

5th Mai 2018

I have often talked to you about the crisis in Belo, stemming from the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. I thought somehow, any how the government would soon find a lasting solution to the problem. It is like no solution is forthcoming and as each day passes, the crises escalate. Belo, where we reside, seems to be the hub of the crisis in Cameroon. I have witnessed some sad happenings in Belo from both sides, both with the restoration forces and with the government forces. There are many unpleasant things happening elsewhere in Cameroon related to the Anglophone crisis but I will have to concentrate on Belo and Boyo.

It was in Belo, on the 22nd of September 2017 that the population marched with peace plants to protest a seemingly long time period of marginalization by the Cameroon regime on Anglophones and again on the 1st of October 2017, the population came out for the same purpose to protest with peace plants. It should be recalled that this 1st October is celebrated as independence for the southern Cameroons (and they reunited with the larger French Cameroon territory on the 11th February 1961 through a plebiscite and again on the 20th of May 1972, a unitary state was formed). On the 1st of October 2017, many mishaps happened in Belo. When the population marched peacefully, some boys started marching toward the gendarmerie brigade in Belo. One of the gendarmes opened fire and a man by name Sam Sawyer was shot in the leg and another man shot in the arm. The Senior Divisional Officer's vehicle was equally burnt that day by the angry population when the people were shot.

Sometime later masked unknown gun men attacked the gendarmerie checked point in Mbingo, at the gateway to Boyo and killed two gendarme officers. It was so sad because one of the officers was a pregnant woman. The response of the military was immediate. They first came to Mbingo and instead of finding the culprits; they were breaking into shops and looting. I learned they were stopped by the Divisional officer of Belo. They now relocated to Belo central and many shops again were broken into and looted. Vehicles and commercial motor bikes of boys who panicked and left them behind were burnt by the military. The people of Belo fled into bushes. After what appeared to be calm, the worst happened in Belo that has shocked everyone until today. One evening the military men came to Belo and attacked the boys who were at Sam Sawyer's business place, (the guy who was shot and was still limping), arrested him and everyone there. They said he is the one who slaughtered the officers at Mbingo. One thing about this man is that he is marijuana dealer and people come to buy from him. They took him to his house, burnt down many things, motor bikes and any worthy thing they could find. There was also one small boy staying there and they arrested him, cut off his ears and finally killed him. His crime was that they caught him watching a TV channel run by Southern Cameroons. Sam Sawyer was finally killed. Some say they cut off his throat. Others say that he

was killed slowly, by cutting from the back of the neck. The people killed that day were two and Sam Sawyer simply because the others were found in Sam Sawyer's place. The wife of Sam Sawyer was also taken into custody and tortured.

I think this is what has radicalized the youths of Belo. They say all the people killed that day were innocent people, and that the army made no investigation, that the only crime of Sam Sawyer is that he is a marijuana dealer and smoker. They say the people who slaughtered the two gendarmes might not necessarily have been from Belo. They are also angry at the killing of the boy XY, a young, calm, humble and disciplined young boy who was only doing petty training.

After this we began to hear of arm groups formed who were training to fight for the independence of Southern Cameroon. We thought it was a joke, and then they started arresting men who were suspected of being traitors to the cause and taking them to unknown destinations, cautioning them and asking for a ransom before they were released. One such camp was in a village called Anyajua in Belo Sub Division.

One fateful morning we woke up to the sound of gunshots. The military had decided to attack the camp in Anyajua. They came by the way of Jinkfuin only to be forced back by a fierce resistance by the militant group, or the amba boys as they are called. The army turned now on the helpless innocent population. At a village called Ntungfe, they shot to death a mad man who was coming toward them. They burned down several houses, the house of a trader, a teacher and other compounds along the road. Back at Jinkfuin, a neighbouring village they shot to death a blind boy, caught another mad man, took him to Belo, tied him to a rope and dragged him on a car along the tarred road until he died. They took the dead body, still tied with ropes and dumped among Indian bamboos. The body was only discovered in a decomposed state after some days.

That day a boy shot on the leg was being transported to hospital by a sympathizer on a motor bike. Some soldiers waylaid them and killed. Another boy was shot in the head. After that the military grew wild in Belo. Homes, motor bikes, etc were reduced to ashes. They shot at everyone they could see. They shot at goats, pigs and anything that came along. Some innocent people were shot elsewhere and brought to Belo. For days Belo stank of dead bodies. They could not even permit relatives to recover the dead bodies of their relatives shot simply because they happened to be passing by. There were some dead bodies that could not be identified. One dead boy was buried where the man failed because dogs were also already visiting.

This radicalized people the more. I heard more boys were joining restoration forces. The military retaliated with more crackdowns. At Fungom, Anjang and Anjin the military came looking for the restoration fighters. Again, innocent people were killed. They caught a young boy at Kikfuini village on the road, put in their vehicle and asked that he show them the way to Fungom. The boy came and showed Fungom village. As they

allowed the boy to go back, one soldier opened fire and killed the boy instantly. They resorted to more burning of people's houses. They shot to death two who unknowingly were coming on a motor bike. They also shot to death an engine saw operator.

The next day they came to Anjin, burnt down houses where the engine saw guy was buried. They also went to Juambum village and burnt down more houses looking for the fighters. All along innocent people suffered.

A fortnight ago, the said restoration forces decided to attack the military in Belo on a Sunday. The military retreated only to come back when they left. A few days after this, a soldier was caught by the fighters who was in the house of girlfriend and the soldier was executed. Some say his head was cut off in retaliation for the cutting off of Sam Sawyer's head.

However, it is true the soldier was killed by whatever means.

The retaliation of the military was heavy but their vengeance fell on wrong people. None of the fighters was apprehended. They fell on the wrong people, the helpless population. At Jichami, 15 houses were burned down. Many people were killed. They broke into homes and killed the people. A father and his two children were roasted alive in one compound by the military. A man was killed and his wife taken away. They beat the wife on the buttocks until she is unable to sit down and later released her. More killings in Belo took place. A bum boy was removed from a vehicle from Bamenda and killed, dumped at Kitchu with his eyes gorged out.

Yesterday, May 4th 2018, the military went to attack a camp at Juambum but the other camp attacked in Belo and burnt down the Divisional officer's office. One of the fighters was killed. We await the next movement.

What I have observed from these crises is that they could have been avoided in the first place through dialogue. Each passing day youths are radicalized. Fighting groups sprung up. The more attempted crackdown by military issues the radicalization erupts. Atrocities are committed on both sides born of pride and a desire to revenge. The earlier genuine talks are held the better.

I have seen boys come home to fight. I have seen people send their children to go out and fight. The worst thing is that Cameroonians are fighting Cameroonians and animosity grows daily.

If at all the war continues, the government has to revise its strategy of fighting the war. They should devote more energy to investigating before cracking down. This is because at each move only innocent people are killed. From what I know from the 22nd of September 2017, among the many number of people who have been killed, there have only been about 4 people killed that the population knows were members of the restoration forces. And with these four none of their property has been touched in Belo. I repeat, only innocent people are victims of army brutality.