

## **Southern Cameroons Liberation: Let us Weigh our Options**

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Fellow compatriots, in this magnanimous struggle for the liberation of our Southern Cameroons territory we have seemed at some points to be mixing up issues, combining sentiments and facts and by so doing we complicate the struggle and make it even more difficult to define the processes for what we want to achieve. Some of the preconceptions we carry along are sometimes easier said than they are practically achievable. The two important issues that I like to highlight are the following: The first issues relates to the preconception that once we secure a federation with La République du Cameroun that will pave the way to independence. With the hopes that the United Nations and the international would eventually come to our assistance, I like to also point out as the second issue that getting into a federation is an entirely domestic arrangement, which according to the international law principle on non-interference forbids external interference.

It is important to note that a federation is not a pre-requisite to achieve independence under international law. On the contrary, independence is an acceptable although not an absolute precondition for getting into a federation. On the one hand, independence is an acceptable precondition for getting into a federation in the sense that two independent states can mutually agree to come together and form a federation. When that happens (obviously through the signing of a treaty) the federated states become a new state, born and recognised by international law due to the fact that territorial boundaries have shifted. Independence on the other hand is not an absolute precondition for getting into a federation as I have indicated in the sense that a sovereign state can decide to carve out its national territory into federal constituencies. In this instance, the international boundaries of the state does not change and therefore no new state is said to have been born and the federal arrangement does not affect international law.

Let me illustrate this point further. In 1961 the independence of Southern Cameroons was inevitable as had already been decided by the United Nations. It was based on the fact that Southern Cameroons was to achieve independence that the condition was attached to either join Nigeria or La République du Cameroun. Even though Southern Cameroons was administered by the British as part of Nigeria, it could easily have been incorporated into Nigeria but the independence status it was entitled to as a state barred such an arrangement.

When it came to determining where to belong, the people of Southern Cameroons decided to federate with La République du Cameroun as an independent state. Fortunately, no treaty was signed, meaning that the international boundaries between La République du Cameroun and Southern Cameroons remained unaffected.

In our present struggle for liberation, based on historical experience, if we succeed to secure a federal arrangement with La République du Cameroun a treaty would need to be signed to seal the deal. Once that is done, the new federal state that would have been born must in accordance with Article 102 of the United Nations Charter notify the United Nations Secretariat of the new international boundaries that would have been established. In the event that Southern Cameroons subsequently becomes dissatisfied with the federal arrangement, Article 103 of the United Nations Charter bars her from revoking the

arrangement established under Article 102. What this means is that once a federal arrangement is established Southern Cameroons becomes an integral part of the federal state. Following the principle of territorial integrity, which international law upholds, any attempt to break away from that arrangement becomes a secessionist initiative, which may only be achieved under extreme circumstances.

As indicated above, getting into a federation is an entirely domestic arrangement, which does not necessarily call for any external involvement. For instance, after the 1961 referendum the United Nations had no further involvement in the federal arrangement between Southern Cameroons and La République du Cameroun. When we uphold as a central demand to negotiate with La République du Cameroun for a federal system of government or better still to restore the federal arrangement that was supposed to have been established in 1961, and hoping to get the United Nations and the international community on our side for assistance, we need to think again. International politics does not work the way we sometimes imagine.

If we seriously want the United Nations and the international community to hear our cry and come to our assistance, we need to change our language and start speaking the language that they understand. We need to tell the world that since 1961, Southern Cameroons has been annexed or re-colonised by La République du Cameroun. We need to tell the international community about the massive human rights violations that La République du Cameroun has committed against the peoples of Southern Cameroons. We need to remind the United Nations that the re-colonisation of Southern Cameroons by La République du Cameroun is a crime against humanity, which compromises La République du Cameroun's right of territorial sovereignty and therefore guarantees international protection to the peoples of Southern Cameroons based on the principle of responsibility to protect.

However, if we think that the Southern Cameroons problem is just marginalisation by La République du Cameroun then that is a domestic problem that can be resolved between the government of La République du Cameroun and the marginalised peoples of Southern Cameroons. In that way we need to acknowledge that the only way out is to engage with the government in constructive dialogue to secure an effective federal arrangement. However, we need to bear in mind that La République du Cameroun is still a colonised territory under France and that any negotiations for a federation in Cameroon directly involves France as the principal decision maker and therefore, be ready to accept whatever they may offer as they have done in the past 55 years. We are just a minority while they form the majority and have the government, remember?

As a minority within La République du Cameroon with very slim possibilities of securing genuine equality in any negotiation, would it not be wise to state our case as it actually is, as a violation of international law and lobby for the support of the United Nations and the international community?

Just thinking out of the box.