

**PILPG**

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Mini  
Negotiation  
Simulation

Anglophone  
regions

Nigeria

Bamenda

Cameroon

Douala

Yaoundé

# CAMEROON: SELF- DETERMINATION

*Prepared by  
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200 miles



# LAWYERING PEACE

## **Mini-Negotiation Simulation**

### **Cameroon Self-Determination**

The purpose of this negotiation is to identify and address the complex challenges related to negotiating the question of self-determination in conflict states. The intention is to explore the potential points of agreement or disagreement among the negotiating parties. Through the simulation the participants will debate their positions, learn negotiation techniques, identify points of conflict, and discuss potential solutions.

The simulation will tee up the conversation in the remainder of the class time focusing on the question of addressing the question of self-determination in peace agreements, and draw from the relevant chapter in *Lawyering Peace* as well as the supplementary material, if any, provided on the class website.

The conflict between Cameroon and Ambazonia centers around the demand for self-determination by the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, collectively known as Ambazonia. These regions, historically marginalized, have sought greater autonomy and recognition as a separate entity. The conflict has resulted in clashes, displacement, and human rights violations. At the moment there are on-again-off-again peace negotiations mediated by Canada. Through these negotiations the challenge lies in finding a balanced solution that respects both the aspirations of Ambazonia for self-determination and the territorial integrity of Cameroon.

#### **Parties:**

- Government of Cameroon
- Ambazonian Separatist Leaders
- International Mediators

**Time Allotted:** 45 minutes

**Instructions:** Prior to negotiations, each delegation will meet for 5 minutes to discuss negotiation strategies and their positions with respect to self-determination in Cameroon. You may assume that any other issues are on the agenda for a later session and will be addressed in subsequent negotiations.

## **Agenda**

- Individual Delegation Meetings (5 minutes)
- Plenary (15 minutes)
- Individual Delegation Meetings (5 minutes)
- Plenary (20 minutes)

## **Conflict Background**

The conflict between Cameroon and Ambazonia centers around the quest for self-determination by the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, collectively referred to as Ambazonia. Historically, these regions have perceived themselves as marginalized within the predominantly Francophone country, leading to deep-seated grievances related to cultural, linguistic, and political representation. (See Ink Stick Article as Annex 1 for a summary of recent efforts at mediation).

The conflict has escalated into violence as Ambazonian separatist movements have emerged, demanding greater autonomy and even outright independence.

- *Colonial Legacy and Linguistic Divide:* The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the colonial era when Cameroon was divided into French and British territories. This division led to the coexistence of English-speaking Anglophone regions and French-speaking Francophone regions. Post-independence, the linguistic and cultural differences between these regions gave rise to concerns over unequal representation, limited access to resources, and perceived discrimination against Anglophone communities.
- *Federal to Unitary:* The English-speaking regions of Cameroon were initially under British administration after World War I, as part of a League of Nations mandate. After a plebiscite in 1961, Southern Cameroons chose to reunite with the former French Cameroun rather than integrate with Nigeria. This led to the establishment of a federal system in Cameroon.

However, in 1972, a new constitution was adopted which replaced the federation with a unitary state, sparking grievances among many Anglophones.

- *Emergence of Ambazonian Identity:* Over time, the Anglophone regions developed a distinct cultural identity, fueled by their English-language education system, legal system, and historical ties to British colonial rule. A sense of marginalization deepened as Francophone-dominated institutions and policies favored the majority Francophone regions. This discontent laid the groundwork for the emergence of an Ambazonian identity, with demands for greater autonomy and self-determination.
- *Push for Greater Autonomy:* The Ambazonian movement gained momentum in the early 2000s, with calls for autonomy and recognition of the Anglophone regions' distinct linguistic and cultural heritage. Amid growing dissatisfaction with the central government's response to these demands, protests, strikes, and civil unrest became more frequent. Ambazonian leaders articulated their vision for a separate state, emphasizing their right to self-determination under international law.
- *Escalation and Violence:* As peaceful demonstrations were met with repression, the conflict escalated into violence. Ambazonian separatist militias emerged, demanding outright independence and clashing with government forces. The Cameroonian government's response included deploying security forces, which further fueled grievances and led to reports of human rights abuses on both sides.
- *Contested Self-Determination:* The central point of contention revolves around the issue of self-determination. The Ambazonian movement asserts that the distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical characteristics of the Anglophone regions justify their right to self-determination, including the possibility of secession. The Cameroonian government, on the other hand, asserts the importance of maintaining the territorial integrity of the nation and views the Ambazonian separatist movement as a threat to national unity.
- *International Attention and Negotiations:* The conflict has drawn international attention, with human rights organizations expressing concerns about alleged abuses and advocating for peaceful resolution of the conflict. Efforts have been made to initiate negotiations, but finding common ground between the Cameroonian government and Ambazonian separatists remains

challenging. The core issue of self-determination versus territorial integrity continues to be a central point of contention as both parties seek to find a way forward.

## **Issue for Negotiation**

The primary point of contention in this round of negotiations is whether in order to protect the fundamental rights of the Anglophone population Ambazonia should be permitted to hold a referendum on independence from Cameroon. The parties must decide on whether this is agreeable, or whether they commit to a return to the federal state structure or whether they maintain a unitary state structure.

## **Party Positions**

### *For Government of Cameroon (GOC) Delegation*

#### Key Considerations:

- The Cameroonian government under President Paul Biya, who has been in power since 1982, has been consistently opposed to the secession of the English-speaking regions.
- The government has often portrayed the separatist fighters as terrorists, and military operations have been launched to quell the unrest.
- The government receives substantial international financial support and needs this to continue.

#### Goals:

- Maintain a unitary form of government.
- Delegitimize the Ambazonian delegation as terrorists.
- Win international support for your efforts to maintain the territorial integrity of Cameroon.

### *For Ambazonian Separatist Leaders Delegation*

#### Key Considerations:

- The Ambazonian leadership is extremely distrustful of the government and resents the terrorist label.
- The Ambazonian leadership believes that after over fifty years of disenfranchisement there is no path to internal self-determination.

- The Ambazonian leadership sees successful self-determination for East Timor, Kosovo, Slovakia, South Sudan, Eritrea and other peoples and desires the same fair application of international law.

Goals:

- Secure support of the international community.
- Secure an internationally supervised referendum for Ambazonian independence.
- Secure ironclad protections for the fundamental rights of the Anglophone people.

*For International Mediation Team*

Key Considerations:

- Balancing the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity.
- Fostering trust and cooperation between the two delegations.
- Ensuring the legitimacy and inclusivity of the negotiation process.

Goals:

- Facilitate constructive dialogue and bridge the gap between the Government and Ambazonia.
- Suggest models for territorial autonomy that preserve Cameroon's unity.
- Emphasize the importance of international human rights standards in the final agreement.

**Additional Resources - Not Required Reading**

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect - Ambazonia: [Global Centre - Ambazonia](#)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - Cameroon: [OHCHR Cameroon](#)

International Crisis Group - Cameroon: [International Crisis Group - Cameroon](#)

BBC News - Cameroon Profile: [BBC News - Cameroon](#)

Refugees International - Cameroon Crisis: [Refugees International - Cameroon](#)

Human Rights Watch - Cameroon: [Human Rights Watch - Cameroon](#)

International Journal on Minority and Group Rights - Ambazonia's Quest for Self-Determination: [Contested Sovereignty of Ambazonia and its Right to Self-Determination](#)

### **Annex 1: Cameroon's Civil War Continues to Rage On** **By InkStick, April 24, 2023**

The Canada-initiated dialogue is the latest in the litany of stalled efforts to reconcile warring parties in the West African nation.

When in January 2023, Canada **announced** a dialogue aimed at resolving the ongoing war in Cameroon, domestic and international observers beamed with optimism at the prospect of ending the armed conflict. The civil war there began in 2017 and is being fought over how the English-speaking western regions of the largely francophone country **should be governed**.

The announcement followed a series of secret meetings with the Paul Biya regime and **Ambazonia separatists** in the ski town of **Mont-Tremblant** and elsewhere in Quebec and Ontario. “The agreement to enter a formal process is a critical first step toward peace and a safer, more inclusive and prosperous future for civilians affected by the conflict,” Canada’s Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly, said in a **statement**.

The peace talks were expected to bring various separatist groups and the government of Cameroon to the table. Even though both countries have linguistic similarities, such as the use of French and English as two official languages, Canada’s efforts to seek peace in Cameroon are driven by its economic interest. The bilateral relations between the two countries go back over half a century and involve **development assistance, investment, and trade, worth \$99 million in 2021**.

Amidst the climate of suffering and pain that civilians in the region have endured since the war began, the announcement brought “**a sign of hope**,” Esther Njomo Omam, the Executive Director of the aid group, **Reach Out Cameroon**,

said. But this soon yielded to a feeling of “**frustration**,” she added when Yaoundé rejected the peace overture three days later. In a **terse statement** issued on Jan. 24, 2023, Cameroon’s Minister of Communication Rene Sadi said that the Biya government never entrusted any foreign country or external entity with the role of facilitator or mediator to settle the crisis.

## THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS

The civil war in Cameroon erupted in November 2017 following months of brutal crackdowns by security forces on protests and strikes by teachers and lawyers in the two English-speaking regions of the country, the northwest and southwest. The immediate spark was the alleged attempts by the Cameroon government to impose the French language in Anglophone schools and courts, but the **root cause dates back to 1961**, when the British-administered Southern Cameroons united with Cameroon after it gained independence from France in 1960.

“The Anglophone crisis is the direct consequence of the colonial plunder of Africa,” Tse Anye Kevin told Inkstick. Kevin was the **deputy president of the Confederation of Cameroon Trade Unions**, which brought together workers from different walks of life during the **2016 sit-down strikes and protests**. Following weeks of **heavy crackdowns, including arrests of protest leaders and killing of protesters**, Kevin, alongside other protest leaders, fled Cameroon. Some went to Nigeria, while others managed to go elsewhere. So far, he has evaded the “long arm of La Republique du Cameroon,” escaping, for instance, the **mass arrest of Sisiku Julius AyukTabe and other separatist leaders** in Nigeria’s capital of Abuja in 2018.

The Canadian peace process is not the first mediation effort that has stalled since the war began. A series of peace talks have been initiated since 2019, which have met with little or no success.

From 1845, the land and tribes that make up Cameroon came under the imperial influence of Germany, and it was then known as the German Kamerun. But **this changed following World War I** when France and the United Kingdom jointly invaded Kamerun in a military campaign to wrest control from Germany. They succeeded, and in February 1916, the United Kingdom and France agreed to divide the territory, resulting in the United Kingdom obtaining approximately one-fifth of the colony on the Nigerian border and France gaining the rest. This partition was later ratified by the **Treaty of Versailles** signed between Germany and



the Allied Powers at the end of World War I, thereby turning the former German colony into the League of Nations mandates of French Cameroon and British Cameroon.

The linguistic divide that the partition created has dogged the country since then. “It has created a feeling of political and economic marginalization in the minds of people in the English-speaking regions who are a minority of the population,” Kevin added. English speakers are only about 17% of the population and occupy two (the northwest and southwest regions) out of Cameroon’s ten administrative regions. Following unification in 1961, a federal administrative system with shared powers between the Anglophone region and the center was established, but by 1972 this was dismantled by the country’s first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, and replaced by a unitary system that centralized power in Yaoundé.

Although this measure substantially reduced Anglophone political influence, it was not until 12 years later, in 1984, that **full centralization** took place. Biya, who succeeded Ahidjo, prioritized centralization, divided the Anglophone region into two administrative units, and changed the country’s official name to the Republic of Cameroon — the name of the former Francophone territory. Also, the second star, representing the country’s Anglophone part, was removed from the national flag.

Biya, now 90, has ruled Cameroon for over 40 years, making him the **second-longest ruling president in Africa and the oldest Head of State in the world**. The Biya dictatorship intensified the centralization and assimilation policies “partly because of the needs of the state and partly because it needs a crisis like this to preserve itself in power,” **Waliu Ismaila** told Inkstick. Ismaila is a doctoral candidate in African history and British Imperial Studies at West Virginia University. This explains the **brutal repression** that greeted teachers and lawyers’ strikes and civil protests in 2016.

The strikes and protests, called by the **Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium**, an umbrella body of Anglophone lawyers and teacher trade unions, started in cities such as **Limbe**, **Bamenda**, and **Buea** on Oct. 6, 2016 and quickly spread. Although they were initially peaceful, the Biya-led government responded by unleashing security forces on the protesters. Within a week, more than **100 demonstrators had been arrested and many dead**.

But instead of rolling back the movement, the repression had the opposite effect of **hardening public opinion** toward secession. On Oct. 1, 2017, on the 56th anniversary of the 1961 reunification between the Cameroon under French mandate and the British Southern Cameroons, Anglophone separatist groups, angered by the murderous repression, came together to declare a Republic of Ambazonia. Although only a symbolic declaration, the Cameroon government responded by sending the army into the region. Thus began a civil war that, in its sixth year, has caused untold human suffering, **including the death of at least 6,000 people and the displacement of over a million civilians**. In addition, **over 800,000 school children are without full access to education**, while about **three million people** are in need of humanitarian aid in an area whose total population is **estimated** at no more than six to eight million.

## ELUSIVE PEACE

The Canadian peace process is not the first mediation effort that has stalled since the war began. A series of peace talks have been initiated since 2019, which have met with little or no success. Curiously, some of these talk overtures have come from the Cameroonian government itself despite the initial rejection of any mediation by Biya. For instance, **a week-long national dialogue** initiated by the Cameroonian government in September 2019 was boycotted by Anglophone separatist fighters and opposition leaders. This was followed by **another talk** facilitated by the Geneva-based **Center for Humanitarian Dialogue** — a conflict mediation nongovernmental organization — that did not result in any significant outcome due to disagreements among separatist fighters.

In 2020, however, another **peace talk** was held and had Sisiku and other jailed members of the “Interim Government of Ambazonia” at the table. Sisiku and other separatist leaders **are serving life sentences on terrorism charges** at Kondengui Central Prison in Yaoundé. At least two meetings were held in April and July 2020, but when Sisiku announced the talks on social media, it led to a **storm of condemnation** from the separatist camp forcing Yaoundé to abandon the effort. Some secessionists rejected the talks because they believed it was **another example** of Yaoundé unilaterally deciding who gets to speak for the Ambazonians.

While the next step on the road to peace remains unclear, the war rages on. General “Grandpa of the Buffalos” is in the thick of the fighting. His soldiers control the **Bali Nyonga Local Government Area** as part of a network of armed groups fighting an asymmetric war against the more powerful and better-equipped

Cameroon national army. “Until our demand for Ambazonia Republic is respected, we shall keep on fighting,” he told Inkstick.