found out that young men are willing to join or be recruited by Boko Haram because of promises of money or marriages to young girls abducted by Boko Haram<sup>[18]</sup>.

### 1.2.4. Attacks on schools

Deadly attacks, including bombing, and frequent raids damaged schools as a result of the increase in violence perpetrated by Boko Haram. According to a report from the US Department of State, Boko Haram had destroyed hundreds of classrooms in the Far North region<sup>[19]</sup>. Besides, UNICEF reported that about 150 schools in the Far North region were forced to close following frequent attacks carried out by Boko Haram on workers and infrastructure<sup>[20]</sup>. Up till date, so many schools remained closed. Based on UNICEF reports, about 33,163 children were school drop out with some seeking education outside their own communities<sup>[21]</sup>. In 2014, national security forces detained students for alleged involvement with Boko Haram. According to report by Amnesty International and International media, three students were detained for sharing text message about how Boko Haram would not recruit students with poor exams results. The students were transferred to prison on January 2015. On March 3, 2015, there were charged under

<sup>15</sup> Information shared by a UN respondent via email, May 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mr. Njofie Isaac, a secondary school teacher based in Maroua, August 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Interview report by the researcher with a 20-year-old girl in Mora, a village found in the Far North region of Cameroon.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, "Cameroon," p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> US State Department et al., Cameroon 2016, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF, The Impact of Boko Haram and Armed Conflict on Schooling in Cameroon's Far North, February 2015, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the Military Code and the Penal Code, and were guilty of “non-denunciation of terrorism related information”. Based on this, they were sentenced to 10 years in prison<sup>[22]</sup>.

Amnesty international also reported the attack perpetrated by Boko Haram on a Quranic school in Guividig, a locality found in the Far North region where about 84 children were arrested on December 20, 2014. It was alleged that the schools served as training camps for Boko Haram. Children were usually held for about six months without seeing their parents<sup>[23]</sup>. Access to education has been hindered as a result of lack of birth certificate. The ministry of education noted that 35% of school-aged children do not have access to birth certificates in the Far North region.

### 1.3. Obligation of the State to protects citizens

During arm conflict such as the one in the Far North region of Cameroon, international humanitarian law is applicable to both national armed forces and non-state armed groups (Boko Haram). Deliberate attacks on citizens, not living out students and teachers, as well as civilian objects such as schools, are violations of the laws of war. Those who ordered or are involved directly or indirectly in such attacks, such as summary executions, arbitrary detention, mass killings, torture, looting and destruction of property, and ill and degrading treatment, are responsible for war crimes. Attacks and threats on schools has often deprived students of their rights to education, granted and protected under international human rights law, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>[24]</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of a Child<sup>[25]</sup>.

### 1.4. Responses and needs

The government of Cameroon has taken important measures and steps to implement and ensure that the school environment is safe for students especially those who are displaced by war. These initiatives are aimed at ensuring continued access to education, including the provision of free education to primary pupils, redeployment of teachers, recruitment of about 3000 contract primary and secondary school's teachers. The integration of some contracts and PTA (Parent Teachers Association) teachers into the public service. Schools have also been instructed by the government of Cameroon to enroll displaced students. Though the international humanitarian plan in Cameroon remains underfunded, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations like Plan Cameroon, have provided funding and support to help the government. Initiatives have been taken to set up temporary learning spaces for students. In 2018, the Norwegian Refugee Council rehabilitated twenty four classrooms in Logone et Chari and Mayo-Sava subdivisions. This organization has provided school kits and pedagogic materials to schools and capacity building

seminars for professional development for more than 200 teachers. This Council has also worked in collaboration with local authorities to minimize the procedure and time to obtain birth certificates that has hindered many children from going to school. The Council helped in 2017 to obtained 298 birth certificates for school-aged children while more than 200 requests are being processed.

## 2. Conclusion

It is obvious that education has been threatened in recent years. The reason for this is that the system of education should be compromised, as well as open doors for more children to be recruited as soldiers. It is of great necessity to note that Cameroon has contributed to the violation of right to education by intentionally limiting it or not acting where necessary. It is of great important to note that the government of Cameroon has implemented strategies for schools to resume in the Far North region by posting security forces to guard schools. Such measures have not deterred terrorist attacks but in some instance scare children and teachers away. Cameroon should always take into consideration human rights when combating terrorism especially with counter-terrorism measures that will impact education. The international community has worked with the local population to start community schools that ensure that education is protected. Lessons have been provided for education under threat.

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<sup>22</sup> Cameroon, Thousand worldwide demand release of students jailed for sharing Boko Haram joke,” Amnesty International news release, May 23, 2017. Tunde Fatunde, “Calls for release of students jailed over Boko Haram joke,” Universal World News, May 26, 2017.

<sup>23</sup>“Cameroon: Hundreds slaughtered by Boko Haram and abused by security forces,” Amnesty International, September 16, 2015. Cameroon: End six-months illegal detention of 84 children held following Quranic school raid,” Amnesty International, June 19, 2015. Amnesty International, Human Rights under Fire, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in it's article 13 stipulates that the right to education is a universal right and should be given to everyone without discrimination.

<sup>25</sup>Article 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child.

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