



Cameroon's Far North: A New Chapter in the Fight Against Boko Haram

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Principal Findings

What's new? As fighting between government forces and the Boko Haram insurgents in Cameroon's Far North diminishes, a lasting peace depends on how the government deals with former members of the jihadist movement, its former prisoners and vigilante groups set up to fight it.

Why does it matter? A well-designed policy toward former Boko Haram members could lead those that are still active to surrender. Vigilantes could turn to crime if left to their own devices.

What should be done? The government should put dangerous militants on trial, but reintegrate low-risk former Boko Haram members into their communities, while encouraging communities to accept them and ensuring that they have the resources to do so. It should demobilise some vigilante groups and integrate others into municipal police.

Executive Summary

The intensity of the conflict against Boko Haram in Cameroon's Far North has diminished, though the movement still poses a threat and the humanitarian situation remains precarious. Long-term stability hinges on how the government resolves two principal security challenges: first, dealing with former combatants and other Boko Haram members; and, secondly, determining the future of community self-defence, or vigilante, groups. For former Boko Haram fighters, the Cameroonian government should put in place measures to distinguish dangerous militants requiring judicial proceedings and likely incarceration from other members for whom community service and public apologies might be more appropriate. It should provide support to communities into which militants will reintegrate. For vigilantes, it will have to better assist those still needed in the fight against Boko Haram and integrate some of them into municipal police, while demobilising those in other areas. It also must investigate vigilantes accused of abuses, hold accountable those responsible and make public court decisions.

Thousands of Cameroonians joined Boko Haram between 2012 and 2016, sometimes due to ideological conviction but often out of opportunism or under duress. Some were killed in the fighting, others arrested by the security forces and an unknown number, perhaps as many as one thousand, are still active members. In early 2017, some tried to surrender, but were rejected by their communities or killed by security forces. Since October 2017, the Cameroon government has been more willing to accept Boko Haram deserters. To date, almost 200 have surrendered. As yet, however, the government has no clear policy for dealing with them. The right response could encourage other Boko Haram members to surrender and further weaken the movement. Getting it wrong, on the other hand, could deter combatants who are still active from giving up the fight and entrench their reliance on the jihadist group.

Since 2014, vigilantes, numbering some 14,000 in the Far North, have played an essential role against Boko Haram. They provide critical intelligence to Cameroonian forces, act as scouts and guides, and sometimes confront jihadists directly and protect their villages, especially against suicide attacks. The authorities offer them little support, however. Some have become disillusioned and abandoned the struggle. Vigilante groups also have come in for criticism. Some members were previously cattle thieves, smugglers or bandits, others have been arrested for collaboration with Boko Haram and some are suspected of human rights abuses against captured Boko Haram suspects. As the conflict quietens, plans for their future will become ever more urgent. The absence of such plans could lead groups to fragment, with some vigilantes turning back to crime.

The Cameroonian government should adopt policies aimed at encouraging more Cameroonian Boko Haram members to surrender and prepare for vigilantes' demobilisation. For the former, it should:

- Publicly announce that it will protect surrendering Boko Haram members and afford them due process, and that non-combatants are unlikely to face jail time; it also should consult neighbouring countries with more experience on good practices for former combatants' reintegration;

- ❑ Devise a program of support for communities into which former Boko Haram members will reintegrate, potentially including support for agricultural, livestock and commercial activities in host communities and subsidies to small businesses that employ young people;
- ❑ Refine procedures for distinguishing those surrendering or captured Boko Haram members who are combatants, still preach violence or are suspected of perpetrating atrocities from those who are non-combatants, renounce violence or are not accused of major crimes. Initial assessments, now led by the military, should be expanded to involve police officers, International Red Cross and/or UN protection experts and potentially also academics and researchers;
- ❑ Adopt a tailored approach for holding former Boko Haram members accountable, based on these initial assessments. Some will require judicial proceedings and, in some cases, imprisonment and careful monitoring. For others, community service, public confessions, symbolic ceremonies and vocational training would be more apt. The government also should allocate greater manpower and funds to Far North courts so they can quickly adjudicate cases for former militants who do require judicial processes; and
- ❑ Amend the 2014 anti-terrorist law and the Penal Code to give judges and communities a degree of flexibility in their treatment of former Boko Haram members. Alternatively, President Paul Biya could sign a decree laying out procedures for dealing with individuals who have surrendered.

Regarding the vigilantes, the government should prepare for their future after the fight against Boko Haram. It should:

- ❑ Refrain from mobilising new vigilante groups and focus instead on developing intelligence and early warning networks to ensure state security forces can protect civilians as needed;
- ❑ In areas still exposed to Boko Haram, keep vigilantes operational while better supporting and supervising them, setting up external accountability systems, including community oversight, integrate some of them into municipal police and provide training in practical skills (for example, intelligence, first aid and demining);
- ❑ Demobilise vigilantes in areas where they are no longer needed, registering those who still have weapons and establishing projects to enable their reintegration into civilian life, either by helping them find local work or by financing micro-projects in sectors such as trade and agriculture; and
- ❑ Investigate all accusations of abuses by vigilantes, hold accountable those responsible and make public court decisions.

International support for measures to deal with former Boko Haram members and vigilantes will be critical, given the lack of local expertise and the strain on public finances, with the October presidential election looming and Cameroon hosting the Africa Cup of Nations in 2019. Foreign partners, notably the U.S., the European Union and Japan, should support investment in communities into which former militants will reintegrate and initiatives aimed at demobilising vigilantes, including them as

beneficiaries of development projects. Some vigilante groups will not trust traditional chiefs or local authorities to administer government or donor funds alone; better would be for local NGOs also to be involved in their disbursement.

While levels of violence in the Far North have diminished, the Cameroon government has a long way to go in tackling the underlying factors that allowed Boko Haram to gain a foothold, notably the state's lack of legitimacy, poverty, some communities' exclusion from power and divides between local elites and young people. For now, however, the priorities are to deal with surrendering or captured combatants and prepare for the vigilantes' future. The manner in which the government handles those challenges will determine whether the Far North can make the transition to greater stability. Lastly, the fight against Boko Haram in general and the reintegration of former members in particular goes hand in hand with respect for human rights. Videos have recently circulated on the internet, apparently showing the killing by Cameroonian soldiers of unarmed women and children accused of belonging to Boko Haram. Such grave abuses can only discourage Boko Haram members from surrendering officially and openly, as is best, and instead push them to try returning to Cameroon in secret.

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Cameroon's Far North: A New Chapter in the Fight Against Boko Haram

I. Introduction

In Cameroon's Far North, Boko Haram is weakened but not yet defeated. A number of senior Cameroonian army officers expect the conflict to end in 2020.¹ This prospect is realistic only if the road to stabilisation is carefully plotted. The conflict's decreasing intensity since 2016, as shown by a reduction in the number of attacks, the greater failure rate of suicide bombings and (since October 2017) the surrender of combatants, confirms that the jihadist insurgency is weakening. It still poses a genuine threat, however: in 2017, it carried out some 80 attacks and kidnappings in Cameroon and planned 90 suicide bombings (51 of which either failed or were foiled), killing at least 210 civilians and about 30 soldiers. Since January 2018, Boko Haram has caused the death of at least 135 civilians and eighteen soldiers.² There is a risk that the Cameroonian armed forces will get bogged down in this low-intensity conflict.

The history of Boko Haram, and of jihadist groups in general, shows their capacity to lie low before re-emerging in a different form and even making alliances with non-Islamist armed groups and criminal networks.³ The government of Cameroon must remain vigilant and take security, political, economic and social measures to accelerate the denouement of the conflict. Such steps are all the more necessary given that a presidential election is scheduled for the autumn of 2018. If the situation has not improved by then, the risk of unrest in the region will be high.

This report is one in a series of Crisis Group publications on the threat posed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin.⁴ It is based on documentary research and some 150 interviews conducted from August 2017 to March 2018 in the Cameroonian capital Yaoundé, the Chadian capital N'Djamena and Cameroon's Far North, with local authorities, members of the security forces, traditional chiefs, religious leaders, vigilante group members, academics, Western diplomats, local NGOs' staff members and former Boko Haram members imprisoned in Maroua, the capital of the Far North Region. The report analyses conflict dynamics from 2017 to mid-2018 and puts forward proposals for dealing with two urgent security challenges: former Boko Haram combatants and vigilante groups.

As discussed in previous Crisis Group publications, a series of deep political, social and economic problems lies behind the Far North's vulnerability and the instability caused by Boko Haram in the region. This report does not deal with overall

¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior army officers, Yaoundé and Maroua, September 2017.

² Crisis Group estimates based on open sources, for example, *L'Œil du Sahel*, and interviews with local authorities and security forces.

³ Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, 2017); "Jihadism in Africa – Local Roots, Regional Expansion, International Alliances", Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), June 2015; Crisis Group Special Report N°1, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

⁴ Crisis Group reports on Boko Haram, www.crisisgroup.org/boko-haram-insurgency.

responses to address the threat posed by Boko Haram but focuses instead on urgent security issues, because the way in which the government handles them will determine whether the country can make the transition to greater stability.

II. The Situation in the Far North

A. *Boko Haram: Weakened But Still a Threat*

In Cameroon's Far North, Boko Haram is weakened. It remains a nuisance, however, and is still able to attack small military targets, by exploiting vulnerabilities in the security apparatus and the complicity of some sections of society.

1. A declining presence in the Far North

Boko Haram's capacity to conduct large-scale military operations in Cameroon's Far North now seems restricted. Operations are increasingly limited to small-scale attacks, the use of explosive devices and suicide bombings, most of which do not succeed. It is no longer able to recruit other than by kidnapping. Security forces have captured more than 1,000 suspected Boko Haram members since 2014 and accepted the surrender of about 200 between October and December 2017. In 2017, the number of Boko Haram's civilian and military victims fell by about 20 per cent compared to 2016 and 40 per cent compared to 2014-2015.⁵ Pressure from the Nigerian army and other countries in the Lake Chad basin has weakened the jihadist group, as have internal divisions, which provoked violent clashes between different factions.⁶

In the main towns of the Far North, the situation seems to be gradually returning to normal. The security measures introduced in July 2015 by the regional authorities, including a ban on the use of motorbikes and a curfew, are no longer applied even though they have not been officially lifted.⁷ Women are again wearing the full veil (*soudarè*), previously forbidden. The border with Nigeria at Amchidé and Fotokol, closed in 2014, has gradually reopened since 2017 and trade has resumed. Local people have become accustomed to the threat posed by Boko Haram and tend to minimise it.⁸

Most Boko Haram attacks since 2017 have been concentrated in the departments of Mayo-Sava and Mayo-Tsanaga, on the border with Nigeria, especially in the *arrondissements* of Kolofata and Mayo-Moskota.⁹ But there has been a resurgence of violence in Logone-et-Chari since March 2018.

Boko Haram now operates in Cameroon in small groups of three to ten combatants. They meet at the last minute prior to launching their rare major attacks and then disperse. Most of the Cameroonian nationals in Boko Haram are reportedly

⁵ Crisis Group estimates based on documentary sources and hundreds of interviews conducted in the region.

⁶ The two Boko Haram factions reportedly clashed on Lake Chad and in the Nigerian state of Borno between October 2016 and July 2017. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence and Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) officers, residents of Darak and local councillors for Logone-et-Chari, Mora, Kolofata and Logone-et-Chari, September-October 2017. See Hans de Marie Heungoup, "Boko Haram's Shifting Tactics in Cameroon: What Does the Data Tell Us?", Africa Research Institute, 14 February 2017.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, sub-prefect, Maroua, September 2017.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, sub-prefects, university teachers, president of a Muslim women's association and the *lamido* (traditional chief) of Maroua, Far North, September 2017.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, officers of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and the MNJTF, local authorities, Maroua and Mora, February 2018.

part of Abubakar Shekau's faction, deployed along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. A smaller number are in the Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction (better known to the Cameroonian security services as Habib Yusuf), which is concentrated in the north of Borno state and on Lake Chad.¹⁰ According to some sources, Shekau tried to dissuade his Cameroonian supporters from surrendering or joining Barnawi, partly because they play an essential role in his supply chain. For that reason he has reportedly promoted some Cameroonian combatants, increased surveillance and punished fugitives more severely.¹¹

2. The many reasons for Boko Haram's persistence

Several factors explain the persistence of Boko Haram activities in Cameroon. First, the military situation has changed. Following attacks on advanced military outposts, the army withdrew from some of them in order to consolidate its main bases. Although this new arrangement protects the military, it makes the civilian population more vulnerable.¹² In addition, the army loathes fighting at night, which it finds more difficult. Well-informed about its targets, the jihadist group launches most of its attacks at night and rarely faces a military intervention.¹³

Troop morale seems low, especially in regular army units. The fatigue of war, logistical problems and a feeling that officers are treating soldiers unfairly, particularly with regard to promotions, is causing frustration among the rank and file. Soldiers have as a result become less engaged and there have also been incidents such as one in October 2017 when a soldier shot his commanding officer dead.¹⁴

Neither is morale any better among the Mora (Mayo-Sava)-based Cameroon contingent of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a sub-regional force reconstituted in 2015 by the Lake Chad Basin Commission to fight Boko Haram. Soldiers are irritated because they thought deployment with the MNJTF would mean bonus

¹⁰ Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015. But in August 2016, the movement split because of internal differences over ideology, strategy and administration of the "caliphate". Two groups now exist: the Shekau faction (Boko Haram) and the Barnawi faction, recognised by Islamic state and renamed Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°120, *Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, 4 May 2016.

¹¹ In March 2017, Shekau for the first time let his Cameroonian combatants speak in an official video. They spoke in French and Fula. Crisis Group interviews, senior army and police officers, Western military expert, researchers, journalists and former members of Boko Haram, Yaoundé, Maroua and Kolofata, September-December 2017. Other sources emphasise that Shekau encouraged the Cameroonians to form autonomous groups along the border. Crisis Group interviews, deputies, vigilantes, traditional chiefs and former members of Boko Haram, Mora and Kolofata, September-December 2017.

¹² The day after dismantling military posts at Ldamang and Ldobam in Mayo-Tsanaga in August 2017, more than 100 combatants attacked these places and the village of Vizik. Crisis Group interviews, vigilantes, Mokolo, Koza and Mozogo, September 2017.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, local authorities, Mora, September 2017. Some observers go so far as to say that the army has left the fighting against Boko Haram to vigilante groups. Crisis Group interviews, Western defence attaché and Western diplomats, Yaoundé, 31 August 2017.

¹⁴ "Cameroun : un soldat tue son chef et se suicide", BBC, 5 October 2017. Living conditions in the forward posts are difficult. Many soldiers have been killed by improvised explosive devices on their way to collect supplies on motorbikes. Crisis Group interviews, soldier and non-commissioned officer taking part in the Cameroon Army's Operation Emergence 4, Maroua, September 2017.

payments like those paid to the Cameroon contingent of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic. But the MNJTF is not a UN mission and each country is responsible for paying and equipping its own contingent. Many soldiers are under the false impression that their "international" bonuses are being misappropriated. It is true, however, that the defence ministry sometimes paid bonuses for soldiers in the Far North that had been in arrears between 2014 and 2017. Some soldiers have accused senior officers of misappropriating these bonuses.¹⁵

The interruption of Cameroonian military operations in Nigeria also helps to explain the persistence of Boko Haram. Since 2015, the Cameroon army has launched offensives against the jihadist group's bases near its borders and participated in bilateral operations with the Nigerian and sub-regional armies as part of the MNJTF. These initiatives have been at least partly successful. But the Cameroon army conducted no such operations between February and December 2017, which has allowed Boko Haram to rebuild cells along the border. Although there are many reasons for this interruption in operations, senior army officers and Cameroonian diplomats often cite their cost and Nigeria's reluctance to let Cameroonian soldiers act independently on Nigerian territory.¹⁶

Moreover, Boko Haram can still rely on several support and supply networks. The group reportedly still uses supply routes in Mayo-Moskoto. Goods looted by Boko Haram in Nigeria are reportedly sold at markets in the area.¹⁷ It also continues to raise funds in Cameroon by taxing farmers in Mayo-Tsanaga travelling to and from Nigeria and fishermen around Lake Chad and by kidnapping Cameroonian civilians to obtain small ransoms.¹⁸

Finally, the government's inadequate material support and rumours suggesting its misappropriation by local authorities or traditional chiefs all contribute to lowering the morale of vigilante groups. The leaders of some vigilante groups claim that the government rewards the traditional chiefs' inner circles, including individuals who are not even group members, rather than the most committed members.¹⁹ Many group members are tired of it all and some decide to quit. This situation helps explain the persistence of attacks by Boko Haram.

B. *A Precarious Humanitarian and Social Situation*

Although Boko Haram has become weaker in Cameroon, the humanitarian situation in the Far North has not improved. On the contrary, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) increased in 2017. In May 2018, the region had

¹⁵ In June, 32 soldiers blocked the road between Maroua and Kousseri to protest at non-payment of bonuses. Crisis Group interviews, sergeants and non-commissioned officers of the MNJTF, Mora, September 2017. "Lutte contre Boko Haram au Cameroun: des militaires mécontents mis aux arrêts", Radio France Internationale, 6 June 2017.

¹⁶ In January 2018, 1,000 Cameroon soldiers were deployed in Operation Deep Punch 2 at the side of the Nigerian army in Sambisa Forest in Borno state. Crisis Group interviews, security forces, diplomats and local authorities, Maroua, September-October 2017.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, mayor and vigilantes, Mokolo, Mozogo and Tourou, September 2017.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, local councillors, academics and humanitarian NGO personnel, Maroua, Mokolo, Mora, Kousseri and Fotokol, December 2017.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, presidents of vigilante groups in Mayo-Sava, Mora, September 2017.

96,000 Nigerian refugees (including 65,000 at the Minawao camp) and 238,000 IDPs. Of the region's four million people, 2.1 million needed humanitarian assistance in January 2018.²⁰ But the level of funding for humanitarian aid is low, while insecurity and the government's reluctance to provide escorts for humanitarian actors hampers access to vulnerable people.²¹ The situation of Nigerian refugees and IDPs therefore remains precarious.

The question of the voluntary return of Nigerian refugees staying at the Minawao camp and the deportation of other Nigerians is at the heart of discussions between representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Cameroonian government. Since 2015, Cameroon has forced more than 120,000 refugees outside the camp back to Nigeria, officially for security reasons.²² The UNHCR has protested this deportation and asked the authorities to establish screening centres on the border.²³

But the Cameroon government opposes this proposal. It fears that screening centres would encourage an influx of Nigerians aware that refugees at Minawao receive much better care and protection than IDPs in Nigerian camps.²⁴ In March 2017, Cameroon, Nigeria and the UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement on the voluntary return of refugees overland. But the return of the first group, scheduled for January 2018, was postponed indefinitely. In fact, fewer and fewer refugees are ready to return to Nigeria, meaning that Cameroon could have to host tens of thousands of refugees on a permanent basis.²⁵

Similarly, most of the 238,000 IDPs in the Far North, most of whom come from areas close to the border with Nigeria, want to stay in their new homes. The economy of the Nigerian state of Borno, on which they depended, is broken and their houses and villages have been destroyed. Therefore, they have no reason to return to their previous homes, especially as the rural areas close to the border are still insecure.²⁶ The presence of IDPs has changed the ethnic, religious and gender balance in the host areas and may lead to social conflicts.

Between 2014 and 2017, international partners substantially increased their support for refugees and IDPs, especially after the Oslo summit in February 2017, which aimed to increase humanitarian assistance and development aid to countries in the

²⁰ "Cameroun: aperçu des besoins humanitaires 2018", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), January 2018; and "Cameroon factsheet", HCR, May 2018. Several recent Crisis Group publications deal with this dramatic humanitarian situation. See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°133, *Cameroon's Far North: Reconstruction Amid Ongoing Conflict*, 25 October 2017; and Hans de Marie Heungoup, "The Humanitarian Fallout from Cameroon's Struggle Against Boko Haram", Crisis Group Commentary, 21 February 2017.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, senior official, UNHCR in Cameroon, Yaoundé, September 2017. See "Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples (MICS5) 2014 Cameroun", UNICEF, 2014.

²² Human Rights Watch has documented the refoulement and Cameroon security forces abuses against refugees outside the camp (torture, rape, inhumane and degrading treatment). "Cameroun : expulsions massives de réfugiés nigériens", Human Rights Watch, 27 September 2017.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, UNHCR officials, Yaoundé, March 2018.

²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, UNHCR officials, Yaoundé and Maroua, September 2017.

²⁵ "Cameroon, Nigeria and UNHCR sign a tripartite agreement on the return of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon", UNHCR, 2 March 2017.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, departmental manager of a humanitarian NGO working with IDPs, Kousséri, September 2017.

Lake Chad basin. But their contribution is not enough to meet the needs.²⁷ The Cameroon government has also been contributing to the care of Nigerian refugees since 2015, but does very little to assist IDPs. It has launched two modest emergency plans for the region, which still receives only a small part of the Public Investment Budget (PIB), although this share has been rising since 2014.²⁸ These efforts therefore fall short of what is needed, as estimated by the UN and local officials.²⁹

The protection and care of IDPs also poses a political problem. The elections in October 2018 represent a dual challenge: first, it will be difficult to organise a peaceful election in the border areas; secondly, organising ballots for IDPs and stateless persons is proving a headache.³⁰ But the agency responsible for organising the election, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), is playing down the problems: it says three quarters of IDPs are already on the electoral roll and there will be only a few thousand people without identity documents whose nationality will be difficult to establish.³¹ But the three-quarters figure is higher than the proportion of residents who have registered in the Far North – even in cities like Yaoundé and Douala, where registration is easier – and therefore seems unlikely.³²

²⁷ The West seems to be prioritising the Sahel. Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats, Brussels, November 2017.

²⁸ For a more detailed analysis, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Cameroon's Far North: Reconstruction Amid Ongoing Conflict*, op. cit. In 2017, the PIB was FCFA1,873 billion (\$3.5 billion), of which only FCFA53 billion (\$100 million) was allocated to the Far North. "Cameroun: BIP 2017 – Le journal des projets", economy, planning and local government ministry, Yaoundé, 3 January 2017.

²⁹ "Cameroun : aperçu des besoins humanitaires en 2018", OCHA, January 2018. In 2014, local authorities estimated the development needs of the three regions of the northern part of the country at FCFA1,600 billion (\$3 billion). "Plan d'urgence du grand Nord: les fausses promesses du gouvernement", *L'Œil du Sahel*, 20 December 2014.

³⁰ According to NGOs and humanitarian actors, there could be more than 200,000 stateless people. "Apatridie: la face cachée de la guerre contre Boko Haram", *Jeune Afrique*, 2 January 2018. Crisis Group interviews, UNHCR officials, NGO, local authorities and IDPs, Far North and Yaoundé, February-March 2018.

³¹ Most IDPs were already on the electoral roll before the conflict and those who were not have been systematically identified and registered by NGOs and UN agencies for humanitarian assistance purposes. Crisis Group interviews, regional and departmental delegations of ELECAM, mayors and deputies of the governing party, the RDPC, Kousséri and Maroua, February 2018.

³² "Statistiques d'inscriptions du 2 January au 20 June 2018", ELECAM, 22 June 2018.

III. Two Major Problems: Former Boko Haram Members and Vigilante Groups

Policy on former members of Boko Haram will be a decisive factor in stabilising the Far North. A well-designed reintegration policy could lead those who are still active to surrender. Getting it wrong, on the other hand, could deter combatants who are still active from giving up the fight and entrench their reliance on the jihadist group. The weakening of the group and the prospect of an end to the conflict also raises the question of the vigilante groups' future.

A. *Former Boko Haram Members and Prisoners: Finding a Balance Between Justice and Reintegration*

1. Former Boko Haram members

Since the Cameroon army engaged the jihadist group for the first time in 2014, more than 1,000 people have been imprisoned in Cameroon on suspicion of being a Boko Haram member or collaborator. Some individuals were taken prisoner during combat; others were arrested at their homes or while organising supplies for the group. More than 400 have since been acquitted and/or released. In September 2017, about 600 people remained in prison, many of whom were awaiting trial. The detention of Boko Haram suspects has worsened overcrowding in Maroua and Yaoundé prisons and saturated the courts.³³

Boko Haram members have been surrendering to the Cameroon authorities since October 2017. This trend provides an opportunity for the authorities to design a policy for dealing with these individuals, in particular to encourage others to follow suit. Imprisonment should not be the only response, especially since there is severe overcrowding in several prisons in the country, especially in Maroua. Reintegration is nevertheless a difficult task, especially because of the suspicions harboured by the local population.

In 2015, rumours began to circulate in the Far North about the willingness of some Boko Haram members to surrender. In December 2016 and January 2017, some of them approached traditional chiefs, members of vigilante groups or their own families to discuss terms for surrender. They said they were disillusioned, disappointed by the group's failure to provide them with arms and material support, and concerned about the counteroffensive launched by the Lake Chad countries.³⁴ But the unprecedented violence that Boko Haram inflicted on the region, in which combatants killed members of their own communities and families, means that local people, traditional chiefs, the army and vigilante groups are disinclined to welcome them back.³⁵

³³ Crisis Group interviews, prison officers and judges, Yaoundé and Maroua, September 2017.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, vigilante groups and traditional chiefs, Mokolo, Mozogo and Tourou, January-September 2017.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, vigilantes, security forces and local authorities, Mokolo and Mora, September 2017. According to a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2017, all sectors of the population were strongly opposed to the return of former members of Boko

These first contacts were unsuccessful. Twice during the first half of 2017, Boko Haram members tried to surrender but were killed by the army near Kolofata; others found themselves stranded between Cameroon and Nigeria, unable to rejoin Boko Haram or get back into Cameroon.³⁶ Rejected by their communities, they reportedly launched punitive raids. For example, in August 2017, a former municipal councillor for Mayo-Moskota at the head of a group of about 100 Boko Haram combatants is said to have contacted traditional chiefs there to negotiate terms of surrender and reintegration into the community. But the local population was opposed. A few days later, his group reportedly attacked several settlements there, including their own village, Kamjiji.³⁷

As of September 2017, the Cameroon government's position on this issue has changed under the influence of several factors: the participation of Cameroonian representatives at international meetings on the issue; examples of surrender in neighbouring countries; and the advocacy of senior Cameroon army officers who are said to have convinced the president that welcoming former Boko Haram combatants could help deprive the group of its lifeblood, while at the same time improving intelligence.³⁸

Traditional chiefs communicated this new position to Boko Haram members, through vigilante groups or the combatants' families who had remained in Cameroon. The army gave combatants a deadline of 31 December 2017 to surrender, before a new offensive by the Nigerian army, Deep Punch 2, in which 1,000 Cameroon soldiers would take part.³⁹ From October to December 2017, about 200 members of the jihadist group surrendered. Some deserted Boko Haram just before surrendering, while others had not been in contact with the group for several months. The situation in Nigeria, where Boko Haram has been under pressure and divided, also explains this wave of surrenders.

Only a small number of the thousands of Cameroonians recruited by Boko Haram between 2012 and 2016 surrendered. It is difficult to know whether this low number is due to the measures taken by the group to prevent desertion, losses suffered in combat or distrust of Cameroon's reintegration policy.⁴⁰

The second hypothesis seems more likely, as several Cameroonians in Boko Haram are persuaded that they will be executed if they surrender. Their fear is justified, because the Cameroonian military continues to be accused of abuses in the Far North, including of the civilian population. There have been few proper investigations of the soldiers involved.⁴¹ A horrific video showing Cameroonian soldiers apparently kill-

Haram. Most interviewees said they should be killed. Crisis Group interviews, UNDP researchers, Maroua, September 2017.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, military and police officers, Maroua and Mora, September-October 2017.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities and village chiefs, Mokolo and Mozogo, September 2017.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, local NGO worker and sub-prefect, Mora, January 2018.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior Cameroon army officers, Maroua and Mora, January 2018.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities and senior police and army officers, Mora and Maroua, February 2018.

⁴¹ "Cameroon: Amnesty report reveals war crimes in fight against Boko Haram, including horrific use of torture", Amnesty International, 20 July 2017. "Cameroun : accusé de déstabiliser le Cameroun, Amnesty International dément", Cameroon-info.net, 2 August 2017.

ing two unarmed women and two children, whom they accused of being Boko Haram members, circulated on the internet in July 2018.⁴² Originally labelling the video “fake news”, the government of Cameroon later opened an investigation and on 11 August announced the arrest of seven soldiers.⁴³ The fact that soldiers seem to be committing such crimes in public view – and even filming them – implies that killings may be a common occurrence in the Far North. A dozen other videos that are said to show similar abuses in the Far North are also available on the internet.

Those who have surrendered are almost all young men from Kolofata and belong to the Kanuri, the best represented ethnic group in Boko Haram. Many of them had been involved in combat but others had logistical tasks. Some said they had been kidnapped. Others had joined voluntarily with ideological motives – which they sometimes still have. Several in the latter category, notably combatants who killed people close to them, such as their fathers or village chiefs, maintain that they are ready to continue a violent struggle if they are given the means to do so.⁴⁴ Still others joined Boko Haram for social and economic reasons or simply for a taste of adventure. Generally, several of these motives coexist in the same person.⁴⁵ Most were members of the group for more than two years, and the great majority received weapons training.

Few Cameroonians seem to have held leadership positions in Boko Haram units or been members of Abubakar Shekau's *choura* (governing council). Most were apparently assigned minor tasks. From November 2017 to January 2018, Crisis Group met ten individuals who had surrendered. They all said they had no direct contact with Shekau or with any of Boko Haram's main leaders.⁴⁶ They seem to have been disappointed in their hope of improving their social status by joining the group. Having said that, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the position of Cameroonians within the group, the degree to which they were indoctrinated or their propensity for violence on the basis of the 200 individuals questioned by the military or the ten individuals interviewed by Crisis Group, who may not be representative of all the Cameroonians who joined Boko Haram.⁴⁷

⁴² “Au Cameroun, une vidéo montre des femmes et des enfants exécutés par des hommes en tenue militaire”, *Le Monde*, 19 July 2018.

⁴³ “Cameroun : sept militaires arrêtés après la diffusion d'une vidéo sur les exactions de l'armée”, *Jeune Afrique*, 11 August 2018. The government press release underlines “the will of the head of state (Paul Biya) to ensure that abuses that may have been committed by wayward soldiers are systematically investigated and, if the soldiers are proven guilty, punished”.

⁴⁴ The movement's hierarchy apparently told them they could have a weapon on a permanent basis if they killed people close to them. Crisis Group interviews, members of the security forces and former member of Boko Haram, Mora, February 2018.

⁴⁵ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°241, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, 16 November 2016, pp. 13-15.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, security forces, local authorities and former Boko Haram combatants, Mora, December 2017-February 2018.

⁴⁷ The motives of members of violent jihadist groups, their careers and what to do about the indoctrination of former members (often described as “deradicalisation”) is the subject of a wide debate. The reasons for joining jihadist groups are often political, social, economic and ethnic rather than religious, and may change on joining. The concept of radicalisation therefore does not satisfactorily explain the process. But ideological or religious de-indoctrination programs for former members of jihadist groups could discourage support for violent jihad. See Xavier Crettiez, “Penser la radicalisation.”

None of the Cameroonian combatants who surrendered turned in their weapons. Some soldiers and vigilante group members think that several hid their weapons before surrendering. Former combatants said they were provided with arms only during operations and that they gave them back to their leaders as soon as the operations were over. In the words of a senior officer in the Cameroon army, "there are some bloodthirsty people in this group, but to tell the truth, none of them seem to have any leadership capacity. The Cameroonian and Nigerian leaders are still at large".⁴⁸

Cameroon opted to encourage former combatants to return late in the day and arrangements for dealing with them were therefore non-existent until October 2017. The government still lacks a clear policy on this issue. There is very little discussion about restorative justice, or the need to prioritise the reconstruction of communities and the reintegration of former members over sanctions and imprisonment. There is no fully thought-out reintegration mechanism, and there are no official discussions between the government and its partners about funding such a program. An inter-ministerial committee on "deradicalisation" was created at the start of 2018, under the supervision of the ministry of local government administration and decentralisation.⁴⁹ The military generally conduct investigations into individuals who surrender, sometimes with the help of the police. The military separate out those who are combatants from the non-combatants, and those who continue to support jihadist violence, and are therefore considered high-risk, from those felt to be low-risk.

In October and November 2017, the former non-combatants who surrendered (about thirty young men and about fifty women and children) were sent to their home villages after publicly swearing on the Quran that they would never rejoin Boko Haram. Village residents were concerned about the return of these people, because early on, in October 2017, former combatants were also sent back to their villages. About twenty combatants were directly transferred to the MNJTF base in Mora but it was only in December that all former combatants were transferred from the villages to the MNJTF base.

After Cameroon's sudden change in policy, sub-prefects and traditional chiefs quickly tried to raise awareness among the region's inhabitants, but most residents of border settlements remain opposed to hosting or reintegrating former Boko Haram members, even non-combatants. A number of people think they are getting more attention than they deserve and only accept them reluctantly, under government pressure. Some villagers ostracise returning former members of the group, who fear the community will exact vengeance.⁵⁰

About 100 former combatants who surrendered have been held at the Mora base since December 2017, but they have permission to leave the base under surveillance.

Une sociologie processuelle des variables de l'engagement violent", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 66, no. 5 (2006), pp. 709-727; Andrea Brigaglia, "The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram", *Diritto e questioni pubbliche*, 2015, pp. 174-201; Peter Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization", *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 4 (2013), pp. 873-893.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, senior MNJTF officer, soldiers and vigilantes, Mora, February 2018.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior officials, Yaoundé, March 2018.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, residents, former Boko Haram member, village chiefs, regional social affairs delegation, Maroua, Mora, Tolkomari and Kerawa, January 2018.

They were initially even given freedom of movement in the hope that they would encourage other combatants to surrender. They reportedly have had access to telephones to speak with combatants who have remained in Nigeria. The transfer of most of them to Mémé, in Mayo-Sava, was scheduled for mid-2018. But the transfer has been delayed because the site has not yet been built. While waiting, the authorities are planning to transfer some of them to the secondary prison at Meri to relieve congestion at Mora.⁵¹ However, residents emphasise that Mémé has the biggest IDP camp in Mayo-Sava: making victims and executioners live close together could be deemed risky, even if the two camps are not exactly side by side.⁵²

In addition to those who have surrendered to the authorities, some former members of Boko Haram are secretly returning to Cameroon. The authorities have been aware of this phenomenon since 2015. According to a prefect, "we know that many Boko Haram members are secretly reintegrating all over the place. But we don't know to what extent. They infiltrate society and may poison it in the long term".⁵³ These people mainly had a logistical role or collaborated only occasionally with Boko Haram. Some reportedly live in Mora and elsewhere in Mayo-Sava. Others are said to be living in Maroua, Garoua (capital of the North region) and Ngaoundéré (capital of Adamaoua region). In November 2015, three former Boko Haram members from Amchidé were reportedly arrested in Mayo-Louti (North region) where they had been living for several months. In August 2017, the authorities questioned two former members who had been living in Garoua for several months.⁵⁴ Since June 2018, several Boko Haram members have secretly returned to Mayo-Sava.⁵⁵

2. Boko Haram's former prisoners

About 410 Cameroonians held prisoner by Boko Haram or living in Nigerian territory under its control, including 230 children, have returned to Cameroon since the start of 2017. Their situation is unusual and they are treated as IDPs.

At the start of February 2017, vigilantes in Mayo-Tsanaga picked up a family of fourteen children, four women and one man making their way home from Nigeria. These were the first of the Cameroonians held captive by the jihadist group to return in large numbers. In March, about 50 former prisoners returned to Zelevet, in Mayo-Moskota.⁵⁶ A gendarmerie investigation corroborated what the first returnees were saying. The governor of the Far North therefore decided to take responsibility for them as of April. A further 300 people arrived during the following months, all in Mayo-Moskota.⁵⁷ The former prisoners are being looked after by the social affairs

⁵¹ "Le Cameroun face au pari des désengagés de Boko Haram", *Le Monde*, 23 May 2018.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, vigilantes, security forces, local authorities and general public, Mora, January-February 2018.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, prefect, Far North, September 2017.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, academic, sub-prefect, diplomats and intelligence officer, Far North, Garoua and Yaoundé, September 2017 and February-March 2018.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group email correspondence, UN expert, July 2018.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, local councillors and residents, Mozogo, September 2017.

⁵⁷ Initially settled at a site near the Mozogo Town Hall, they were relatively free to move around. Some of them could come and go as far as Koza. This caused concern among the local population, who wanted them moved to another location. Following these complaints, the former prisoners were transferred in December to a converted site in Zamai, not far from the Minawo refugee camp.

ministry, the World Food Programme, the Red Cross and the Catholic movement, Civitas. Most of them took advantage of Nigerian army operations to escape, while others benefitted from their kidnappers' lack of vigilance.

The care and treatment of former prisoners poses social and security problems. Despite the efforts of traditional chiefs to raise awareness, the local population continues to doubt the former prisoners' innocence and some families find it difficult to accept their return. The children, most of whom were born in captivity, have often lost their fathers or even both parents. They are stigmatised and not made welcome.⁵⁸ Moreover, the gendarmerie suspects but cannot prove that about 30 former prisoners fought for or collaborated with Boko Haram.⁵⁹ Some of them have returned to Nigeria and may have rejoined the jihadist group.

It is not always easy to distinguish between former prisoners, people who were living in territories controlled by Boko Haram, passive or occasional collaborators and former members or combatants. Some former prisoners (not the 30 or so people suspected of complicity with the jihadists) were probably occasional collaborators. Having said that, none of these 410 individuals has admitted collaborating with Boko Haram. The security forces and humanitarian NGOs believe that the great majority were prisoners or people who just happened to be living in territories under the group's control.⁶⁰

B. *Vigilante Groups: A Change is Needed*

Villagers started forming self-defence groups in Cameroon in the 1960s. In the Far North, these groups were reactivated and new groups were created in 2014, under the name of vigilante groups, generally by the local authorities or the military, but sometimes at the initiative of local communities themselves.⁶¹ They increased in number after Boko Haram's first suicide attacks in Cameroon in July 2015. Placed under the authority of sub-prefects and traditional chiefs, they work closely with the military.

Vigilante groups have about 14,000 members in the Far North. Most of them have only rudimentary weapons (such as poisoned arrows, spears, machetes and hunting rifles) and only some of them have modern firearms. They play an essential role against Boko Haram.⁶² Vigilantes provide intelligence to Cameroonian forces, act as guides, identify suspects and work as translators during interrogations. They protect their villages, especially in the absence of the military, and they sometimes confront jihadist combatants in Nigerian territory. They are said to have foiled more than 80 suicide

Crisis Group interviews, local councillors and local authorities, Mokolo and Maroua, February 2018.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors and gendarmes, Maroua and Mokolo, September 2017 and January 2018.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, gendarmes, Mokolo, September 2017.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, security forces and humanitarian NGOs, Maroua and Yaoundé, February-March 2018.

⁶¹ "Arrêté régional portant création des comités locaux de vigilance dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord", June 2014.

⁶² See Crisis Group Africa Report N°244, *Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, 23 February 2017.

attacks in three years.⁶³ They have paid a high price for their commitment: more than 200 vigilantes have been killed since 2015.⁶⁴

Some vigilantes, however, commit abuses against residents or detainees and falsely accuse people of being Boko Haram members. Others collaborate with Boko Haram combatants, providing them with information, selling cattle they have stolen or supplying them with food and fuel.⁶⁵ One vigilante group is suspected of facilitating use of a market in Mayo-Sava for receiving stolen goods and selling goods looted by Boko Haram, to the extent that other groups are reluctant to cooperate with it.⁶⁶ Some vigilantes are reported to be letting Boko Haram enter Cameroonian territory in exchange for cash.⁶⁷

This situation raises the question of how to supervise the vigilante groups, which are now a key part of the security apparatus, and what to do about them now that an end to the conflict could be in view. Vigilante contacts with Boko Haram and suspicions that some may have a criminal past show that recourse to these groups in the fight against the jihadists presents a long-term security threat if the government does not support and supervise them appropriately. Some vigilantes have grown accustomed to using violence and are armed with modern weapons taken from the jihadist group. They could turn to petty or organised crime or fuel community violence after the conflict, especially considering that security forces and local authorities recognise that recruitment was not very selective – former cattle thieves and highway robbers are among their number.

⁶³ "Limani : 70 vigilantes attaquent Boko Haram au Nigéria", *L'Œil du Sahel*, 3 May 2016; "Au Cameroun : les soldats de l'ombre oubliés de la lutte contre Boko Haram", *Le Monde*, 30 March 2016.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group estimate based on reliable open sources and interviews in the Far North.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, vigilantes from Amchidé, Kerawa and Mora, Mora, September 2017.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

IV. First Steps to a Lasting Peace

The conflict in Cameroon's Far North has devastated local populations and worsened the region's underdevelopment and poor governance.⁶⁸ Since 2016, the conflict has become less acute. As this trend becomes more apparent, and despite sporadic attacks, the government and its international partners are starting to talk about post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction. An end to the violence is essential if these objectives are to be achieved. The government should publicly announce that it will protect surrendering Boko Haram members and afford them due process, and that non-combatants are unlikely to face jail time. Determining the role of vigilante groups in a post-conflict setting will also be decisive for a lasting peace. Without a demobilisation and reintegration policy, some vigilantes could fuel new insecurity.

Inter-ministerial discussions are underway, but the government has yet to adopt a clear policy on these issues and says it lacks the resources to do so.⁶⁹ International partners should provide technical and financial support to the government for the formulation and implementation of coherent policies.

A. *Justice and Reintegration for Former Members and Prisoners of Boko Haram*

The government should answer several questions before it can design a reintegration program for former members and prisoners of Boko Haram:

1. What judicial process would be appropriate for combatants and logisticians, perpetrators of serious crimes or otherwise, leaders and followers? Policy must take account of prison overcrowding, the slow pace of judicial proceedings and the saturation of the courts. Hundreds of suspected Boko Haram members in Maroua Prison are still awaiting trial.
2. Which former members should be made to attend de-indoctrination sessions that stress the importance of religious tolerance and non-violence?
3. Which former members can be reintegrated into their communities and by which mechanisms?

Up to 1,000 Cameroonians may still be members of Boko Haram. Among the 200 members who have surrendered, about 100 (children, non-combatants and non-indoctrinated members) could be reintegrated directly into their communities by using community justice and reparation mechanisms rather than subjecting them to formal judicial proceedings.⁷⁰ Public awareness campaigns and symbolic ceremonies could also help reintegrate the 410 former prisoners.

The authorities should conduct an investigation into the remaining 100 former combatants and refine procedures for distinguishing between indoctrinated individuals and opportunists; perpetrators of atrocities and those who have committed less

⁶⁸ Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior official at the presidency, security forces, Far North and Yaoundé, February-March 2018.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, local NGOs, local authorities and traditional chiefs, Mora and Kolofata, February-March 2018.

serious crimes; and leaders and followers. The small minority of indoctrinated individuals could be made to follow a rigorous de-indoctrination program, possibly in prison. Formal judicial proceedings should be opened against those suspected of atrocities – including some of the indoctrinated individuals. Those who are not accused of serious crimes could be reintegrated after serving short prison sentences and/or carrying out community work.

The military is conducting initial assessments of individuals who surrendered. These are preliminary criminal investigations, but they are also a first stage in dealing with former Boko Haram members who are not a priori guilty of acts of violence and who should not be subjected to formal judicial proceedings. These investigations should be expanded to involve police officers, International Red Cross and/or UN protection experts, as well as academics and researchers who are specialists on this question.

The government should do more to raise awareness of the jihadist group's recruitment strategies among communities – whose cooperation is essential for the success of reintegration. It should emphasise that forced recruitment and enrolment for economic reasons have been much more common than spontaneous enrolment for ideological motives. The media, especially community radios, can participate in public awareness campaigns, for example, by broadcasting statements by repentant combatants. The government should provide adequate support to host communities and negotiate the terms under which they would be ready to reintegrate former Boko Haram members.

Unless the government takes into account local aspirations, communities may reject former Boko Haram members. This in turn could create additional social tensions in the medium term. There is therefore a dual threat: first, that communities will reject former Boko Haram members because they fear and distrust them, causing them to rejoin the jihadists or other armed groups; second, that young people will view the reintegration program as a reward for terrorism and legitimisation of membership in Boko Haram and other armed groups which might establish themselves in the region.⁷¹

Policy should therefore provide incentives and mechanisms to reintegrate to former Boko Haram members, while at the same time providing communities with symbolic and material encouragement to host them. It should be possible to reconcile these two elements, for example, by supporting pastoralist, agricultural and commercial activities in host communities and providing subsidies to small enterprises that employ young people from host villages and the surrounding area as well as former members of Boko Haram undergoing reintegration.

Cameroon, its international partners, specialised NGOs and Lake Chad basin countries should discuss reintegration programs, so that countries in the region learn from each other's experiences and harmonise the main lines of their programs. The government should work with its international partners because their technical assistance and financial support are indispensable for the program to succeed. Some of them

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior officers, local authorities, vigilantes and young people in Mayo-Sava, Mora, February 2018.

are ready to fund reintegration projects but lament the government's lack of initiative. They could lose interest if they are not consulted at the policy formulation stage.⁷²

Harmonisation of policies for dealing with former members of Boko Haram is one of the concerns of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Senior LCBC officials worry that countries with well-designed reintegration policies may be swamped by surrendering combatants, although this does not seem likely at the moment. This is also a security issue. The LCBC fears that failure to harmonise reintegration policies will prolong the conflict. Most Boko Haram members who have surrendered have done so in their country of origin. If some countries oppose to the surrender of their nationals or do not introduce policies to encourage them to surrender, combatants will continue to do damage, probably beyond their countries of origin. Finally, the LCBC should continue discussions to help states reach agreement on common rules for the extradition of non-nationals who have surrendered.⁷³

An international workshop discussed this question in January 2018 at Maroua University and sub-regional conferences were held in Abuja in Nigeria, Diffa in Niger and N'Djamena in Chad, in 2017 and 2018. Cameroon could learn from the best practices discussed at these meetings and use them to help formulate policy. At the conferences, the Chadian representatives highlighted the importance of assessing Boko Haram's relationship with each particular community and territory. In Chad, the government found it less difficult to integrate 1,000 former Boko Haram members, partly because the communities in question had not been hit hard by jihadist violence compared to those in other countries in the region. The Nigeriens insisted on the need to define an appropriate legal framework before introducing any reintegration policy, while the Nigerians underlined the need for each country to adopt a clear position on the issue.

The reintegration program requires a dual judicial process. First, there should be a formal process, which should be as transparent as possible. In order that combatants who have surrendered are not added to the long list of suspected Boko Haram combatants who are awaiting trial, the judicial system should speed up proceedings in terrorism cases concerning Boko Haram and strengthen the courts in the Far North. Some former members will be given custodial sentences. A restorative justice process would be more suitable for others. Such a process would require them to perform community work, but would also draw on local dialogue and forgiveness mechanisms, including public confessions and symbolic ceremonies, such as swearing on the Quran.

The 2014 anti-terrorist law and the Penal Code need amending to facilitate the medium-term reintegration of members who have surrendered (not perpetrators of serious crimes). This law provides for condemning members and accomplices of terrorist groups to death or life imprisonment. Individuals found guilty of laundering products for terrorists or failing to denounce acts of terrorism can receive twenty years' imprisonment.⁷⁴ It could therefore prevent any community hosting or justice program for low-risk former members of Boko Haram. Alternatively, the president

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, Western ambassadors and EU representatives, Yaoundé, September 2017-March 2018.

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, European diplomat and LCBC colonel, N'Djamena, February 2018.

⁷⁴ Law N°2014/028 of 23 December 2014 on the repression of acts of terrorism.

of the republic could sign a decree laying out procedures for dealing with individuals who have surrendered. Such a decree could also allocate additional human and material resources to courts in the Far North and make provisions for speeding up judicial proceedings in Boko Haram-related cases.

Among former members of Boko Haram who have surrendered since 2017, a few still preach violent jihad. Public support for Boko Haram is limited and much lower now than at the start of the conflict in 2013-2014. Unrepentant jihadists would therefore be unlikely to make headway with propaganda and recruitment. But they do pose a threat to the people around them and should be required to attend a monitoring and conversation program with local imams and the public to impress upon them the virtues of religious tolerance and dissuade them from preaching recourse to religiously motivated violence. These programs, commonly called “deradicalisation” programs, are often limited in what they can achieve, but the rare initiatives implemented informally in Cameroon to date have been fairly successful. In the event of failure, these individuals should be monitored and put under surveillance, including if they are imprisoned.⁷⁵

Reintegration of former members of Boko Haram means that communities should receive support and local development programs should be implemented. This is going to be much more expensive than the care and protection of the 200 individuals who have surrendered and the 410 people who have escaped from territories under Boko Haram's control and returned to Cameroon. While presidential elections in October and the Africa Cup of Nations hosted by Cameroon in January 2019 are putting a strain on public finances, the government plans to allocate FCFA1 billion (\$2 million) for reintegration, which does not seem anywhere near enough.⁷⁶ Cameroon's international partners should commit to funding this initiative.

B. *Rethink the Role of the Vigilante Groups*

The government should start a discussion on the vigilante groups' role in a post-conflict context, including their demobilisation. To avoid the vigilante groups becoming a source of insecurity in the medium term, Cameroon should find a balance between the gradual dissolution of these groups and reintegration of their members, on the one hand, and regulation, improved support and supervision of the remaining groups, on the other. Careful definition of the remit of these auxiliary forces and improved support and supervision will reduce the risk of them straying from their task. In a post-conflict context, Cameroon's government should refrain from mobilising new groups and focus instead on developing intelligence and early warning networks to protect civilians.

A minority of the 14,000 vigilante group members should continue to play an auxiliary role to help the police force, especially in rural areas.⁷⁷ These groups have a

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, prison officers, justice ministry and humanitarian organisations, Yaoundé and Maroua, March-December 2017.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities and senior official at the presidency of the republic, Mora and Yaoundé, February and March 2018.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities and *lamido* of Maroua, Maroua and Mora, September 2017.

long history, essentially because of the need to compensate for the deficiencies in state security provision. In towns like Mora, local authorities believe it would be fair and effective to integrate vigilante group members into the municipal police force that is in the process of being created.⁷⁸ External accountability systems, including community oversight, could be used to supervise vigilante groups that remain in existence. Group members should have access to training in practical skills (intelligence, first aid, clearing landmines and getting rid of improvised explosive devices). The government could encourage cooperation between Cameroonian and Nigerian groups in certain areas, as happened in the past in Tourou, in Cameroon's Far North.⁷⁹

The government should demobilise and reintegrate groups and/or supervise their dissolution in areas where they are no longer needed, while registering former vigilantes who still have firearms. It should also establish projects to enable reintegration into civilian life, either by helping members find work in booming sectors of the local economy or by financing micro-projects in sectors such as trade and agriculture.

In addition, the justice system should conduct a transparent investigation of all alleged abuses by vigilantes and make public the court decisions.

Finally, several vigilante groups in border areas do not trust traditional chiefs or local authorities to administer donor funds by themselves.⁸⁰ NGOs should therefore also be involved in the disbursement of funds to support vigilante groups or reintegrate demobilised members.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, Mokolo and Mora, February 2018.

⁷⁹ Cooperation allowed the two groups to meet regularly, exchange information and even join forces in combat on two occasions to repel major attacks by Boko Haram. Cooperation ceased in 2017, because the Tourou groups said that Boko Haram had infiltrated the groups in Madagali, Nigeria. Crisis Group interviews, vigilante groups in Tourou, Mokolo, September 2017. "Au Cameroun, la montagne des persécutés de Boko Haram", *Le Monde*, 23 May 2018.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, vigilantes in Mayo-Sava, Mora, September 2017.

V. Conclusion

The Cameroonian government should become more proactive and formulate clear policies on how to deal with Boko Haram members who surrender or who are under arrest and vigilante group members. The government must rise to these challenges if it is to plan for an end to the conflict in the near future and prevent Cameroon's armed forces from getting bogged down in the Far North. Such a scenario would worsen the country's financial situation, which is already fragile.

Nairobi/Brussels, 14 August 2018

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, European Commission, Directorate General for Neighbourhood Enlargement Negotiations, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Korea Foundation, Oak Foundation, Omidyar Network Fund, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

August 2018

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2015

Special Reports

- Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).
- Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.
- Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

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