

## **Cameroon: UN experts on minorities and indigenous peoples concerned about destruction of pastoralist homes**

GENEVA (10 April 2014) – The United Nations Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, Rita Izsák, and on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya, today called on the Government and the Catholic University in Bamenda, Cameroon, to urgently review the evictions and demolition of houses of a Mbororo pastoralist community. An estimated 300 people have reportedly been made homeless and evicted from their ancestral lands in the locality of Banjah, Bamenda.

The location of the evictions is the scene of a long-term land dispute between the Mbororo community and the Catholic University. Mbororo pastoralist communities, who identify as indigenous minorities, account for some 12 per cent of Cameroon's population and often face conflicts over access to and ownership of land and access to water.

The University claims to have paid compensation to community members to acquire and build on the site. Community members claim to have been misled regarding payments and state that they would not voluntarily have agreed to quit their homes and land that they have occupied since 1904.

"I urge the authorities and the Catholic University in Bamenda to review these actions and their impact on this community and immediately seek a settlement with them," said Ms. Izsák, who visited the Mbororo community in Banjah during her 2013 official mission\* to Cameroon.

Mr. Anaya recalled furthermore that "indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly relocated from their lands or territories," quoting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement of fair and just compensation."

The human rights experts highlighted that "appropriate alternative accommodation must still be provided to community members who have been left homeless and extremely vulnerable, even if the evictions are found to be legally justified based on international standards and within a participatory, consensus building process involving the Mbororo people."

"Where possible," the Special Rapporteurs stressed, "the Mbororo must be provided with the opportunity to return to their traditional lands."

"We are saddened that a community whose survival depends on their lands and cattle is now deprived of access to their ancestral lands," they said. "This also contravenes the UN Declaration on Minorities which requires the protection of existence of minorities, and their unique ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity within the territories in which they live."

Three bulldozers, escorted by armed gendarmes reportedly arrived on 3 April 2014 to start demolishing the Mbororo homes. Community members have no alternative accommodation.

"I referred to this worrying case in my report on my visit to Cameroon presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2014," the Special Rapporteur on minority issues said. "I stand ready to continue consultations with all parties to identify possible solutions to avoid rendering this community even more vulnerable."

**(\*)** Check the Special Rapporteur's mission report to the Human Rights Council:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

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