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The road leading from the small airport outside Bamenda in the North-West region of Cameroon and into the city has been the site for intense fighting and the area is now mostly abandoned. Burned and destroyed houses and cars are everywhere to be seen here in Mankon village. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

Joint statement on attacks on civilians in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon

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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) call upon all parties to the conflict in the

North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon to uphold international human rights and international humanitarian law and cease all attacks on civilians without delay.

The crisis destabilizing the English speaking parts of Cameroon has taken a worrying turn, with an increasing number of reports of targeted attacks against civilians, property and violations of the humanitarian space. More than 700,000 people are displaced, nearly 1 million children are out of school, and the humanitarian needs are mounting.

Survivors have shared testimonies of gruesome attacks that have left children orphaned, people homeless, and limited or cut off access to public facilities such as hospitals and schools. "I have been out of school for two years. The boys stopped us from going to school. They would beat you if you tried," said Charlene, a 23 year-old single mother. "My teacher wanted to give us private classes so we could sit our exams, but they took and tortured him".

The conflict would take even more from Charlene when her home was burned down by the military. "There was fighting and the boys hid in our corridor. The military set fire to the house to catch them. We became homeless. We lost everything."

Reports indicate that an incident on February 14 in Ngarbuh Village, North-West Cameroon, left 24 killed, most of whom were women and children. This is only one of several incidences of disturbing attacks, many of which remain undocumented and impact directly the civilian population.

NRC, the IRC and partners have also witnessed attacks on civilians during humanitarian distributions. "We cannot silently witness defenceless civilians, who are already suffering from extreme deprivation, being attacked while seeking lifesaving assistance," said Maureen Magee, NRC Regional Director for Central and West Africa. "People in need of humanitarian assistance must be allowed to access necessary support, without having to fear for their lives."

“This crisis needs more attention,” said Paul Taylor, IRC Regional Vice President for West Africa. “People have been forced to flee and sleep in open air without adequate food or clean water. Aid agencies need additional resources to meet the needs of those displaced by this crisis, and all parties need to ensure that aid agencies are able to access those who are in desperate need of basic services.”

The IRC and NRC call for the immediate cessation of attacks against civilians, the respect of humanitarian space, and that parties to the conflict allow unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations, in accordance with the law, to conduct a coordinated response to reach the people most in need.

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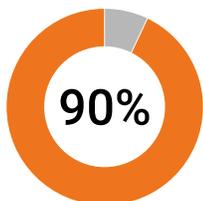
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