

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Statement to the Arria-Formula meeting
on the humanitarian situation in Cameroon**

UN Headquarters, New York, 13 May 2019

As delivered

Thank you for the opportunity to bring this under-reported crisis to your attention.

Cameroon, one of the largest economies in Africa, is facing worsening violence and conflict. Today, 4.3 million people need humanitarian assistance across the country. That is a 30 per cent increase on last year and it means one Cameroonian in six needs humanitarian assistance and protection. More than half of them are children.

Eight regions out of ten are affected by one of three concurrent humanitarian crises.

Firstly, in its East and North regions, Cameroon is hosting more than 270,000 Central African Republic refugees, putting a significant burden on host communities who are already very poor and living in fragile and vulnerable conditions.

Secondly, Cameroon's Far North remains affected by the Lake Chad Basin crisis, one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world. About 1.9 million people living in Cameroon's Far North – that's half the population in that part of the country – need urgent assistance. And that includes 100,000 refugees or more, from Nigeria.

On this note, I would like to recognize the Government of Cameroon, and the people of Cameroon, for their generosity for hosting refugees from neighbouring countries.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in the North-West and South-West regions has rapidly deteriorated and that is what I want to talk most about today.

The crisis in the North-West and South-West regions started with peaceful protests in the English-speaking regions but has now turned violent. It was one of the fastest growing displacement crises in Africa last year.

For the past three years, the population has been subjected to ongoing violence and attacks by armed actors. The level of the crisis today is more alarming than ever.

Both the humanitarian and the security situation continue to deteriorate and run the risk of spiraling out of control, including in neighbouring departments, namely the Littoral and West.

In 2018, 160,000 people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance in the North-West and South-West regions. Today, there are more than 1.3 million people, or at least eight times as many, in need and that amounts to a third of the local population.

Half a million people are internally displaced. Some of those people stay with host communities in main towns in the western part of the country, or in the capital Yaoundé or in the country's largest city, Douala. Most of them though, are still hiding in the forests in fear of violence.

Thousands of homes and entire villages have been destroyed across the two regions, posing significant challenges to the goal of return for people who fled. The fear of attacks further prevents people from being able to return home and prevents access to previous livelihoods, especially farming. That means people are increasingly, and in some cases totally, reliant on humanitarian assistance.

Ordinary people are direct targets of violence. Children are caught in crossfire and subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. The North-West and South-West regions used to be the places where education was best across the country. But a ban on education imported by armed actors has undermined that. In the past three years, at least 70 schools have been destroyed, and pupils and teachers have been kidnapped. Today, over 80 per cent of schools are closed and more than 600,000 children are deprived of an education in both regions.

Attacks on medical staff and infrastructure have also increased, with at least 70 incidents noted since 2018, including the abductions of medical staff and the burning of at least three hospitals. In both regions, 40 per cent of health facilities are simply not operational.

Sexual violence and abuse are also increasingly documented. There are reports of girls as young as 13 living in the forest, pregnant and scared to move.

In response to this grim reality and despite the challenges, UN agencies and NGOs have scaled up the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection.

There are more than 40 humanitarian organizations operational today. They are mainly local NGOs which between them have reached over 100,000 people this year. Some 42,000 of the most vulnerable people received emergency livelihood programme or dry food delivery in March. But only 30,000 people were reached with the same assistance in

April and that is a reflection of the access challenges and the impact of the continuing violence.

While the environment is complex, there is no question that we need a more ambitious response. We are trying to target 820,000 people for humanitarian assistance in the region this year.

Insecurity, violence, what are called weekly ghost town days - where businesses and shops are closed and civilians forced to stay at home - and frequent lockdowns, all limit days on which humanitarian operations are possible. We do have access. It is limited and unpredictable. We continue to work with all actors to improve it.

We are also increasing our engagement with communities to build acceptance and negotiate access with all parties. We work through existing structures such as those of faith-based groups and national NGOs which are often best placed to access people in need.

Humanitarians are at risk. At least a dozen national humanitarian staff have been abducted since last year. Thankfully so far, they have all been released. National NGOs are especially vulnerable to these risks. And we need more experienced humanitarian staff in order to navigate these complexities more effectively.

The biggest challenge is the lack of funding. In 2018, Cameroon's Humanitarian Response Plan had one of the smallest funding requirements in the world. Despite that, it was also among the least-funded globally.

This year, United Nations and NGOs are looking for \$299 million to reach 2.3 million people, including one third of them in the North-West and South-West regions.

Only that, only \$38 million have been received so far, less than 13% of what we require. Half of that money was received for the North-West and South-West crisis, and most of that was allocated through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

I want to thank all donors, including those who provided funds to the CERF last year— as you know, we have a record-breaking year last year and because of that we were able to make this allocation.

There are four critical sectors – education, health, WASH and nutrition – for which we have received barely any funding this year.

As you well understand, humanitarian organizations cannot sustain the response without more funding. They're out of their own resources. Several key, frontline humanitarian agencies – especially international NGOs – will be forced to withdraw from the region if additional funding does not reach them soon.

It is in no one's interest to see the humanitarian situation spiral out of control. So, today, I ask the international community to help in three ways:

First and foremost, to increase awareness of the humanitarian problem in Cameroon. This afternoon's meeting is an important way of doing that, but we need to build on it. We have to come together to address the underlying causes of the current crisis, including and especially, the need for peaceful resolution of conflict and the need for more progress with sustainable development.

Secondly, I ask for your support and that of others to improve the financing we have for humanitarian operations so we can reach a larger proportion of those in need.

And thirdly I ask for help in persuading all parties to respect international law and to provide, safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access. Anyone with any leverage over parties should exercise that influence. And we also need to urgently strengthen awareness and respect for humanitarian principles, including the protection of education and medical facilities. I've described the attacks on those facilities. Those attacks are violations, and we need better compliance with key international law. I rely on your support to enable us to tackle it better.

Thank you.