

**ANALYTICAL REPORT ON THE SAFETY OF
JOURNALISTS IN CAMEROON
2017- 2019**

I- INTRODUCTION

Between January 2017 and January 2019, about a dozen journalists in Cameroon were arrested, intimidated or threatened by state and non-state actors in the country. This was largely as a result of ongoing unrests in the country's Anglophone regions who have accused the government of discrimination with regard to state policies and infrastructure. The crisis, which began in late 2016, has resulted in serious human rights abuses in the region including prolonged network disruptions, arbitrary arrests and detention of journalists and dissidents and even killing. In an attempt to clamp down on protests as well as the media coverage of the incidents unraveling in the two Anglophone regions, Cameroon authorities committed acts of violations against them. The year 2018, which was an election year, was particularly difficult for press freedom in general and the safety of journalists in Cameroon.

The right to freedom of expression and its corollary access to information are guaranteed in the national Constitution of Cameroon as well as regional and international frameworks which the government of Cameroon has signed and even ratified. These frameworks include agreements and treaties that have been ratified or signed at both the regional and international levels.

At the domestic level, several texts have been adopted or drafted to guide the work of journalists, particularly the 1990 Law on Social Communication in Cameroon, which enshrines freedom of the press in Article 6. Nonetheless, there are also two texts on the Code of Conduct and Ethics for journalists. The first law was signed by the Prime Minister at the Time, Achidi Achu and the other one was adopted by the Union of Journalists of Cameroon (UJC). In addition, several codes of conduct for journalists have been proposed or developed by civil society organisations as well as by media professionals themselves. Most of these codes are contextual. For example, a code of conduct for journalists during an election period was adopted, etc.

At the regional and international level, there are a number of texts or frameworks that govern the work of journalists in Cameroon. These include the Munich Charter of November 24, 1971 concerning the rights and duties of journalists working in the country. This text is considered as the journalist's 'Bible'. For instance, provision 1 of the five-rights Charter is also clear on this point. "Journalists have a right to demand free access to all sources of information and the right to freely investigate all the issues that affect public life. The principle of secrecy among public or private sector institutions does not therefore apply to journalists unless it is provided for by law." At the international level, the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights which was adopted in June 1981, notably in Article 9, posits for freedom of expression and access to information. With the advent of digital technology, journalists' can also rely on the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms. The Declaration now recognizes the Internet as a tool to exercise our freedoms, including access to information and freedom of expression on the Internet.

In the light of these non-exhaustive texts, it can be said that the violation of the aforementioned texts has become more prominent in recent times than over the last 10 years. This is largely as a result of the current political situation in addition to the ongoing unrests in the Anglophone regions. Aside of the above political context, , the war against Boko Haram and the rise of hate speech on social media have also resulted in increased violations against freedom of expression and access

to information both offline and online. While it has not been clearly established that the increase in press freedom violations in Cameroon is as a result of the above mentioned incidents, the peculiar nature of the violations recorded can be linked to them. The Yaounde government has been very reluctant in promoting civil liberties over the past years. Although in some cases these arrests or manhandling of journalists may be considered collateral victims, in other cases, it can be clearly seen as the settlement of scores by the public authorities.

In fact, there were seven incidents of violations recorded during the monitoring period in which the freedom of expression and access to information rights of journalists were violated by law enforcement agents for various reasons, the main motive being political. For instance, the freedom of expression situation in Cameroon deteriorated in 2018 during presidential elections which were held in October 6, 2018 with voters electing a successor to President Paul Biya who was no other than the 86-year old who has been in power over the past 37 years. Additionally, journalists who attempted to cover the ongoing crises in the English-speaking regions were allegedly attacked by the military or separatist groups. Thus, journalists who work in these areas continue to live in fear. They are also frequently threatened and intimidated by local and even national authorities, sometimes having programmes run by their media outlets suspended. These violations against journalists threaten their independence or force them to toe the line of government and public officials. The violations against press freedom also extend to the online space with several reports of media outlets in Cameroon being under violent attacks on social networks because of their editorial line. This is the case of Equinoxe TV based in Douala which was accused wrongfully or rightfully of tarnishing the image of the country. Several Internet users called for the suspension of the TV station's programmes which are sometimes broadcasts live online. Similarly, Vision4 Television broadcasting from Yaounde was also allegedly accused of supporting the ruling government and fueling hate speech in the country. Even the appeal by the Founder and CEO of Vision4 TV, Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga in a note dated April 26, 2019 to journalists to promote peaceful co-existence could not calm the citizens.

Several journalists also complained about pressure from the management of the media houses they work for which ultimately comes from government authorities. Some journalists or media houses, at the request of the government, have had their programmes suspended or journalists dismissed without any reason.

II-FINDINGS

Below is a cursory view of the major findings identified in Cameroon during the monitoring period:

For example, one can note:

- Incidents of physical and verbal violations against journalists recorded;
- Numerous arrests of journalists working with private media houses because of their publications and the linked implications of loss on the earnings for the newspaper or media house;

- Many citizens deprived of information;
- Many journalists having their work equipment confiscated by the Security Forces;
- Reports of journalists being internally displaced because of the threats they face;
- Many journalists exiled because of the threats they face;

Acts of surveillance of journalists and other media workers by the Cameroonian government;

1- Table one below highlights the types of perpetrators, victims and violations recorded in Cameroon during the monitoring period.

Summary of Incidents of Attacks Against Journalists in Cameroon – January 2017 to July 2019

Name	Media House	Date/narration of Incident	Place	Perpetrator	Date of Release	Place of detention
1-Amboise Awono	Vision4	Assaulted on March 6, 2019 at the residence of Edgard Alain Mebe Ngo'o, a former Minister while he was covering a police raid at his home of the Minister.	Yaoundé	Police	N/A	N/A
2-Caristan Isteri	Quotidien le Jour	In relation to the above, security agents assaulted and detained Awono in the former Minister's dog cage at his residence. Teh journalist was covering the arrest of the Minister.	Yaoundé	Police	March 3, 2019	Minister's dog cage

3-Ambe Macmillan	Waka Africa Media and The Statesman	Abducted by unknown individuals suspected to be members of Cameroon's separatists group on February 21, 2019.	Bamenda	Unknown Individuals	February 22, 2019	QG des Séparatistes
4- David Enyegue	Quotidien Le Jour	January 28, 2019	Douala	Groupement Spécial d'Intervention (GSO) de Yaoundé	Jan. 31, 2019	Groupement Spécial d'Intervention (GSO) de Yaoundé
5- Theodore Tchopa	Quotidien Le Jour	January 28, 2019	Douala	Groupement Spécial d'Intervention (GSO)	31 janvier 2019	Groupement Spécial d'Intervention (GSO) de Yaoundé
6- Marxel Fonkwen	The Post	07/2018	Kumba	Police	07/2018	Police
7-Michael Doppas	Soleil Fm	Arrested on November 28, 2018 for defamation charges par Samuel Eto'o,	Yaoundé	Police Judiciaire	27 /12/ 2018	Central Prison of Yaoundé
8- Mimi Meffo	Equinoxe TV	07/10/18	Douala	Military Tribunal of Douala	09-nov-18	Central Prison of New- Bell
9- Mathias Mouende	Quotidien le Jour	28/10/2018 Mouende was released after being arrested and detained by Judiciary police for an entire day.	Douala	Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) du Littoral- Service de police		Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) du Littoral- Service de police

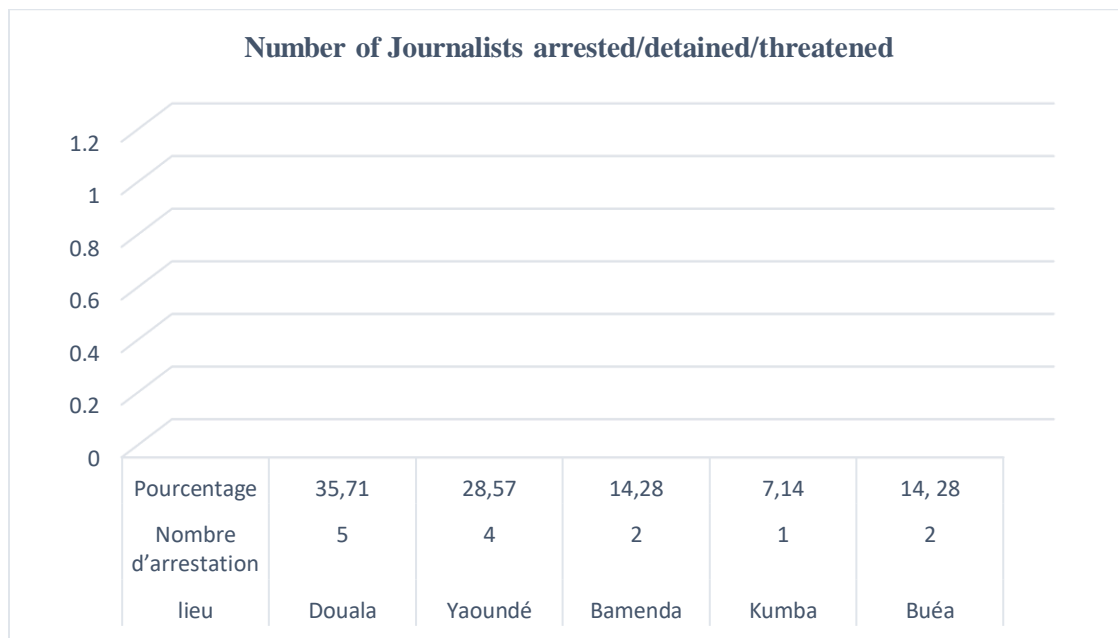
10- Michel Biem Tom,	HurineWS	Authorities dropped charges against him on October 23, 2018	Yaoundé	Secrétariat d'Etat à la Défense (SED)-Gendarmerie Nationale	24/10/2018	Military tribunal
11-Josiane Kouagheu,	Reuters	21/10/2018	Douala	Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) du Littoral- Service de police	22/11/2018	Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) du Littoral- Service de police
12- Kiven Brenda	Radio Hot Cocoa	08/02/2017 The Judicial Police raided Brenda's home and thoroughly searched it without a warrant. The police after finding nothing confiscated his laptop	Bamenda	Police	10/02/2017	Maison uniquement fouillée
13- Athia Azohnwi	Sun Newspaper	09/02/2017 Arrested for the 3rd time in the space of 2 weeks by the police	Buéa	Police	24/10/2018	Central Prison of Yaoundé
14- Amos Fongung	Guardian Post	09/02/2017 Arrested by police	Buéa	Police	24/10/2018	Central Prison of Yaoundé

This report of incidents of attacks against journalists in Cameroon is not exhaustive because, several journalists especially in the two English-speaking regions, suffer in silence following the crisis which has plagued the region since 2016. Many journalists have been forced to flee the region in order to seek refuge elsewhere on the continent and beyond. Some have also been subjected of constant blackmail by the local government, who continue to languish under pressure from the central administration. Since 2017, for example, Brenda Kiven has had her laptop confiscated by the police with all her files. Despite several attempts to mediate with the police, Kiven is yet to get access to her laptop.

Authorities in Cameroon have also barred journalists from gathering in the country. In 2017, when journalists in the South-West wanted to form a coalition to demand that all official documents by the local government are translated into both official languages, they were threatened by the administration. The governor of the region, Bernard Okalia Bilai, has since banned the existence of such a group in his territory.

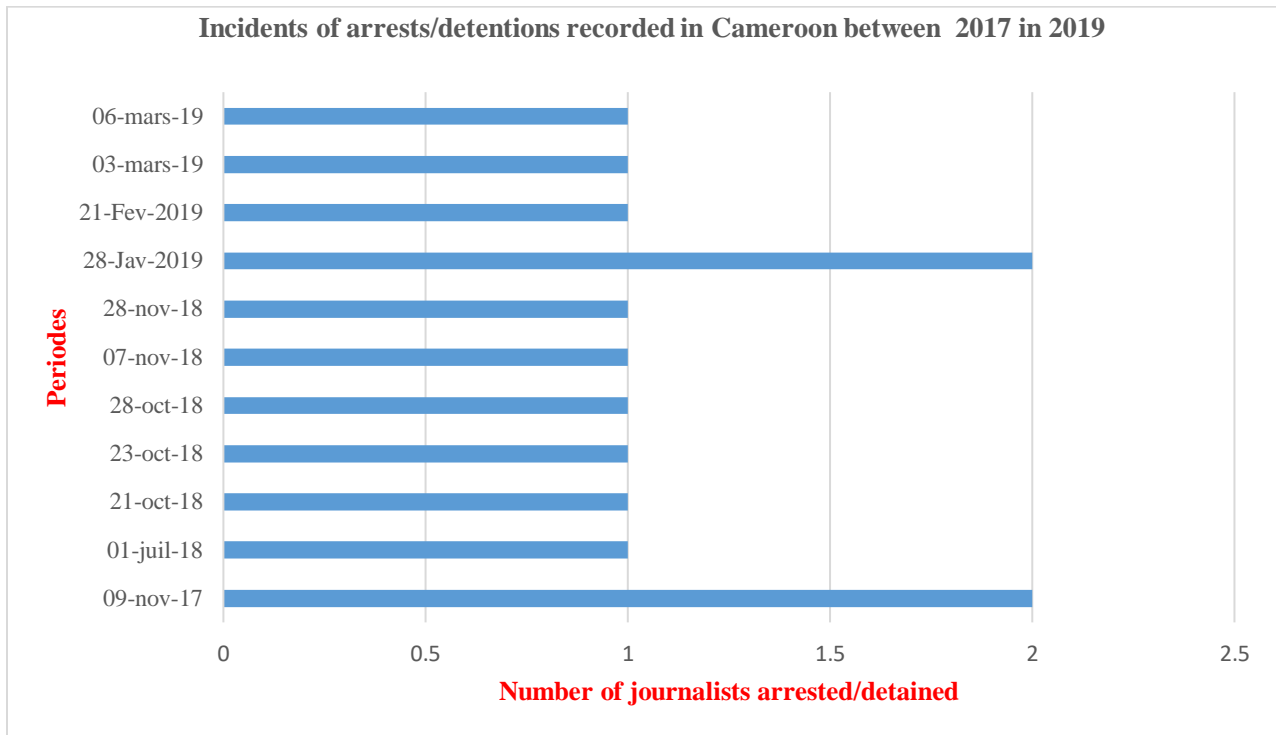
On August 9, 2019, Atanga Nji, the Minister of Territorial Administration during a press conference in Douala, taunted local media. He accused them of undermining the "government's efforts" and issued warnings against them. He went further to lambast the guests of some of the shows produced by the media houses. This includes the Equinoxe TV, which remains the only independent channel that provides credible coverage of the situation in Cameroon.

Indeed, the repression by the government has targeted certain newspapers and journalists who have been critical of the regime while favouring those that toe the line of the regime. It is important to remember to decry that the media in Cameroon do not have as their tutelage the Minister of Territorial Administration who only issues permissions for the written press. All dependent on the Ministry of Communication. Many journalists complain about the Minister's terror when they do not handle information the way he wants. Many of them testify that they have been reprimanded on the phone by this minister. It is also remembered that while he was still The Mission Officer for the Presidency of the Republic, he summoned the Editor of the daily newspaper, *Emergence* to the office of the Minister of Communication at the time, where he was reprimanded for an article he wrote that was critical of Paul Biya.



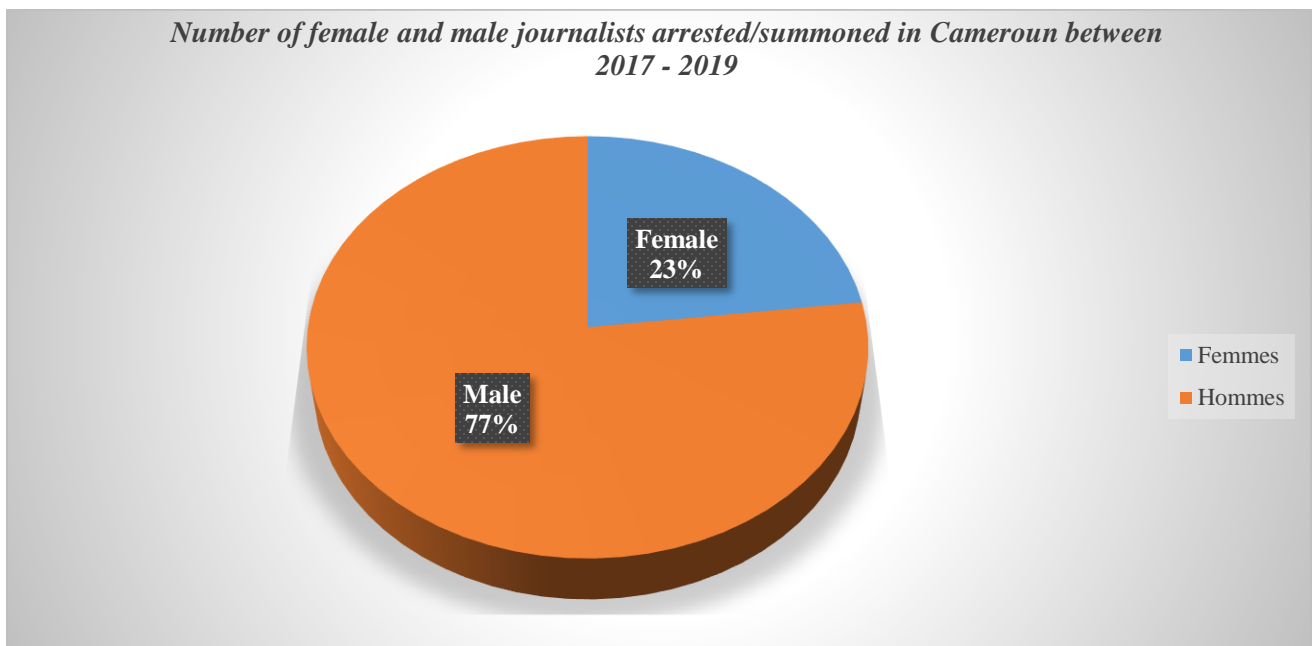
Source : Data collated by ADISI-Cameroun/DataViz by ADISI-Cameroun

1- Distribution of incidents of arrests recorded between 2017 and 2019



Source : Données collectées par ADISI-Cameroun/Dataviz by ADISI-Cameroun

1- Gender Distribution of Attacks



Source: Data collated by ADISI-Cameroun/DataViz by ADISI-Cameroun

III- Impunity

The fight against impunity for crimes against journalists in Cameroon is a major challenge that needs the collaboration of all stakeholders in Cameroon. ADISI-Cameroun continues to work closely with state and non-state actors in this regard. For instance, over the past years, ADISI-Cameroun has worked with government officials, donor organisations, civil society organisations, the media among other in their quest to advance freedom of expression right and combat impunity for crimes against journalists.

IV- Conclusion/ Recommendations

The protection of journalists in Cameroon is a major project that requires the input of the various stakeholders. These are found in all sectors of the Cameroonian Nation. Among these, recommendations can be made to:

1- Journalists should:

- Work in collaboration to strengthen existing or create journalists' unions aimed at voicing the aspirations and demands of the entire corporation;
- Be professional and respect the journalism ethics of the profession at all times in carrying out their duties;
- Re-institute the media support funds for journalists;
- Continue to keep up to date with new approaches and techniques of journalism;
- Adopt and promote the code of conduct for journalists in Cameroon;

2- Media Owners should:

- Respect the collective agreement and interest of journalists;
- Ensure the social security of journalists in order to guarantee their financial security during retirement;
- Promote the creation of a mutual funds for journalists to help them cope with their precarious media environment;
- Continuously organise capacity building training or workshops on safety of journalists and other important developments in the space;

3- Government of Cameroon should:

- Commit to the implementation of the recommendations of the 2015 General Statements;
- Adopt an access to information and public data law in Cameroon to facilitate access to information by journalists and ordinary citizens;

- Review the 1990 Law on Social Communication in Cameroon to integrate the new paradigms of the information society;
- Review the status and conditions of journalists in Cameroon;
- Decriminalise press offences in Cameroon;
- Put in place stringent measures to punish perpetrators of attacks or violations against journalists;
- Respect the various agreements adopted or passed to facilitate the work of journalists, such as the Florence Agreement;
- Implement the collective agreement of journalists and media workers and put in place a framework that would facilitate the implementation of such agreements;

4- Civil society actors should:

- Provide legal defense for attacked journalists;
- Continue to raise public awareness about the need for a free and independent press;
- Organize regular discussions with journalists to learn more about gaps within their professional and legal environment;
- Organise capacity building workshops for journalists and media professionals on their safety