
BAPEC/PRES/2016/29

06 December 2016

**AN APPEAL BY THE BISHOPS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
BAMENDA CONCERNING THE SIT-DOWN STRIKE ACTION CALLED BY
THE TEACHERS' TRADE UNIONS OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING
SUBSYSTEM OF EDUCATION**

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:2).

1. For almost three weeks now, many of the educational institutions – government, denominational and lay private, from nursery schools to universities, in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon – have not been functioning due to the sit-down strike action called by the Teachers' Trade Unions of the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education. The strike action, which gave room to some disgruntled Cameroonians to engage in public demonstrations, has caused an uneasy atmosphere that in some places has degenerated into violence, leading to the destruction of property and even the loss of life, particularly in the cities of Bamenda and Buea and their neighbourhoods. We are relieved by the fact that the Prime Minister and Head of Government immediately responded by initiating the process of dialogue with the leaders of the Teachers' Trade Unions in order that the strike action may be suspended and eventually called off. We regret the impasse in which we now find ourselves, because of an apparent intransigence on the part of the leaders of the Teachers' Trade Unions, and the fact that other groups with different objectives are exploiting the situation.

2. We, the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda, cannot be indifferent to the strike action taking place in the educational and legal sectors within the territorial circumscription of the North West and South West Regions. We recognize and experience the difficulties that such a state of affairs brings to the English-Speaking Regions in particular and to the integrity of our country Cameroon in general. Our citizens and parents and children are living in a state of anxiety, wondering what will become of our society and of the children so grossly affected by the strike action. A society that does not educate its youth puts into question the very survival of its future

and prosperity. The high stakes situation we are living through now calls for the concerted effort of all and sundry to redress the challenges facing our educational system, so that our society can return to the peace and tranquillity Cameroon is known for.

3. In the past, we have been involved in defending the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education by addressing letters to the Government. Although some of these letters were private, they have all borne enormous fruit for the protection and survival of this subsystem of education (cf. *Memorandum on the GCE, An Open Letter to the Prime Minister, Head of Government, of the Republic of Cameroon on the Place of Religious Studies Certificates*). We stand for truth, justice, and peace and for an educational system based on ethical, moral and religious values. That is why we clearly understand the rights of the teachers in making their voices heard and in protesting about all that they consider is going wrong in the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education in Cameroon. The Social Doctrine of the Church approves strike actions as a last resort to establish dialogue in order to settle industrial disputes and guarantee social justice (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 304).

4. The Church teaches that “*all men of whatever race, condition or age, in virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of the individuals, adapted to their ability, sex and national cultural traditions, and should be conducive to fraternal relations with other nations in order to promote true unity and peace in the world*” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 1). Understanding the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education in Cameroon and protecting it is a matter of respecting, protecting and promoting the cultural identity of English-Speaking Cameroonians and the values which are inherent and embedded in their culture. Without this educational subsystem, we can never ever talk of Anglophone Cameroon any more.

5. It is important to respect the conventions that bind us together as a people. The bicultural nature of our country, which enriches our diversity, should be a treasured commodity that guides our interaction with each other as children of the same fatherland. The 1998 Law on the Orientation of Education in Cameroon, Law No. 098/4 of 14 April 1998, Art. 15, par. 1 reaffirms our bicultural option as a nation by stating that there are two Subsystems of Education in Cameroon. The second paragraph of the same article emphasizes the fact that the two subsystems would each preserve their specificity in their respective methods of evaluation and certification. It is, therefore, expedient that in the evolution of our country as a nation, such tenets of its constitution are respected so as to preserve the peace and harmony of our society.

6. We recognize the effort that the Government of Cameroon has been making towards trying to break the stalemate of the teachers. We laud the efforts of the Prime Minister and Head of Government, who came to Bamenda and dialogued with the teachers for two full days, and subsequently created a committee that will work out a

permanent solution to the problem. In fact, most of the conditions advanced by the leaders of the Teachers' Trade Unions for the suspension of the strike action were accepted by the Prime Minister. If there has been reticence by the leaders of the Trade Unions in accepting the proposals made by the Prime Minister in the recent offer of dialogue with the teachers, it does seem to be due to what they perceive as the unfulfilled promises of the past.

7. We, therefore, appeal to the Government to continue this process of dialogue by ensuring that veritable and verifiable guarantees are given on decisions taken to resolve the grievances of the Trade Unions who represent the popular opinion of our people. We cannot continue to play the politics of the ostrich. We humbly exhort the Government to do everything in its power and within the shortest time possible to engage in an honest and credible dialogue with the Trade Unions to resolve the issues affecting the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education at all levels.

8. Our Children, our parents and our school communities have borne the brunt of the current prolonged strike action and our children's future is being compromised. We recognize the effort of the Government through the steps already taken to try to resolve the issues at stake and believe that all the efforts already made are in good faith. Our children are already tired of staying at home, some of whom will be sitting for public examinations with children of other Regions. The parents whom the teachers substitute in the classrooms and who are making enormous sacrifices for the education of their children are becoming exasperated. We must in conscience give the children a chance to prepare for their future while we work to create a conducive society for them to realise their dreams. If we are fighting for a better future for our children it would not be proper to compromise their dreams for that very future by holding them from going back to school. Children cannot be used as instruments for the achievement of political ends. It would be a gross abuse of their right to education. We, therefore, earnestly appeal to the leaders of the Teachers' Trade Unions to accept the process of dialogue already offered by Government so as to resolve the issues concerning the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education and get our children back to school as soon as possible.

9. We earnestly appeal to the teachers at all levels to remain focused on what they need to do to reform our educational subsystem without letting themselves be manipulated or hijacked by people with objectives that are not academic. Article 8 of the 1998 Law on the Orientation of Education in Cameroon states that education, whose application you seek, is apolitical, and you should remain apolitical if you are truly fighting for the English-Speaking Subsystem of Education. That is what we were made to believe when you started your strike. Therefore, as you engage in further dialogue with the Government, to iron out the issues still left to be resolved, we call on you to facilitate the return of all our children to school. We call on leaders of the Teachers' Trade Unions to suspend the strike action and tell the teachers to go back to the classroom, so that we may give dialogue a chance and enable the Government to show proof of its good will.

10. We strongly condemn the violence that is being perpetuated by some groups of young people who are exploited by unscrupulous people. We call on their families to keep them at home. We also vehemently condemn the acts of brutality, torture, inhuman and unjustified treatment that some members of the Forces of Law and Order have inflicted on some Cameroonians and the shameless abuse of human rights and dignity. Violence can only generate violence. We call on the Government to restrain the action of the Forces of Law and Order and bring those who have been irresponsible to justice, so that true peace may reign. We count on the good will of all people concerned in resolving the challenges facing our country at this moment to do all in their power, in a spirit of true and credible dialogue and understanding, to guarantee a better future for all our children and to safeguard the integrity of our fatherland.

11. We are currently engaged in preparations for the coming of the New-born King, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of Peace. As the Psalmist says: *"In his days justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails"* (Ps. 71:1). We, therefore, call on all Christians and people of good will not only to pray but also to work for peace in our country and for a just and lasting solution to the grievances of the sons and daughters of the English-Speaking Regions of Cameroon. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, intercede for us.

Done in Bamenda, this 6th Day of December, the 2016th Year of Our Lord.


+ George NKUO.



Bishop of Kumbo and
President of the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference (BAPEC)
(For and on behalf of all the Bishops of BAPEC)

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