



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	Cameroon
Main subject	Rivalry between the Bassa and Bamileke ethnic groups
Question(s)	Information on the Bassa (Basa/Basaa) ethnic group. In particular: Information on discrimination and ill-treatment against the Bassa group, in central Cameroon, from 2010 until present Information on conflicts between the Bassa and Bamileke (Bamiléké) groups, in central Cameroon, from 2010 until present
Date of completion	24 July 2018
Query Code	Q98
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

Disclaimer

This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).

The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities.

The answer was finalised on 24 July 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.



COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Information on the Bassa (Basa/Basaa) ethnic group

As stated in the official website of the Presidency of the Republic, 'Cameroon has more than 240 tribes which are found in three main ethnic groups; Bantus, Semi-Bantus and Sudanese'¹. In this source, the Bassa ethnic group – also spelled Basa or Basaa – is referred to as one of the main Cameroonian tribes, belonging to the so called Bantus ethnic family:

'The most notable tribes are:

BANTUS: Beti, Bassa, Bakundu, Maka, Douala, Pygmies...

SEMI-BANTUS: Bamileke, Gbaya, Bamoun, Tikar...

SUDANESE: Fulbe, Mafa, Toupouri, Shoa-Arabs, Moundang, Massa, Mousgoum...'²

The World Atlas – an online portal launched in 1994 to provide information on world geography³ – also associates the Bassa with Bantu peoples, through their affiliation with the Douala:

'The Douala are a Bantu coastal Cameroonian ethnic group who are highly educated due to long-term contact with the Europeans. The Douala shares a common origin with people such as the Ewodi, Isubu, Batanga, Bakoko, and the Bassa forming 12% of the total population. The primary language spoken is Douala. The Douala traces their origin to Gabon or Congo after which they moved to their present locations. During their movement, they displaced the Bassa and Bakoko who they later assimilated'⁴.

The UK Home Office Country of Origin Information Report on Cameroon (2008), which also mentions the presence of an estimated 250 ethnic groups across the country, locates the Bassa group in the coastal area. Among the five large regional-cultural groups the report identifies, the Bassa are included among the coastal tropical forest peoples, primarily located in the South-West part of the country:

'It has an estimated 250 ethnic groups from five large regional-cultural groups: Western highlanders, including the Bamileke, Bamoun, and many smaller entities in the North-west; coastal tropical forest peoples, including the Bassa, Douala and many smaller entities in the SouthWest; southern tropical forest peoples, including the Ewondo, Bulu, and Fang (all Beti subgroups), Maka and Pygmies (called Bakas); predominantly Islamic peoples of the northern regions (the Sahel) and central highlands, including the Fulani; and the 'Kirdi', non-Islamic or recently Islamic peoples of the northern desert and central highlands'⁵.

¹ Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, *Presentation of Cameroon*, n.d. ([url](#)).

² Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, *Presentation of Cameroon*, n.d. ([url](#)).

³ WorldAtlas is a Canada-based information portal with educational purposes, which has been present online since 1994. As stated in its website, it 'covers topics that reach beyond geography to include sociology, demography, environment, economics, politics, and most recently, travel'. For further information, see: WorldAtlas, *About WorldAtlas*, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁴ WorldAtlas, *Ethnic Groups of Cameroon*, last update: 7 June 2018 ([url](#)).

⁵ UK Home Office Border and Immigration Agency, *Country of Origin Information Report – Cameroon*, 16 January 2008, p. 7 ([url](#)).



Such information is corroborated by the 2013 report of the UN General Assembly's Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák⁶, who adds they also inhabit the Centre Region:

'the population comprised ethnic groups defined on the basis of dialect, in five major groups: the Bantu, in the South, Littoral, South-West, Centre and South-East provinces (now regions), comprising the Beti, Bassa, Douala, Yambassa, Maka, Kaka, Bakweri, Bali and others; the semi-Bantu, in the West and North-West, including the Bamileke, Bamoun, Tikar and Bali; the Sudanese, in the Adamawa, North and Far North, including the Mundang, Toupouri, Kotoko, Kapsiki, Mandara, Haoussa, Matakam, Bornouam and Massa; the Peulh, inhabiting the same regions as the Sudanese; and the Choa Arab people in the Lake Chad basin'⁷.

The 'Joshua Project' – an online portal providing regularly updated information on ethnic groups from all over the world⁸ – provides an estimated number of the Bassa population and some details on their culture and society. According to the project, the approximately 418,000 Bassa people speak the Bassa language and are principally Christians (73%)⁹. With regards to their location in the country, it affirms they inhabit the following *départements* of 4 regions (Littoral, Centre, South and West):

'Littoral region: Nkam and Sanaga-Maritime divisions; Centre region: spread throughout Nyong-and-Kélé division; South region: Océan division; West region: Menoua division'¹⁰.

2. Information on discrimination and ill-treatment against the Bassa group and on conflicts between the Bassa and the Bamileke, in central Cameroon, from 2010 until present

Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no specific and reliable information could be found on the discrimination and ill-treatment against the Bassa group nor on conflicts between the Bassa and Bamileke groups, in central Cameroon, from 2010 until present.

Among all sources consulted, information has mainly been found on a generalised tribalisation of the country's social and political life, as well as ethnic tensions over economic and religious issues, also involving the Bassa and the Bamileke.

In an academic paper drafted in September 2007, Professor Molem Sama from the University of Buea in Cameroon¹¹, refers to the ethnical and cultural cleavages across the country as a critical aspect of the country's political landscape and provides some information on their root causes and implications in the country's social fabric. In his paper – published on the web portal of the 'African Centre for the

⁶ As stated in the OHCHR's website, 'Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye (Hungary) was appointed Independent Expert on minority issues by the Human Rights Council and assumed her functions on 1st August 2011. She was renewed as Special Rapporteur on minority issues in 2014, a position which she held until 31 July 2017'. See: OHCHR, *Rita Izsák-Ndiaye*, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁷ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Independent Expert on minorities issues, Rita Izsák*, 31 January 2014, p. 4 ([url](#)).

⁸ The 'Joshua Project' is a US-based research project launched in 1995 to provide online data and information on the world's ethnic people groups, focusing on their 'Christian status, persecution rankings, human development index, economic levels and religious makeup'. For further information, see: Joshua Project, *What is Joshua Project?*, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁹ Joshua Project, *Bassa – People Groups speaking*, n.d. ([url](#)).

¹⁰ Joshua Project, *People-in-Country Profile*, n.d. ([url](#)).

¹¹ Dr Molem C. Sama is the Head of the Department of Economics and Management of the University of Buea in Cameroon. Source: ACCORD (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes), *People – Molem Sama*, n.d. ([url](#)).



Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)', a South Africa-based civil society organisation¹² – the author claims that:

'[s]ince reunification in 1961, inter-community and ethnic conflicts have been common in Cameroon. Inter-community or ethnic conflicts (with various degrees of intensity) have erupted in almost all of the ten administration provinces of the country. The ethnic/regional cleavages have crystallised since the institutionalisation of 'autochthonisation', or 'politics of belonging'. These conflicts are consistent with the drive of 'belonging'¹³.

The author continues:

'Ihonvbere (1994) argues that in a context where the state is absent, "the masses turn to ethnic, religious, and philanthropic organisations for hope, leadership, self-expression and support", thus accounting for the bloom in associational and ethnic groupings in Cameroon. For example, in the logic of South West indigenes, the North West Elite Association (NOWELA) is purportedly protecting the interests of North Westerners. The La'kam stand for the ideals of the Bamilekes of the West, while the Essigan represent the interests of the Betis from the South, East and Centre. The SAWA and revitalised Ngondo cater for the interests of Bassas and Doualas'¹⁴.

A 2010 report from International Crisis Group entitled 'Cameroon: fragile state?' makes reference to a 'politicisation of community relations, both at local and national levels' conducive to tensions and conflict¹⁵. As stated in the report:

'Cameroon has a certain ethnic division of labour – some groups are strong in trade, others have done well in formal employment, for example. Although these distinctions are often more perception than reality, some in both regime and opposition use them to portray social and economic divisions as communal ones, and thereby to build local political bases. As a result, people often believe that one group is being favoured above another, that it may be "stealing" land, employment or other benefits'¹⁶.

International Crisis Group continues on the consequences of perceived socio-economic divisions in the country:

'This communal view of economic advantage and disadvantage is embedded in the way the country is governed and can be seen in tensions between Bamileke and Douala in Douala city, between Fulani and non-Fulani groups in the north, between Anglophones and Francophones and so forth. It originates in the "regional balance" politics of the 1970s but is now encouraged by the regime through its emphasis on the different rights of indigenous and "stranger" groups and its politicisation of local traditional leaders. This is highly dangerous, as it can act as a

¹² The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a South Africa-based civil society organisation which has been working since 1992 to contribute to conflict resolution in Africa. For further information, see: ACCORD (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes), *About ACCORD*, n.d. ([url](#)).

¹³ Sama M., *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa*, 25 September 2007 ([url](#)).

¹⁴ Sama M., *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa*, 25 September 2007 ([url](#)).

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Fragile State?*, Report N°160, 25 May 2010, p. 2 ([url](#)).

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Fragile State?*, Report N°160, 25 May 2010, p. 26 ([url](#)).



multiplier of conflict in the event of crisis. The politicisation of community relations, both at local and national levels, reduces capacity for managing conflict¹⁷.

As concerns the Bamileke in particular, the 2005 'Encyclopaedia of the World's Minorities'¹⁸ describes them as a rich and economically influential minority targeted by other ethnic groups:

'The Bamileke have primarily been successful farmers, growing maize, yams, peanuts, and some livestock. As a result, they control much of the economy in Cameroon. Although this makes them a powerful minority group, the Bamileke and other groups from the Grassfields have been targets of animosity¹⁹.

Such information is corroborated by other sources, among which 'Minority Rights Group International' (MRGI)²⁰. According to its 2017 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples' for Cameroon: 'Bamiléké are noted and frequently resented for their success in farming and commerce'²¹. Similarly, the UK Home Office specifies, in its 2018 report on Cameroon, that 'Bamileke run most businesses wherever they settle, creating local resentment, which is often exploited by politicians'²².

Although economically successful²³, the Bamileke are 'generally excluded from political processes, and their interests are poorly represented by elected officials', as stated in the Freedom House 2018 report on Cameroon²⁴.

The sources consulted confirm that tensions against the Bamileke also involve the political sphere. In a 2000 academic paper, researcher Yvette Monga²⁵ refers to the practice of political elites from the majority party, the 'Cameroonian Popular and Democratic Party' (CPDM), to reach their respective villages to raise support for their candidates²⁶. She adds that such a practice 'can be interpreted ultimately as a stratagem aimed at preventing Bamileke's alleged political influence from spreading all over the country'²⁷.

Tensions arose when Bamileke candidates were elected at local level outside the territories of which they are traditionally considered native. Although such events took place before 2010, they are worth mentioning as they provide an insight into the ethnic rivalry in the country, in particular against the Bamileke. In an academic paper published in 2006, on ACCORD (African Centre for the Constructive

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Fragile State?*, Report N°160, 25 May 2010, p. 26 ([url](#)).

¹⁸ As written in the preface, 'the *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities* includes the work of over 300 contributors from 40 countries specializing in areas as varied as anthropology, cultural studies, ethnography, history, international relations, linguistics, political science, and religion'. Skutsch C. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities*, 2005, p. xxiii ([url](#)).

¹⁹ Skutsch C. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities*, 2005, p. 261 ([url](#)).

²⁰ MRGI is a London-headquartered NGO with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and observer status with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. It was founded in 1969 with a first major grant from the Ford Foundation to defend the oppressed minorities' rights worldwide. For more information, see: MRG, About Us, n.d. ([url](#)).

²¹ MRGI, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Cameroon*, last update: September 2017 ([url](#)).

²² UK Home Office Border and Immigration Agency, *Country of Origin Information Report – Cameroon*, 16 January 2008, p. 58 ([url](#)).

²³ Sama M., *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa*, 25 September 2007 ([url](#)).

²⁴ Freedom House, *Cameroon*, 20 April 2018, p. 3 ([url](#)).

²⁵ Yvette Djachechi Monga is a researcher affiliated to the 'Center for African Studies and Conflict Management Programs', Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., USA. For further information on the author, see: Brill Online Books and Journals, *The Politics of Identity Negotiation in Cameroon*, n.d. ([url](#)).

²⁶ Monga Y., « *Au village !* », in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, n° 160, 2000 ([url](#)).

²⁷ Monga Y., « *Au village !* », in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, n° 160, 2000 ([url](#)).



Resolution of Disputes) web portal, professor Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo, from the University of Buea in Cameroon²⁸, reports on a protest which took place in Douala in 1996, in which Bassa members were involved:

‘On the 10th of February 1996 three thousand indigenous inhabitants of Douala City (Duala, Bassa and Bakoko), who are collectively known as Sawa, marched in protest of the election of non-natives as mayors in "their city". According to the organisers of the protest march, they were dissatisfied with the fact that out of five councils in which the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party won in the municipal elections of January 21, 1996 only one of the mayors was an indigene. The Sawa interpreted this as proof of Bamileke hegemonic intentions, the Bamileke constituting the bulk of the SDF party membership and a demographic majority in Douala city²⁹’.

In the aftermath of these elections, as reported by the same source, some measures were taken by the government, which were interpreted by the Bamileke as an attempt to undermine the democratic results. Delegates with supervisory and over-riding powers over elected candidates were appointed by the government in towns considered ‘Sawa’ (collective name for Duala, Bassa and Bakoko) where the SDF party (largely composed of Bamileke) won. The government’s initiative was welcomed by the Sawa, who “congratulate[d] the head of state” for heeding their call to put a check to the hegemony of non-natives in "their cities"³⁰.

Another source also refers to political friction between the Bamileke and the Sawa in Yaoundé (Centre region). Although no clear indications are provided on when such events happened, the source reports on tensions in the capital’s 5th District Council, where the government annulled the results of the elections, which had resulted in an absolute majority for the SDF party³¹.

The same source specifies that tensions between the different ethnic groups in Cameroon are mainly related to ‘inequalities of access to land, political positions and control of commercial activities’³². In this regard, two articles – published by the ‘Inter Press Service’ (IPS)³³ – report on a tragic confrontation that took place in October 2006, in Nyokon, a small town in Cameroon’s Centre region, between the indigenous inhabitants and the Bamileke³⁴. According to IPS:

‘In the past months alone, ethnic tensions have taken a severe toll. On 17 October [2006], a land dispute in Nyokon in the Centre Province pitted indigenous people against the Bamilekes – who are originally from West Province. The violence caused the death of six persons’³⁵.

²⁸ Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo is an associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Buea in Cameroon. Source: African Books Collective, *Author & Editor - Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo*, n.d. ([url](#)).

²⁹ Vubo E. Y, *Management of Ethnic Diversity in Cameroon against the Backdrop of Social Crises*, in Cahiers d’études africaines, n° 181, 2006, ([url](#)).

³⁰ Vubo E. Y, *Management of Ethnic Diversity in Cameroon against the Backdrop of Social Crises*, in Cahiers d’études africaines, n° 181, 2006, ([url](#)).

³¹ Sama M., *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa*, 25 September 2007 ([url](#)).

³² Sama M., *Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa*, 25 September 2007 ([url](#)).

³³ The Inter Service Press (IPS) was founded in 1964 by Italian-Argentinean economist Roberto Savio and Argentinean political scientist Pablo Piacentini to fill the information gap between Europe and Latin America. Today IPS is an international news agency specialised on providing news on development, environment, human rights and civil society, with a focus on countries and peoples from the world’s south. For more information, see: IPS, *Our history*, n.d. ([url](#)).

³⁴ IPS, *La montée des conflits interethniques inquiète de plus en plus*, 30 October 2006 ([url](#)).

³⁵ IPS, *Little Unity in Diversity*, 21 November 2006, ([url](#)).



Tensions against the Bamileké have also affected the religious sphere. A report on the role of Cameroon's Catholic Church in the Anglophone crisis of 2017, published by the International Crisis Group in April 2018, explains that '[c]onflicts within the Catholic Church often have an ethnic dimension, pitting priests from the influential Bamiléké community against those hailing from other groups. Rivalries over postings and promotions are common'³⁶. The report refers, in particular, to a fact which took place in 1987, involving members from the Bassa community in Douala. As claimed in the report, 'a group of mainly ethnic Bassa priests in the Douala archdiocese wrote a memorandum to the Vatican criticising the appointment of Bamiléké bishops to dioceses outside their region of origin'³⁷.

One of the sources consulted mentions that a similar fact took place in Yaoundé. According to the source, in July 1999, some Catholic believers in the community contested the appointment of a Bamileké bishop, Mgr. André Wouking. The author describes such an event as a reaction to what is perceived as a 'bamilékisation' of the Cameroonian Church hierarchy³⁸.

Additional and more recent information on tensions between the Bamileke and other groups, including the Bassa, could not be found amongst all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query.

³⁶ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue*, 26 April 2018, p. 3 ([url](#)).

³⁷ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue*, 26 April 2018, p. 3 ([url](#)).

³⁸ Université de Montréal, Faculté de théologie, *Pour une Eglise-communauté-de-paix dans un contexte multiethnique conflictuel. Le cas du Cameroun*, thèse doctoral par Galbert Kouyoum, Juin 2009, p. 4, p. 125 ([url](#)).



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