Arbre à palabre, Palaver tree

CONSTITUTIONAL **OPTIONS**

PROJECT

PEACE POLICY PAPER

PATHWAYS TO A PEACE PROCESS

INFORMATION NOTE

This Policy Paper starts out by advocating for the Government of Cameroon to craft and adopt a Comprehensive Peace Strategy for the NW&SW crisis, as the organizing instrument to focus efforts on its resolution. It suggests that such a Peace Strategy should constitute Government's 360 degrees Peace Offer on the crisis in 2 Regions. The Strategy should include policy reform commitments to defuse tensions in conflict prone Sectors (official languages, education sub-systems, and legal traditions), and approaches to peace-making through mediation, reducing the allure of armed activities, and amnesty, national reconciliation, and inter-community cohesion.

It proposes that the Strategy be captured in a single High-Level Document (comparable to the Recovery & Peace Consolidation Strategy 2018-2022 for the 3 Northern and East regions), approved at the highest level of the Executive and be implemented through a whole-of-Government approach. It should include an Implementation Matrix, and have its activities reflected in Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks, Annual Program Budget Objectives, and development partner priorities.

The Policy Paper then makes extensive reference to global studies and scholarship, in a bid to answer several inquiries about the mechanics of resolving intra-State conflicts, including separatist conflicts. It draws upon a study of 70 different separatist conflicts worldwide over a 50-year period in the second half of the 20th century, to show that separatist conflicts are most likely to end through some form of peace agreement, than through outright military victory by either party. These studies demonstrate that separatist conflicts often appear intractable because the parties are locked in zero-sum rigidity of incompatible positions.

The Paper draws attention to the structure of armed groups and its impact on their ability to enter peace negotiations. Specialist studies show that in a landscape with multiple or fragmented armed groups, the challenge in adopting a pro-peace, conciliatory position is the risk of out-flanking by other groups, promising to be more radical and make no compromises. It also cites from specialist literature as to *when* an armed conflict actually becomes ripe for a mediated or negotiated settlement – drawing from studies which show that parties to a conflict only sue for mediation when they perceive being in a *Mutually Hurting Stalemate,* a point at which no further escalation of violence on their part can turn the conflict tide in their favour. It is at that impasse, perceived by the parties, that they elect for peace negotiations – and peacemakers should be alert for its occurrence.

The Paper proceeds to examine the use of Autonomy arrangements (Special Status, Asymmetrically Devolved, Autonomous, Regions) as a strategy to solve outward-seeking, centrifugal conflict, affecting territorially concentrated minorities. It cites specialist literature from the study of separation conflicts, which has examined the demographic thresholds for resolving such conflicts. These indicate that where a given group constitutes 15 to 20% of the national population and is predominant in a distinct region of the country, the said group is unlikely to settle for less than a meaningful autonomy arrangement as an outcome from the conflict. It then provides specific examples of how approaches to regional autonomy, including within Unitary States, have been used in practice, to defuse separation conflicts.

The Paper further cites from specialist literature examining conflict data, to demonstrate that there is – comparatively – *no proof of a "domino effect"* in that the grant of *autonomy* concessions to one Region necessarily leads to other Regions *within the country* making similar centrifugal demands on the State, pressuring its unity. It also cites from specialist studies to show that neither is the "slippery slope" effect a verified fact: evidence from the resolution of actual conflicts does *not* show that regions benefiting from autonomy arrangements inexorably abuse it, as a steppingstone towards separatism afterwards.

The Paper draws from global guidance on the use of Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR) programs to show that ceasefires and/or peace agreements, and trust in a peace process are preconditions for DDR; and that where those pre-conditions are absent, the preferred approach is Community Violence Reduction which goes beyond fighters in structured armed groups, to deterring new persons in communities from joining armed groups.

The Paper argues that large-scale infrastructure Projects in the NW & SW regions should be leveraged as incentives (peace dividend) for the parties to seek peaceful options – given the difficulty of executing them in the current context. In addition to the importance of assisting critical regional economic assets (such as the NW&SW Credit Union movement), it also flags the geo-strategic importance of staving off conflict from Cameroon's coastline.

Lastly, the Paper argues for opening up national civic space to urge for peaceful resolution of the crisis, for a coordinated multilateral development partner approach to the crisis with a voice through policy dialogue to urge on needed reforms, and for a National Peace Fund to support entities working to usher peace.