



Will Cameroon Grant Clemency to Anglophone Separatists?

OE Watch Commentary: Since the start of the Ambazonia crisis in Cameroon in 2017, Anglophone speakers have protested against perceived favoritism towards French speakers in the country. This has led to rising levels of organized violence between the state and the separatists. The accompanying excerpted French-language article from *La Afrique Tribune* discusses a possible measure of leniency from the government towards the arrested separatist leaders, which would represent a change from the government's generally harsh stance towards the separatists and could lead to a possible resolution to the crisis.

According to the article, the legal proceedings of 289 separatists are soon to take place and 210 separatists have already been released by a military court. The article notes these releases have been the result of presidential clemency that was expedited before the Christmas holiday. However, the article notes that the leader of the separatists, Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, who declared himself to be the president of Ambazonia, has not been mentioned as part of the clemency program. He was arrested in Nigeria in 2017, along with his declared ministers, and extradited to Cameroon.

The article states that releasing Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe could lead to an opening for peace negotiations with the separatists. However, according to the article, his applications for release have been consistently turned down. The article also quotes the director of a human rights group who supports his release from prison for the purpose of reconciliation, but also suggests that it would be an unprecedented gesture before the new year. Although Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe was not released from prison during the holiday season and still stands trial, the article expresses optimism that there can be a non-violent resolution to the Ambazonia crisis if the government takes conciliatory measures towards the separatists, including beginning dialogue with the imprisoned leaders.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

“A gesture for the new year could pave the way for a dialogue and be the element that would undo this crisis that has claimed many lives.”



Southern cameroon map.

Source: CIA World Factbook, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_cameroon_map.JPG, Public Domain.

Source: “Grâce présidentielle pour le “président autoproclamé” de l’Ambazonie? (Presidential pardon for the “self-proclaimed president” of Ambazonia?)” *La Afrique Tribune*, 16 December 2018. <https://afrique.latribune.fr/politique/2018-12-16/cameroun-grace-presidentielle-pour-le-president-autoproclame-de-l-ambazonie-801265.html>

The presidential clemency is a gesture of appeasement but does not affect the self-proclaimed “president” of Ambazonia. Since the special hearing under the Presidential Ordinance, releases have increased. This is an early Christmas present that is interpreted as at least a gesture of clemency. But this “grace” has not benefited leaders of the movement including Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, leader of the Southern Cameroon National Congress (SCNC), the radical branch of the Liberation Movement of Southern Cameroon (LMSC), who proclaimed himself “president” of Ambazonia.

Arrested in January 2017 in Nigeria with 46 of his “ministers”, he was extradited to Cameroon and then jailed at Kondengui Central Prison in Yaoundé. Several times postponed, his trial is still before the court, which has refused all his applications for provisional release or final release. Some separatists believe that his release could perhaps allow a resolution of the crisis that has erupted in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon. One might be surprised to think of a presidential pardon for the separatist leaders as a gift during the end-of-year speech of Paul Biya. A gesture for the new year could pave the way for a dialogue and be the element that would undo this crisis that has claimed many lives.