

**COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN**

**Sous-Commission de la Promotion
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**CAMEROON HUMAN
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**PRESS STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ON THE ALLEGED
MURDER OF CIVILIANS BY ARMED GROUPS IN AKWAYA SUB-DIVISION**

24 to 25 June 2022

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), (hereinafter referred to as “the Commission”) took notice of a dreadful scene in unsupportable videos posted on social media (*Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter*) on Friday, 24 June 2022, the killing of some villagers and the burning of houses in Messaga and a health centre in Ballin, Akwaya Sub-Division in Manyu Division of the South West Region.

According to information posted on the incident, it was alleged that the Health Center in Ballin in Akwaya was heavily burnt down to ashes by unidentified armed men. This resulted to the death of more than thirty (30) persons and many others missing.

Similarly, in a Press Release issued on 27 June 2022 by Reverend FONKI Samuel FORBA, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and published in the daily newspaper *The Horizon* of 28 June 2022, as well as other social media platforms, the incident began with a land dispute between the Oliti people and the Messaga Ekol people of Akwaya. The Oliti people attacked and killed some Messaga Ekol people in their farms on 29 April 2022 because they were cultivating on their land, after which, the Messaga people retaliated. The Oliti people then mobilized, got back up of hired armed men and launched a violent attack on the Messaga Ekol people during a funeral in Bakinjaw village chieftdom in Messanga Ekol of Akwaya Sub-Division. During this attack, more than thirty (30) persons killed among whom twenty-six men, four women, including the elderly and five (5) Nigerians. Some of the victims were beheaded and several houses were burnt down.

On the strength of the provisions of Section 7 of Law n° 2019 / 014 of 19 July 2019 relating to the Establishment, Organization and Functioning of the CHRC which states that, in order to perform the duties, “the Commission may [...] conduct investigations, in accordance with the laws in force, particularly by :

- carrying out all necessary inspections ;
- accessing any place of alleged human rights violation ;
- gathering all necessary information”;

This institution carried out investigations on these allegations. Information gathered from administrative and judicial authorities of Akwaya Sub-Division and Manyu Division, as well as traditional rulers, representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and some eyewitnesses of the concerned locality established that:

- The Oliti community is found in the Makunda, Ballin and Mbakunjo villages while that of Orgal is found in Messaga, Assaka Mboruku and Mavas villages. The Orgal community in Messaga and Assaka villages have had a long ancestral land dispute over the management and exploitation of Boru-Mogu forest with the Oliti community.

- Apart from the ancestral land dispute, the Messaga people have also been in conflict since 2018 with the Oliti community where separatist armed groups installed their base in Mavas, a village in the Oliti community, and regularly block the Bamenda-Akwaya highway during which, they extorted huge amounts of money from the villagers before circulation.
- During the month of November 2021, separatist terrorist fighters based in Oliti attacked unarmed villagers in Injobo, one of the villages of the Messaga community, killing some villagers and injuring many others. In retaliation, the indigenes of Oliti community attacked and killed four (4) separatist terrorist fighters. These cross and counter attacks resulted to regular conflicts between the two communities since the beginning of the year 2022.
- In April 2022, the Oliti people attacked the Messaga people in their farms killing four (4) of them and injuring four (4) others. Those injured are receiving treatment in Nigeria. In reaction to this attack, the Messaga people seized the authorities of the South West Region for intervention. In return, the Oliti people then accused the Messaga people of collaborating with the military in preparation to attack them.
- This therefore sparked the events of Friday, 24 June and Saturday, 25 June 2022 in Messaka village, and later in Ballin during a funeral ceremony. The Oliti people, after hiring the services of over one hundred (100) separatist terrorist fighters, attacked the Messaga people in the said villages, killing many of them and burning down houses with civilians inside, as well as the Ballin health centre. *Thirty-two (32) persons among whom, children, women, the elderly and five (5) Nigerians were killed during this incident with many others injured.* The separatist terrorist fighters after committing this act, left a notice declaring that they will next attack the Assaka village.
- These cross and counter attacks between both communities sympathetic to and against separatist terrorist fighters have continued as a result of activities conducted by these armed groups due to insufficient military elements deployed to ensure security in these localities.

Mindful of the 12th hyphen of Law n° 96-6 of 18 January 1996 relating to the Constitution of Cameroon which stipulates that *"Every person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment"*,

Mindful of article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights which states that *"Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right"*,

Mindful of article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which stipulates that *"Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life"*,

Considering the 3rd hyphen of the above cited Constitution of Cameroon which states that, *"Freedom and security shall be guaranteed to each individual, subject to respect for the rights of others and the higher interests of the State"*,

Considering article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which stipulates that *"Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person [...]"*,

Considering article 3 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states that *"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person"*.

Recalling the 19th and 20th hyphens of the same Constitution of 1996 which stipulates that, *"Ownership shall mean the right guaranteed every person by law to use, enjoy and dispose of property. No person shall be deprived thereof, save for public purposes and subject to the payment of compensation under conditions determined by law" [...]* *"The right of ownership may not be exercised in violation of the public interest or in such a way as to be prejudicial to the security, freedom, existence of property of other persons"*,

Recalling article 14 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights which states that *"The right to property shall be guaranteed. It may only be encroached upon in the interest of public need or in the general interest of the community and in accordance with the provisions of appropriate laws"*,

Recalling article 17 (1) and (2) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states that *"Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others [...]"* *"No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property"*,

The Commission addresses its heartfelt condolences to the devastated families who lost their loved ones during this incident and a quick recovery to those injured.

The Commission firmly condemns this unqualified barbaric and unbearable attack on fellow human beings in Akwaya on Friday, 24 June 2022, which no circumstance can justify, thus violating the right to life, the right to security, the right to physical and moral integrity, and the right to property of its victims, rights protected by the cited national, regional and international legal instruments.

The Commission strongly encourages State authorities to continue investigations on this cruel and inhuman act so that the perpetrators should be arrested and tried before competent courts and their authors punished, according to the law.

The Commission once more calls on the population especially that of the concerned communities to fully collaborate with administrative and judicial authorities, as well as the defense and security forces, so as to help track those responsible for such atrocities.

The Commission further calls on State authorities to strengthen the security of the population and property in Akwaya Sub-Division in particular, and in Manyu Division in general to prevent future conflicts between the Oliti and Orgal communities.

The Commission finally recommends to State authorities to adopt strategies in resolving the land disputes between Oliti and Orgal communities in Akwaya Sub-Division of Manyu Division, in order to restore peace between the conflicting communities.

Yaoundé, 21 JUL 2022



James MOUANGUE KOBILA