



Finding a Lasting Solution to the Crisis in Cameroon

For over two years now, Cameroon has been faced with a serious crisis. People who have lived together in peace for over fifty years and who recently fought together against an external enemy, Boko Haram, have been in armed confrontation against each other with millions of other people caught in between and suffering for no crimes committed.

It all started with grievances expressed by trade unions of teachers and lawyers of the two English speaking Nord West and South West regions of Cameroon who had been brought up in the anglo-saxon system of education and common law practice who saw their system and practice being seriously undermined and degraded. Unsatisfied with the outcome of negotiations conducted and measures adopted by government, the trade unions formed a consortium of trade unions to work towards finding acceptable solutions to their grievances. Further calls for negotiations failed, leading to confrontations, arrests and detention of the leaders of the consortium and many followers and suspects in a bid to maintain public order.

The National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) and many other independent actors intervened and repeatedly proposed solutions which were only partially accepted by the contending parties in the conflict which ended up becoming a crisis in which the firm resolve of public authorities to ensure public order met with the recalcitrance of civil society activists. In December 2017, the NCHRF made a strong call for the acceleration of decentralization but when Government embarked on that course, the already radicalized civil society activists of the North-West and South West Regions wanted either the restoration of the federation or complete separation. The crisis deepened and escalated. This has offered an opportunity to some unscrupulous members of the opposing forces and other independent war lords and robbers to join in unprecedented rampant and indiscriminate killing of civilians and elements of the defence and security forces. Kidnapping, pillaging, destruction of homes, villages and property followed, with an uncountable number of people dying and thousands of them running to hide in bushes and caves or take refuge in Nigeria and other regions of Cameroon. Many have also been arrested and detained for long without trial. It has in deed become increasingly risky to sojourn or work in the North West and South West Regions. Schools have for long been closed down and the level of economic activities in these regions has been drastically reduced while some businesses have simply been closed down. The negative

effects have been felt almost throughout the whole country, including the functioning of the National Assembly.

We submit that the root cause of the crisis is governance. Frustrated by stagnation and even regression in some development sectors which many blamed on centralization and corruption, people used the grievances of the trade unions as entry points to clamour for reforms through dialogue. The responses by government were considered too partial and too superficial for a situation that required profound actions that would provide lasting solutions.

The President of the Republic has, in his investiture statement on the 6th of November 2018 raised hopes. He intends to make this term of office one of great opportunities for Cameroon in the march towards emergence. He has promised to face the challenges and ensure improvements in various development sectors.

The challenges include:

- 1) the restoration of peace and calm in the two English speaking regions, and
- 2) the creation of conditions conducive to stability and security in Cameroon.

To ensure improvements in various development sectors, the President:

- 1) will work to complete infrastructure projects including water, energy and transport projects
- 2) will ensure the acceleration of decentralization.

The President has said, “I shall see to it that it so happens”. He has promised to allow for the use of all the opportunities offered by an ever changing world and has extended the invitation: “help me to continue the task of nation building in peace”.

Against this background, we are proposing a lasting solution to the crisis. Considering the divergent views of the people of the North West and South West regions on the nature of the solution, an Anglophone General Conference would be a logical starting point for finding a solution to the crisis.

The right approach to problem solving must be adopted. In an initial exercise of brainstorming, all lawful ideas are accepted, each is examined, the good ones are retained for scrutiny that would lead to the best choice. The best choice is that which gives general satisfaction. This best choice may or may not pose a precondition. If it poses a workable precondition it should be chosen and implemented after dealing with the precondition.

It is our reading that some actors in the crisis do not really master what they are proposing or fighting against. For example, some options may appear different (e.g. decentralization and

federalism) even though they give similar advantages. These contrast with deconcentration. A careful analysis is useful.

We therefore see the need for an Anglophone General Conference which will help to better prepare the way for a lasting solution to the crisis through dialogue. Some initiatives have already been taken by a group of convenors led by Cardinal Christian Tumi. The convenors have clearly outlined the objectives of the conference.

The AGC will among other issues help to:

- 1) unite the different dynamics to the dialogue table;
- 2) analyze the impact of the current crisis on the population and make proposals for dealing with it;
- 3) develop a common agenda for addressing Anglophone grievances;
- 4) adopt a strategy on how to address the issue in a national dialogue; and
- 5) designate representatives to take part at the national dialogue.

It is necessary for state authorities to allow the conference in a safe venue and to take adequate measures to guarantee the safety of participants. Each main party should participate or be properly represented. Independent resource persons and observers should also be allowed to participate.

The venue chosen for the conference has not only a financial impact (charges for conference rooms and other conference facilities) but also a general impact based on accessibility and security considerations which should be more important than historical considerations. We think it would be helpful to hold the conference outside the crisis area, preferably in Yaounde or Douala.

In considering the cost of the conference, the following observations would be useful. For an event that will last for at least two days, it will be necessary to foresee at least three nights of room charges as well as travel costs for participants (including resource persons) coming from long distances. Local transportation and feeding of participants should also be considered. We must not forget to foresee incidents for first aid and health care as well. Against this background, it would be necessary to limit the number of participants to a reasonable extent after taking stock of the manifestation of interest to attend the conference.

We stand ready to assist in the search for the so much desired lasting solution to the crisis through peaceful means.

Dr Chemuta Divine BANDA