

Provisory report: “Silence the guns”

March – April 2020



After having received the 2019 international children's Peace prize delivered at Hague by KidsRights Experts Committee for her engagement and leadership role in peacebuilding, Divina, Coordinator of Children for Peace has undertaken to launch the national campaign “Silence the guns” which is aligned to the African Union’s Campaign on “Silencing the Guns in Africa”. In fact, as in many African countries, conflicts remain one of the biggest challenges Cameroon is facing. Since several years, the country faces significant issues of unrest and insecurity, including the increasing number of refugees come from the Central African crisis; the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram, which has primarily operated in the Far North region since 2014 making at least 2,500 killed. Since 2016, separatist rebels launched a battle for their own state making over 3 000 killings (civilians and army), thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees. Children and youth being the main victims since they lose their lives, become injured or traumatized and are forced to flee their homes, see their villages burned to the ground and families torn apart and their education collapsed. Many of them targeted and recruited to become child soldiers and child brides. Girls, targeted for particularly horrendous abuses, enrolled into sexual slavery and early marriages either by Boko Haram members/separatists rebels or by their parents to overcome their financial difficulties. Additionally to terrorism and transnational crime, the country is also characterized by communal conflicts between herders and farmers over water and pasture; violent urban crime and cultural practices such as cattle rustling, are also of concern because firearms have become the weapons of choice, replacing traditional and less deadly weapons. Those conflicts are undeniably one of the biggest impediments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the convention of elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the implementation of the Agenda 2063 of Africa Union.

One important cause and consequence of the cycle of conflicts in Cameroon and in Africa is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons by civilians, including rebel groups and militias as well as government-related entities. Guns which have been becoming the most popular weapon are mostly imported and cause more deaths than bombs, grenades or mines. Oftentimes government stocks are raided or military troops or police officers are killed for their weapons.

Thus, the “Silence the guns” campaign implemented by Children for Peace aims to achieve a conflict-free Cameroon and Africa, prevent genocide, make peace a reality for all and rid the country and the continent of wars, violent conflicts, human rights violations, and humanitarian disasters. It aims to mobilize all stakeholders to prioritize efforts on peace and effective socio-economic development and address the challenges that lead people to violent conflicts, including poverty, historical injustices, inequality, unemployment, climate change, illegal financial flows, and corruption. Target groups of this project are rural and urban communities, those affected by conflict. It emphasizes on government (s) because of their primary responsibility of providing peace and security and the overall protection of citizens and children and youth (including vulnerable children such as street children, students; orphans by war/conflicts...) because their future is at stake. It gives a particular importance to religious and traditional leaders, refugees and IDPs, children, armed forces, local elected, civil society and media. The methodology of the project basically lies on sensitization, capacity building and advocacy through exposé, debates, drawings, documentaries, painting and artwork; marches with banners and posters; and interviews with stakeholders. The commencement of that project has started on March 02, 2020 in the far North Cameroon precisely in the Town of Maroua, in the village of MEME, in two refugees’ camps in Igawa 1 and 2. Children for Peace have reached out 90 children, 70 women and 80 men so far.

Basically, the launching of that campaign was focused on the understanding of the theme "silence the guns", its stakes for economic development and stability and the best initiatives deployed and to be deployed by women, men, children, traditional and spiritual authorities to build a durable Peace. During their activities, children for peace have encouraged all the target groups to voice out their personal and collective engagement toward the silence of guns. They have advocated to the Lamido (Traditional Leader) of *MEME* for increasing his commitment for girls’ and women rights and more inclusion of women and children in peace-building. For this month of March, the campaign will continue in others subdivisions of the North region affected by Boko Haram a focus will be made also on koranic schools, traditional schools, civil society, street children; local elected, media, armed forces and states officials. In each community, a “silence the guns multi-stakeholders group” will be settled to continue the action in collaboration with children for peace members. Children for Peace wish to broaden the project in the upcoming months to others regions of Cameroon and precisely the north and south west regions so as to have a critical mass of at least 50 000 people joining the campaign to contribute to effective inclusive governance leading to disarmament, social cohesion and development in the country.



