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*To the Collaborators in the Health Services of the
Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis (TSSF)
In Europe and America*

Dear Collaborators

**Subject: **Impact of the Anglophone Socio-Political Crisis On Our Health
Services—Major Concern****

We wish to inform you of the negative impact on our health services of the socio-political crisis that has wrecked Anglophone Cameroon since September 2016.

It started with the lawyers asking for some reforms in the legal practice in this region, a move closely picked up by the teachers. The people in Anglophone Cameroon, the minority that has suffered instances of marginalization since its reunification with French Cameroon in 1961, arose with several grievances against the Government: marginalization, subjugation and under-development, etc. As Government response was considered inadequate, the Anglophone population pressed on and started demanding for a federal system of Government whereby they would be a federal State. Soon afterwards, they shifted to demands for independence as they Government considered “federation” as taboo. The local move was fueled by the Cameroonians in diaspora—most of whom had been forced to leave Cameroon in search of better life conditions, as the situation back home was considered frustrating.

Once in 2017, the people went out on a peaceful march with green branches, but the military started to shoot them. In revolt and self-defense, the people picked up local hunting tools and fought the military. The Anglophones in diaspora formed an “interim government”, which, in order to force the Government to listen, enforced “ghost towns” on Mondays and instituted School shutdown. This is the third year that Schools have not opened in Anglophone Cameroon.

Eventually the president declared war against the people marked by arbitrary and massive arrests, various forms of torture and killings, destruction of property. Certain areas have experienced what could be termed, genocide. The people picked up their own arms against the Government officials, military and anyone who has a penchant for collaboration with the Government in Anglophone region. These locals, popularly known as the Ambazonian Defense Force (Amba Boys) have rapidly grown in numbers and are present all over Anglophone Cameroon. The Government has tagged them “terrorists” and is determined to exterminate them and all associated with them.

EFFECTS ON THE TSSF HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

For over 80 years of presence in Cameroon, the social services offered by the TSSF are found mostly in Anglophone Cameroon and are affected in various negative ways:

The imposition of curfews by the Government and “ghost towns” by the Ambazonian Leaders hamper travels and of activities. Failure to observe these exposes the defaulter to summary killing, burning of his car or structure, etc. Most of the clients who came to our specialized services: **cardiac, urology and ophthalmology services in Shisong, orthopaedic services in Njinikom and in Bafut**, were from French Cameroon, who now cannot come.

We continuously suffer harassment and threats from both parties, accusing us of being in alignment with the opponents because we treat wounded soldiers and wounded Amba Boys indiscriminately as the nursing profession requires. The Catholic Church in Anglophone Cameroon is generally placed in the in the bad books of the Government for condemning violence and insisting to treat the wounded persons. The military has actually broken into some of our health facility, brutalized and terrorized the workers and carried away a wounded person (shot) whom we had hospitalized. This is the case in Bafut and Djottin. We are even threatened to be brought to the military court for this reason.

The military control on the roads has been fiercer, meting arbitrary sanctions and torture on the travellers. All of us have suffered this, but particularly the Sisters in Mbetta have suffered particular incidents in two occasions as they struggled to bring in foodstuff and medication. Note that Mbetta is a hard-to reach area in the South West Region. The access road project undertaken by *ASHIA CAMEROON*-Switzerland, has been brought to a halt for reasons of insecurity—same with the Shisong-Kumbo road, that Cameroon’s Ministry of Plan and Regional Development was finally taking on board.

Armed confrontations between these two groups usually cause severe casualties and material destruction around them; thus the people fled from any village where such confrontations are likely to occur, and infact, half the population has fled the North West and South West Regions for Nigeria and the French Cameroon. Villages where we have services are literally deserted; notably Njinikom, Shisong, Tatum, Bali, Wum, Bafut, Akwaya, Ashing.

The closure of schools in the Region has rendered the TSSF members and staff redundant and miserable.

We have also suffered human and material loss:

The Bus of Njinikom Hospital was burned, and medication worth 3 million was collected by armed men, a few kilometers away from the Hospital, on their way for outreach clinic to the Western Region. The doctor and staff were also tortured and robbed.

The Cardiac Center bus (donated by the Minister of Public Health), machines and medication worth tens of millions, was seized from the Team on the tour for outreach consultations by unidentified armed persons (suspected to be Amba Boys). This happened at Kogne, as they

drove from Mamfe (where they had consulted) to Kumba, trying to reach patients who could not come to us due to tension. They molested the doctor, staff and sisters, leaving them psychologically very traumatized.

As the threats and tension intensified in the past months due to the October 7 Presidential election in Cameroon, huge numbers of people evacuated from Anglophone Cameroon while others were internally displaced.

A worker from SAJOCAM Bafut was abducted and later killed by the Amba Boys.

The Sister Administrator of Bafut Health Centre / SAJOCAM and another sister nurse were threatened by the military and had to leave Bafut for security reasons. The two sisters trekked from Bafut to Bamenda. Now the center is without an administrator nor doctor as he was also threatened. All roads (Bamenda-Kumbo, Bamenda Njinikom and Bamenda-Bafut) are still blocked for close to one month with no movement, no activities except minimal health services.

HOW THE CRISIS SLOWS DOWN OUR SERVICES

The shutdown of economic and social activities causes significant economic loss on the people who generally live from hand-to-mouth. In this situation, who among our people in the villages can afford to pay hospital bills even if they came to the Hospital for treatment?

The population is not even there, and those who would come from French Cameroon can't take the risk anymore; so the health facilities have been operating at less than 20 percent.

Most of the workers fled the endangered zones; we signed suspension engagements with others, accompanied by significant salary cuts while others simply fled for their safety.

Developmental projects (like the Hospital we wanted to open in Kombo, Buea; building in Bafut Hospital, etc), missions from oversea collaborators (cardiac, orthopaedics, ophthalmology, urology) have been suspended, much to the detriment of the populations. Material transactions, such as shipment of containers have been suspended.

Government subventions to some of our Hospitals are usually very minimal. As a lot of funds are deployed to fight the war against Anglophone civilians, the situation of subventions is worse. This year, the Cardiac Center (alone) was promised less than 3 million, which might not be received for obvious reasons.

On another note, medications in stock runs the risk of expiring since there are no patients to consume them.

TSSF EFFORTS TO SURVIVE IN THE SITUATION

As a religious Congregation, directed more by Church law than by business motivations, the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis are compelled to adjust their strategies for mission:

Secondary School in Banyo: This academic year, we opened a Secondary School in Banyo, Ngoundere, French Cameroon.

Expansion of Douala Hospital: Despite the restricted land available, we are doing some innovations that could expand the capacity of St. Padre Pio Hospital, Douala; where some of our specialized workers could be absorbed. We wouldn't want to lose them!

Project in Bikoko: The land in Bikoko (Douala) was meant to accommodate a Hospital and a School, but we can't afford to start the project without external assistance.

Yaounde-Soa Project: The piece of land recently acquired in Yaoundé is equally meant to host a Hospital and a School; we would need assistance to begin these projects.

Note: Opening up in French Cameroon would not only support the running of the services in Bamenda and Buea, but would enable us respond to the population in French Cameroon that trust and depends on our specialized services for its quality—thanks to your assistance. These would also give us a chance to keep our hard-to-find, precious specialized staff.

ASSISTANCE YOU COULD OFFER US AND THE PEOPLE

- **Any move of advocacy to “force” the Cameroonian Government to address the crisis through dialogue,** not by arms.
- **Support financially** the healthcare coverage for the populations whose poverty level has risen due to the shutdown of economic activities. While the people would benefit from subsidized health care, the health facilities would be able to pay salaries, to say the least.
- **Be ready to come for missions as soon as the situation stabilizes.** We are monitoring and will alert you.
- **Support us in the construction-expansion of facilities in French Cameroon.**

Presidential elections may bring some respite depending on whether the 85-year old Biya retains power for the 8th term in office. If he does, he is not likely to change his manner of handling the anglophone crisis (as he insinuated in his campaign speech in Maroua). If Maurice Kamto wins as already self-proclaimed and as wished, there could be a ceasefire as he seems to be open to dialogue. Whether the anglophones who have been extremely radicalized towards cessation will accept the rule of French Cameroon or not, is the question to be answered after the results of the elections.

Thanks so much for your assistance, closeness, collaboration and understanding. We count on you today more than ever before.



Sr. Budzee Appolonia
CEO, TSSF Health Services

CC: The Provincial Superior and Leadership Team
TSSF Hospital Directors and Administrators