

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

CAMEROON: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

1 April 2007

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 185 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 1/2007) is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

Activities undertaken are aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

The Situation

On 3 March 2007, a conflict occurred between two agricultural ethnic groups – Bali-Nyonga and the Bawock – in the North West Province of Cameroon. The unrest resulted in the displacement of about 2,309 people, representing almost the entire Bawock community which is a minority in the region. The ethnic unrest started when the Bali-Nyonga, who first arrived in the locality, claimed that they were the legitimate landowners and wanted to chase away the Bawock, with whom they have been sharing the same land for close to half a century. The Bawock in turn consider the Bali-Nyonga as Nigerians who invaded their land.

Though the conflict claimed no human life, the material damage inflicted is unprecedented in that locality, which is situated 450 kilometres west of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. The Bawocks were violently chased away from their homes, leaving behind all their belongings. The Bali-Nyongas burned down to ashes all houses belonging to the Bawocks after ransacking them one after the other. The internally displaced Bawocks have been welcomed in Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province (40 km from their home town and 400 km from Yaoundé). The Bamenda Congress Hall is temporarily being used as a transit centre hosting the displaced persons who have been rendered homeless.

This ethnic unrest started just when the 2007 agricultural campaign was about to begin, and barely three months to the period of hardship. The Cameroonian ministry in charge of disaster management (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization), through its Department of Civil Protection, has declared that all displaced persons are vulnerable and need to be treated as such. They comprise 243 men, 343 women and 1,723 children, including 194 sick persons and 72 elderly persons above the age of 65 years.

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According to an evaluation report of Cameroon Red Cross Society, the last population census had counted about 5,000 Bawocks. The report further indicates that due to difficulties in accessing the main Bawock village, Red Cross volunteers were not able to count displaced persons who ran into neighbouring villages such as Bengwi, Pinyin, Bafoucho, Ashow and Mbou. This means that the number of displaced persons (2,309) that was given in Bamenda on 11 March 2007 could increase with time. The report ends by stating that the urgent needs of the displaced persons include food, non-food items (including cooking utensils) and temporary shelter.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

As soon as Cameroon Red Cross Society authorities were informed of the situation, they deployed a team to carry out an evaluation on the field, with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). After the evaluation, national society donated some items to the Crisis Committee put in place by Government. The donation included 50 blankets, 40 mattresses, 100 buckets, 100 kg of rice (two bags), 2 cartons of tomatoes and 10 cartons of soap (600 pieces), all amounting to CFA 1 million (about CHF 2,500). Cameroonian authorities expressed their appreciation when receiving the donation.

On its part, the disaster management department of the Federation's Central Africa sub-regional office (CASRO) held working sessions with ICRC and the disaster management department of Cameroon Red Cross Society.

At the field, the local committee of Cameroon Red Cross Society has been working with the government Crisis Committee. The national headquarters of the national society has instructed the local committee to closely follow up the situation and give feedback for quick action to be taken.

At national level, the Civil Protection Department (DPC) invited Cameroon Red Cross Society to take part in a key meeting of Cameroon's humanitarian partners. The meeting was held on 23 March 2007 to seek support, within the framework of the emergency phase of intervention, and to look for sustainable solutions to the crisis (rehabilitation). During the meeting, DPC officers shared a faxed message from the senior divisional officer of the affected locality, which described the evolution of the situation, stressing that the figures and vulnerabilities were the same as those obtained on 11 March 2007.

Government action

Further to the action taken by DPC, the government has been conducting missions in the field to advocate for peace and reconciliation between the Bali-Nyonga and the Bawock communities. The government has particularly been appealing the Bali-Nyonga to reconcile with their brothers and neighbours, the Bawock.

During the Crisis Committee meetings, government authorities were optimistic that the conflict will surely come to an end and peace will be restored in the locality. However, they expressed fears of the serious degradation of the humanitarian situation in the region if it takes long for everything to return to normal. Their fears are justified by the fact that the displaced persons are without food, with no basic goods, no seeds, and are far away from their arable land, thus extremely vulnerable. The authorities added that the existing promiscuity in Bamenda, coupled with the arrival of the displaced persons, might create serious health problems in the region given that the existing health facilities were not built to cater for such an inflow of persons at a time and for long.

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

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