

Ngarbuh Incident : Government Establishes Responsibilities, Proposes Sanctions

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Below is a press release from the Presidency of the Republic on the report of the Commission of Inquiry.

«Following the tragic events of the night of 13 to 14 February 2020 in the locality of Ngarbuh, and in pursuance of the High Instructions of the **PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, HIS EXCELLENCY PAUL BIYA**, the Minister Delegate at the Presidency of the Republic in charge of Defence set up, on 17 February 2020, a Joint Commission of Inquiry whose tasks were: (i) to shed light on the circumstances under which these tragic events occurred; and (ii) to establish the responsibilities of the various actors.

Under the authority of the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence in charge of the National Gendarmerie and chaired by a military judicial and legal officer, the Commission of Inquiry was composed of Army and National Gendarmerie Officers.

Exceptionally, the Commission of Inquiry resorted to the services of the following observers:

- Mr Chemuta Divine Banda, President of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF)
- His Grace George Nkuo, Bishop of the Kumbo Diocese;
- Mr Ahmadou Baba Sale, Imam of the Ntumbaw Central Mosque;
- Mrs. Dighambong, née Mih Bibiana, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the non-governmental Organization called Bihdulem Humanitarian Association of Peace and Hope (BIHAPH) ;
- Captain Iberi Ziem Hamed Karim, Chief Prevention Office at the 50th Group of Firefighters in Bamenda;

- Mr. Chenwi Chrysantus Shu, Regional Secretary of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms for the North-West Region.

On the instruction of the HEAD OF STATE, the United Nations Organization was requested to participate in the work of the

Commission. In response, the United Nations promised to provide technical support that the Cameroonian Justice which is now in charge of the matter could use as and when necessary.

The Commission of Inquiry conducted field visits to Bamenda, Kumbo, Nkambe, Ntumbaw and Ngarbuh, where it recorded various findings, collected and analyzed clues and gathered evidence which enabled it to reconstruct the scene of these tragic events.

At the end of its work, the Commission arrived at the following conclusions:

- the village of Ngarbuh, located in Ndu Sub-Division, Donga Mantung Division, North-West Region had become a centre where secessionist terrorists regrouped and a logistics pole for the supply of arms, ammunition and fuel for secessionist groups located in Bui Division and part of Ngoketunjia Division.
- The terrorists were engaged in all sorts of abuses against the local population (cattle rustling, rape, assaults, etc.) which warranted an intervention by the Defence and Security Forces in order to protect them.
- To this end, a reconnaissance mission was authorized on 12 February 2020 by Major NYIANGONO ZE Charles Eric, Commander of the 52nd Motorized Infantry Battalion (BIM) in Nkambe. It was led by Sergeant BABA GUIDA, commander of Ntumbaw joint regiment.
- The detachment left the Ntumbaw base on 13 February 2020 at 10 p.m. with three (3) servicemen and two (2) gendarmes. As they advanced, the detachment commander decided to enlist seventeen (17) members of a
local vigilante committee.
- At the entrance of the village of Ngarbuh, the group split into two teams to comb Ngarbuh 2 and Ngarbuh 3 neighbourhoods.
- Upon entering the Ngarbuh 3 neighbourhood, the place of the tragedy, the team led by Sergeant SABA GUIDA, comprising Gendarme SANDING SANDING Cyrille, Private 1st Class HARANGA and ten (10) members of the vigilante committee, launched an attack based on information provided by a repented terrorist and a farmer from the area.
- Following an exchange of gunfire, during which five (5) terrorists were killed, and many weapons seized, the detachment discovered that three (3) women and ten (10) children had died because of its action.
- Panic-stricken, the three servicemen with the help of some members of the vigilante committee, tried to conceal the facts by causing fires.

- On his return to Ntumbaw, Sergeant BABA GUIDA who led the operation, submitted a deliberately biased report to his superiors, a report on which the Government initially based its statement.

In terms of responsibilities, the Commission has established that:

- Major NYIANGONO ZE Charles Eric, Commander of the 52nd Motorized Infantry Battalion (BIM), who knew how sensitive the Ngarbuh area was, due to the prevailing high intercommunity tensions, failed to personally supervise the operation carried out by his troops;

- Sergeant BABA GUIDA, involved armed civilians in a military operation, failed to control his troops during the operation, ordered the burning down _of houses and deliberately produced a false report on the operation and its toll;

_ Gendarme SANDING SANDING Cyrille, took part in an operation that caused the death of several persons and the burning of houses;

_ Private 1st Class HARANGA took part in an operation that caused the death of several persons and the burning of houses;

_ The ten members of the vigilante committee enlisted in Ngarbuh 3, who have not yet been identified, took part in an operation that caused the death of several persons and the burning of houses.

After taking cognizance of the findings of the Commission of Inquiry, the **PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC** has ordered the following measures:

The institution of disciplinary proceedings against Major NYIANGONO ZE Charles Eric, Commander of the 52nd Motorized Infantry Battalion (BIM) and all the servicemen who took part in the Ngarbuh operation;

2. The arrest of Sergeant BABA GUIDA, Gendarme SANDING SANDING Cyrille and Private 1st Class HARANGA Gilbert, as well as the ten members of the vigilante committee involved in the Ngarbuh 3 tragic events and the institution of legal proceedings against them. The servicemen concerned are already at the disposal of the Yaounde military tribunal. The concerned members of the vigilante committee are actively being tracked down;

3. The exhumation of the corpses of the victims in order to give them a decent burial at the cost of the State and to establish the necessary evidence to bring out the truth;

4. The identification of the rightful claimants of the victims by the administration to enable the State to pay appropriate compensation and indemnities.

5. The strengthening of security in the village of Ngarbuh, especially by creating a military base and setting up other public services which should help to ensure better protection of civilians against the abuses of armed groups, the return of displaced persons and the easing of intercommunity tensions.

The **PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC** once more extends his condolences and those of the entire Nation to the families of the victims and wishes to assure them of determination to ensure that justice is done.

He reiterates his firm instructions to the relevant officials and the various levels of hierarchy of the Defence and Security Forces to ensure, with increased determination, that they always perform their duty with professionalism, they particularly ensure the protection of civilians and see to it that allegations of any exactions are systematically investigated and where necessary properly punished.

The **PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC** thanks the members of the Commission, as well as all national and international stakeholders who contributed in various respects to shedding light on the Ngarbuh events and to making it possible for justice to be rendered to the victims.

He reaffirms the readiness of the Cameroonian Government to continue to cooperate with bilateral and multilateral partners as well as with non-governmental organizations to further the protection and promotion of human rights in Cameroon.

He however recalls that the protection of human rights is a noble and serious cause that should be defended with vigilance and

firmness as well as with serenity and discernment without political motivations which can only weaken it.

The PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC reaffirms his attachment to the search for ways and means of peacefully resolving the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions, in line with the recommendations of the Major National Dialogue. »

Yaounde, 21 April 2020

(s) Ferdinand NGOH NGOH

Minister of State, Secretary General

Of the Presidency of the Republic.