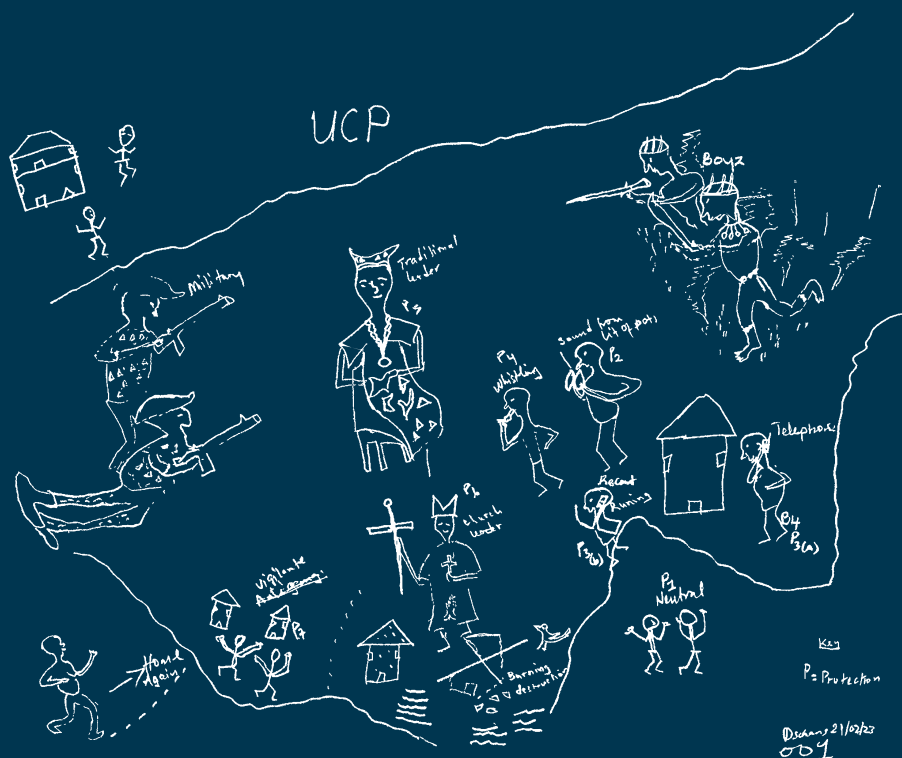


“Ji se a-nta-av”

Resilient Voices:

An anthology of poems on community
unarmed protection from a war zone



Edited by Mutia Brendaline

With an Introduction by Gordon Crawford

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Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of our anonymous authors and thank them for their active participation. Anonymity is unfortunately required to ensure their safety and security, as they continue to live amidst the conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. Most were not familiar with poetry, and had not written a poem before, but responded with positivity and purpose when asked (unexpectedly) to express their experiences of community protection in this form. We also wish to thank and acknowledge the artists whose drawings illustrate the booklet. We are very grateful to all for their tremendous work and sharing of difficult experiences.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to the funders – the Creating Safer Space network based at Aberystwyth University – for the financial support to the project 'Exploring unarmed civilian self-protection in Cameroon's Anglophone conflict'. This poetry booklet is one output from that wider project. Creating Safer Space is a Network Plus funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research Fund. For more information: <https://creating-safer-space.com/about/>

Big thanks also go to the whole research team involved in this project for their important contributions to the workshops and to the realisation of this booklet:

Nancy Annan

Coventry University, UK

James Kiven Kewir

African Leadership Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

Atim Evenye Niger-Thomas

Director, Authentic Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF), Cameroon

Bernard Nsaidzedze Sakah

Director, Big Steps Outreach Network (BONET), Cameroon

Zonziwuh Mbongdulo-Wondieh

Director, Women for a Change (Wfac), Cameroon



Introduction

The moving and inspiring poems in this booklet, as well as the drawings that illustrate them, are all written and drawn by civilians living amidst the current conflict in the English-speaking North West and South West regions of Cameroon, the former British Southern Cameroons. The poems' authors (anonymous to protect their security) outline their experiences, hardships and traumas, as well as their courage, resilience and agency in protecting themselves and others against violence. This introduction has a two-fold purpose. First, it seeks to provide the reader with the background to this internationally neglected civil war, including the historical context. Second, it provides information about the small research project on 'unarmed civilian protection' that generated these poems and accompanying drawings. The data collection methods included two poetry workshops, as well as two drawing workshops, with civilians from conflict 'hot-spots' in the North West and South West regions. These local people were of various ages and educational backgrounds, and no-one had written a poem before. Yet all showed remarkable ability to depict their experiences and perspectives in evocative and heartfelt ways. The poetry workshops were facilitated by Ms. Mutia Brendaline with great skill and empathy. An experienced educator with young people, she did an excellent job in encouraging and advising the participants on how to express their thoughts and feelings in poetic verse. This small collection shows the power of poetry to convey with depth and complexity the authors' experiences of grief and fear, as well as of positivity and hope, and above all their strategies of community self-protection.

Cameroon's 'Anglophone' Conflict

The current civil war in Cameroon, commonly known as the 'Anglophone conflict', pits the Cameroon military against armed separatist groups fighting for an independent Republic of Ambazonia in the English-speaking territory. It can be traced to late 2016 when Anglophone lawyers and teachers took to the streets to protest against the increasing appointments of French-speaking judges and teachers, seen as undermining the distinctive legal and educational systems in the Anglophone regions. These peaceful demonstrations were met with violence and repression by state security forces, resulting in wider protests led by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium against Anglophone marginalisation and discrimination by the Francophone-dominated state. Anglophone citizens demanded increased autonomy for the Anglophone regions through the (re-)introduction of a federal system. However, the Cameroon government responded again with repression. Protests were dispersed by security forces using tear gas and bullets; the Civil Society Consortium was banned, and its leaders arrested; and the internet was shutdown for three months from January to April 2017. One consequence was that secessionist voices gained momentum. Separatist groups, often based in the diaspora, came together to form the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF). On 1 October 2017, SCACUF marked the anniversary

of Southern Cameroons' independence from British rule in 1961 by symbolically declaring the independence of the Republic of Ambazonia.¹ The Cameroon army responded with militarisation of the Anglophone regions, while newly-formed armed separatist groups, notably the Ambazonia Defence Forces, commenced attacks on the military. On 30 November 2017, President Paul Biya declared war on the separatist groups whom he described as 'terrorists'.² Subsequently, armed conflict has been ongoing to date, with little sign of resolution. Biya's government shows an unwillingness to enter negotiations, having rejected Swiss and Canadian government initiatives to broker peace talks.

The historical context is vital for our understanding of this contemporary civil war. Originally a German colony (1884-1916) called Kamerun, the territory was divided between France (80 percent) and Britain (20 percent) after World War I, first under League of Nations (1922-46) and then United Nations mandates (1946-61). Britain subdivided its territory into Northern and Southern Cameroons and governed them as part of Nigeria. Differing institutions were developed under separate French and British colonial rule, leading to legal, educational, political, linguistic and cultural differences. For instance, a civil law system in French Cameroun contrasted with the common law system in British Cameroons, as well as the use of French and English as official languages in the respective territories. A botched reunification process occurred at independence in 1960 and 1961. French Cameroun and Nigeria gained their independence in January and October 1960 respectively. In February 1961, a UN-organised plebiscite was held to decide the future of Northern and Southern Cameroons, with the choice of joining either the Republic of Cameroun or Nigeria, but not independence as a separate state. Consequently, Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria, while Southern Cameroons voted to join Cameroun. The terms of reunification between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroun were then discussed at the Foumban constitutional conference in July 1961, with a federal system agreed upon. The Federal Republic of Cameroon was declared on 1 October 1961 consisting of two federated states: West Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons) and East Cameroon (former French Cameroun). The federal system was understood to uphold the bi-cultural and bi-lingual nature of Cameroon.

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1. International Crisis Group (2017). *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*. Crisis Group [online], Africa Report 250, 2 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-cameroons-Anglophone-crisis-crossroads>
 2. Sonkey D. J. (2017). *Biya declares war on Anglophone separatists*. The SUN Newspaper [online], 5 Dec 2017. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/thesunnewspaper-cameroon/posts/biya-declares-war-on-Anglophone-separatists-by-doh-james-sonkey-the-president-of-t/545921992422722/>

However, federalism was short-lived. In May 1972, President Ahmadou Ahidjo held a controversial national referendum that led to the abolition of the federal constitution and the creation of a unitary state called the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, President Biya re-named the country as *La République du Cameroun*, returning to the name given to French Cameroun at independence in 1960 and before reunification with Southern Cameroons in 1961. Writing in 1985, the barrister Fon Gorji Dinka described the 1972 referendum as a 'constitutional coup' and the 1984 decree as an 'act of secession' of *La République du Cameroun* from the 1961 union with Southern Cameroons.

Therefore, today's conflict is a consequence of longstanding Anglophone grievances as a minority population. Being Anglophone in Cameroon goes beyond language to encompass a cultural identity that has a history linked to Britain and a set of distinctive institutions. For decades, many Anglophones have felt that the Francophone-dominated state's policy of assimilation of the English-speaking territory has attempted to erode that identity. Anglophones feel treated as second-class citizens within Cameroon, with marginalisation experienced in the political, economic, socio-cultural and linguistic fields.

Thus, Anglophone opposition has risen at different times. For instance, in the early 1990s, political liberalisation enabled Anglophone-specific trade unions, interest groups and political groups to be formed. Such mobilisation led to the All-Anglophone Conferences (AACI and AACII) held in 1993 and 1994 respectively and attended by more than 5,000 delegates from numerous Anglophone organisations and associations. AACI's Buea Declaration called for a return to two-state federalism, but total disregard of such demands by Biya's regime then led to the option of secession being noted in the declaration from AACII. In particular, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) advocated for secession, but notably by non-violent means.³ These Anglophone associations were highly active in the 1990s, but only for a limited period, and Konings and Nyamnjoh reported that by 1996 momentum had been lost.⁴ Almost 20 years later, in 2016, frustrations intensified again with the systematic Francophonisation of the legal and education systems in the English-speaking regions, leading to the initial protests by lawyers and teachers and subsequently the unprecedented civil war from 2017 onwards.

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3. Bone, M. (2021). *"We had No Choice": The Emergence of Secessionist Violence in Anglophone Cameroon*, p.48. MPhil Dissertation, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, UK.
 4. Konings, P. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (2019). 'Anglophone secessionist movements in Cameroon' in De Vries L., Englebert P., and Schomerus, M (Eds). (2019). *Secessionism in African Politics: Aspiration, Grievance, Performance, Disenchantment*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.59–89.

Impact on the Civilian Population

The armed conflict, now in its seventh year, has had a devastating impact on the civilian populations in the two affected regions. The Cameroon security forces mount a counterinsurgency campaign against the armed separatist groups mainly based in the rural areas. The Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) remains the largest group, although there is a proliferation of smaller armed groups.⁵ The separatist groups impose a 'school boycott' of government schools and weekly 'ghost-town' or strike days, usually Mondays, with no movement permitted throughout the NW and SW regions. Civilians are caught in the middle, accused of either colluding with the separatist fighters (by the military) or collaborating with the military (by the separatists), and subjected to violence by both, though predominantly by the security forces. Figures for numbers of civilians killed and displaced are unofficial and underestimated. But at least 6000 civilians had been killed by 2022.⁶ Hundreds of villages have been razed in the military's counterinsurgency campaign,⁷ with hundreds of thousands having fled from the violence. More recent figures indicate a total of 628,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 87,000 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria,⁸ out of a total population of some five million. Rape and other forms of gender-based violence are endemic, described as 'pervasive' and 'rampant' in a UN report,⁹ and perpetuated with impunity by both the military and armed separatist groups.¹⁰ The 'school boycott' has caused educational disruption for hundreds of thousands of children, with recent figures indicating that about

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5. Bone M. (2020) *'Ahead of Peace Talks, a Who's Who of Cameroon's Separatist Movements'*. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2020/07/08/Cameroon-Ambazonia-conflict-peace-whos-who>
 6. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2023), *World Report 2023: Cameroon Events of 2022*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/cameroon>.
 7. Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) (2019). *206 villages raided and partially or severely burnt in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon since 2016*. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/206-villages-raided-and-partially-or-severely-burnt-in-the-Anglophone-regions-of-cameroon-since-2016/>
 8. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). (2023). *Cameroon: Situation Report, 12 April 2023*. Available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/cameroon>.
 9. Craig, J. (2021). *Sexual violence pervasive in Cameroon's Anglophone regions*. Al-Jazeera, 29 Apr 2021 [online]. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/29/gender-based-violence-pervasive-in-camerouns-Anglophone-regions>
 10. Amnesty International. (2023). *Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias*, pp.38-40. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/6838/2023/en/>

54 percent of government schools remain closed in the North West and South West regions.¹¹ Gross human rights violations by both warring parties have been widely documented. The military subjects civilians to arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, extrajudicial killing, rape and extortion, as well as wholesale destruction of homes and businesses, especially in rural settlements.¹² The armed separatist groups are responsible for abductions and killings of non-military representatives of the Cameroonian state such as government officials, local politicians, and traditional leaders (known as Fons and chiefs),¹³ as well as killings of alleged informants (so-called 'blacklegs').¹⁴ Civilians are also subject to kidnapping for ransom, assault and extortion by armed separatists for non-compliance with their orders (such as weekly ghost town days and school boycotts). Income levels have been hard-hit. Farming and market activities have been adversely affected by the conflict. Travelling and access within the regions has become difficult, having to negotiate both military and armed separatist checkpoints. The armed separatists also demand a 'liberation tax' to be paid by civilians to support their cause.

The war is unremitting, with no peace proposals currently on the table. The Francophone-dominated state is determined to maintain its control over the Anglophone regions, given their economic significance due to richness in agricultural resources and off-shore gas and oil. Therefore it remains intent on a military solution to what is a political problem, whatever the cost to the English-speaking civilian population.

Unarmed Civilian Protection

In this context, the issue of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) is highly significant. What unarmed or non-violent means are taken, and by whom, to offer some protection to the civilian population? In most global conflicts, UCP is provided by external actors, for instance international and national NGOs or UN peacekeepers. Yet such actors are absent in the Cameroonian context, with the government unwilling to allow such activities. Therefore our team of Cameroon and UK-based researchers was keen to examine unarmed *community self-protection*,

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11. UN OCHA 2023
 12. HRW 2023; Amnesty International, 2023; Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA). (2023). *Midterm Report On The Human Rights Situation In The Conflict-Affected Regions Of Cameroon: January to June 2023*. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/midterm-report-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-the-conflict-affected-regions-of-cameroon/>
 13. Amnesty International 2023, p.24
 14. HRW 2023

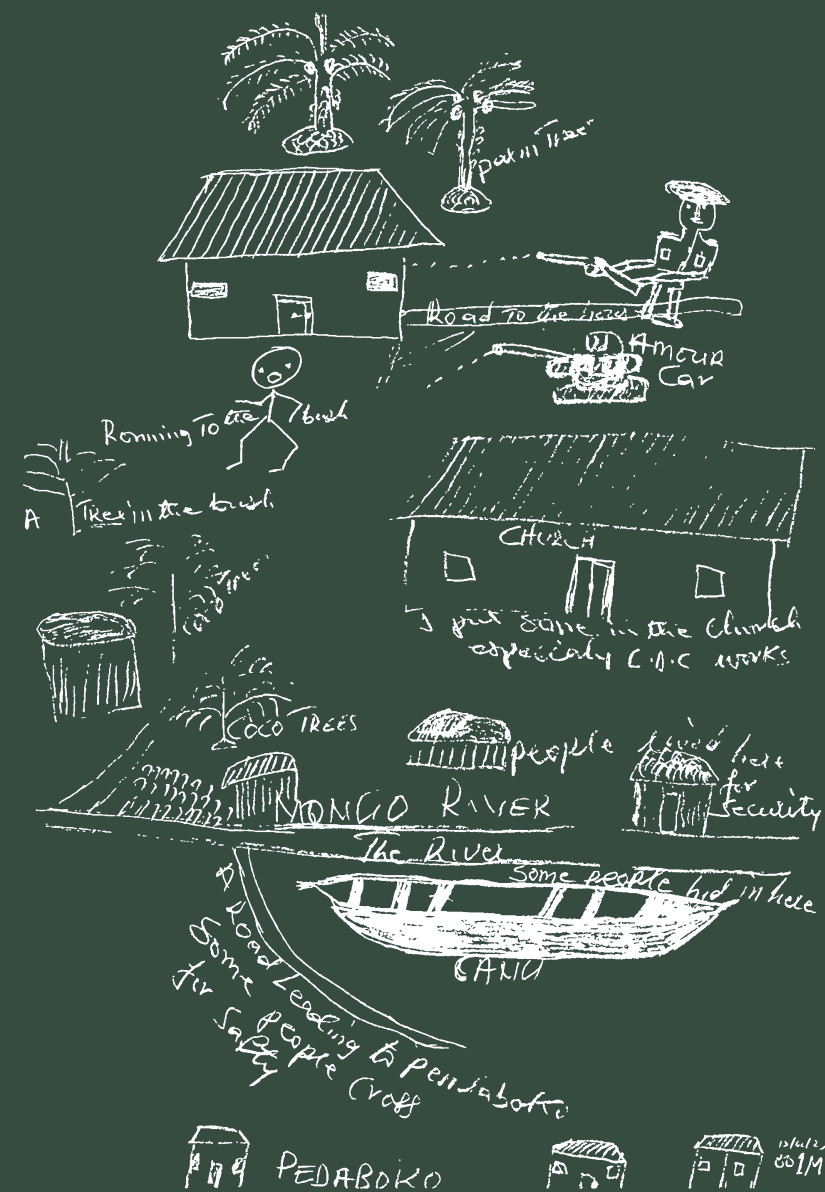
taking a bottom-up approach to explore the strategies and measures taken by local civilians in the conflict zones to protect themselves, their families and communities. We received a small grant to undertake such research from the *Creating Safer Space* network based at the University of Aberystwyth, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Poetry and Drawing as Arts-Based Methods

Our data collection methods included art-based methods – poetry, drawing and storytelling workshops. The growing interest in creative arts for research has been precipitated by a shift in how research is understood and conducted. This shift entails a quest for research to be more engaging and participatory where research 'respondents' become active participants in the co-creation of knowledge. This makes art-based methods a relevant tool for community-based enquiry, including in conflict-affected contexts such as Cameroon. Such methods provide safer spaces for participants to delve beyond verbal narratives to capture their often unsaid experiences, including feelings of loss, grief and fear. Using such methods was especially pertinent in this case where marginalised Anglophone citizens can be afraid to openly verbalise their views due to possible reprisal from the warring factions, and where non-verbal means of expression can be especially important for those who have endured the traumas of violence.

We held two poetry and two drawing workshops with participants from the South West and North West regions. Participants were selected from communities most affected by the conflict. In other words, the participants had all experienced violence and displacement, either directly or indirectly, yet had remained in or returned to their villages and towns despite having to live in the midst of conflict. The workshops were held in safe and secure locations outside of the conflict zones, and provided community members with opportunities to express their experiences, emotions, and perspectives on unarmed community self-protection through spoken word poems and artistic representation respectively. The poetry workshops were facilitated skillfully by Ms. Mutia Brendaline, who also edited the poems for language issues. Participants had not prepared their poems beforehand and produced their work within the two-hour session. Everyone's work is highly impressive and a tribute to their willingness to share their experiences so openly. We invite you to read and appreciate the poems that follow, along with the illustrative drawings. We hope that you learn more about the experiences and perspectives of those civilians living in the midst of the Anglophone conflict and value their collective agency in seeking to protect each other from violence.

Gordon Crawford
Coventry University
February 2024



The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection

I left them when he was dying, being brutally killed by violent soldiers. But as he was dying he was thinking of others. He begged them to let me go, he was thinking of my safety unto Death and this saved my life. When we reached the community, we resolved to always think of the safety of the other, if we have to remain safe.

I left them, limping from the torture meted on me
But I left them thinking about the other
My life was saved because when I was in danger he spoke,
he did not remain silent. When I got to the community
the community resolved to avoid the philosophy of indifference
If we have to remain safe.

I left them and ran into the community
Knowing that I belong to the community
Do I really belong to the community?
No. I went into the community because
I am the community and the community is me
It was here that we resolved to always put
Community first if we have to stay safe.

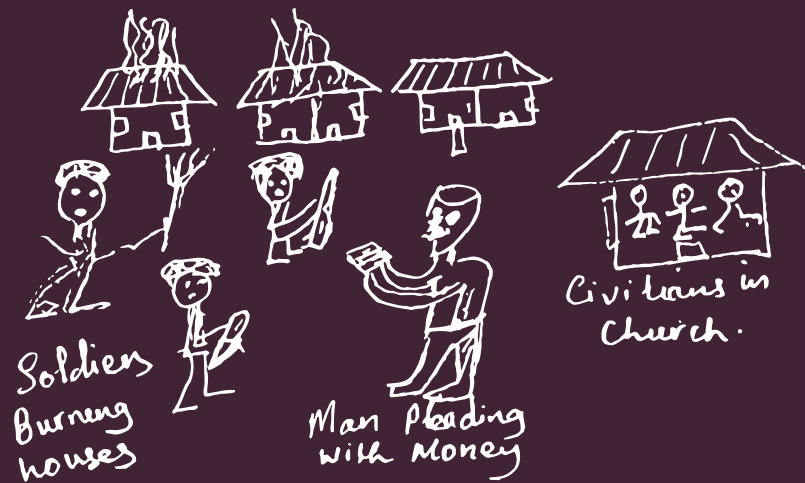
When sleeping, my whistle is by my bed
To signal my neighbour if there is reason
to escape into the farms.
I left them being neither the “they” nor the “them”
I left them with the resolve to remain impartial
Our community resolved to remain neutral
If we are to remain safe.

The Hospital, My Safe Home

A very silent morning
Old women trapped in their huts
Children longing for a “go” signal
The chirping of birds silenced by gunshots
There is only one way out
Go out, watch out, and seek refuge.

Main roads blocked and unsafe
The paths leading to the hospital, bushy and unsafe
Passing through a river and then a thick forest
A family of ten, including children and an old
disabled grandmother, to get to the hospital for safety
Amidst gunshots through uneasy paths.

Little children backed by older ones
The elderly staggering with walking sticks
One destination in mind, the hospital, for safety
Bearing and enduring pains and losses all the way
The family takes longer than usual
The hospital at last! What a relief!



Together, We Are Consoled

Out of the village
Deep in the heart of a lonely forest
A new human community is being established
Humans living alongside animals
But why not? Our homes are no longer safe!
A land (that was) once strange, gradually becomes
Our new home. Underdeveloped? Yes! Safe? Certainly!

That is all that matters
Standing in the middle unprotected like grass
In a fight between two elephants
Get ready, together with people of your kind
Get a place where you can freely tell your story
A place where your voice is heard.

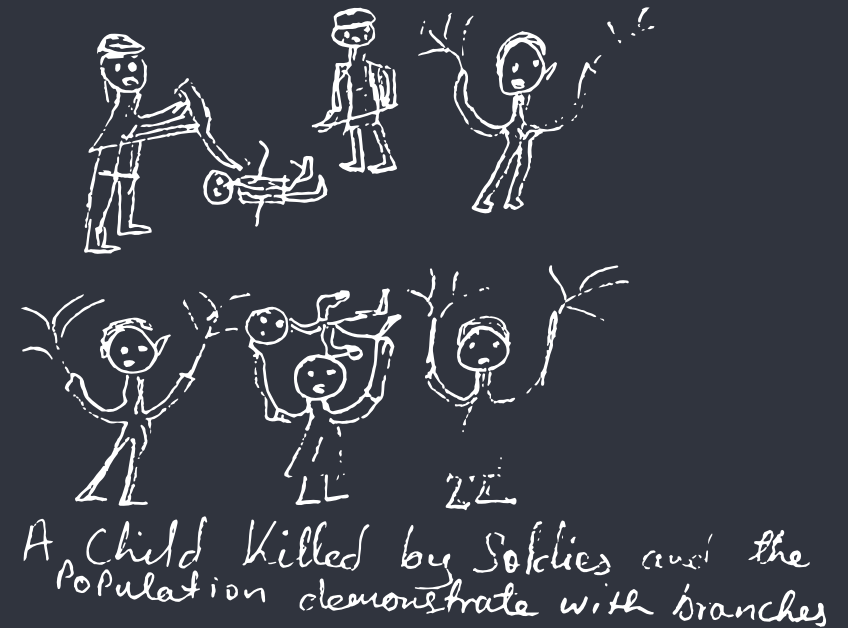
Just To Be Safe

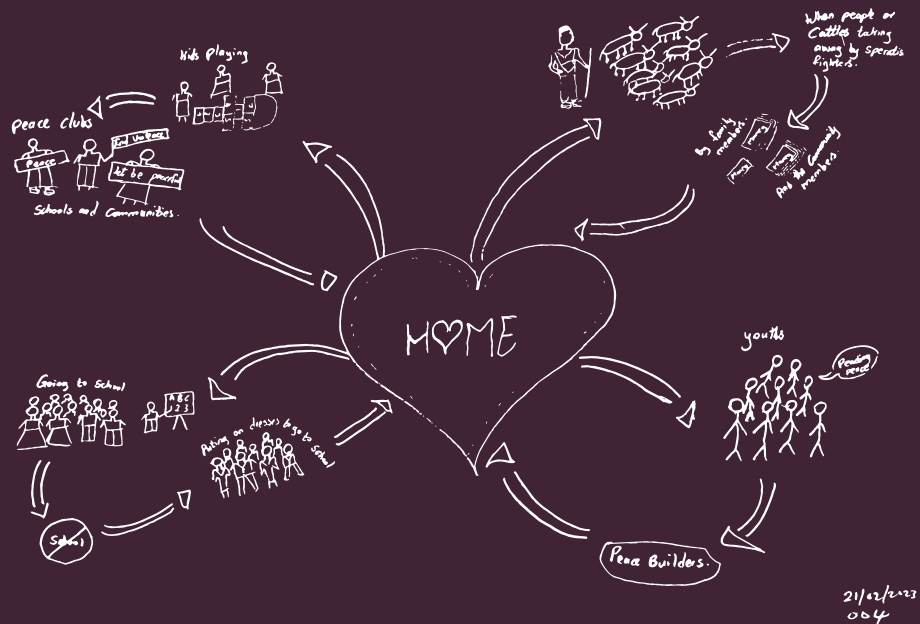
It's the early hours of the morning
Places are very cold, bed is warm, sleep is sweet
Something sounded, what has fallen?
It must be from the neighbours
Hey! It is echoes from gunshots
It sounded louder this time, tear gas
No, it is not, I have rubbed Vaseline on my nostrils
To prevent pollution for my safety
The sounds get clearer, clouded, that means they are coming closer
I have to off my lights, and sleep on the floor far from the door.

A knock on my neighbour's door, strange voices
My heartbeat increases, have chest pain
And I am facing difficulty breathing already
I had to go to the hospital today for my medicine
They are coming towards my door, my heartbeat increases
I try to get raw eggs and drink to reduce my heartbeat
There is a knock on my door, what do I do?

They are talking among themselves
In a language I don't understand fluently
But I hear them talking about fire
I have to escape because the next thing will be fire
While thinking, the compound is already in flames
And the strange voices all gone
I have to find my way through the ceiling to the nearest bush

The road is crowded, everybody in the neighbourhood
Rushing to the bush for safety
The children who can hardly understand what is going on
Breastfeeding mothers carrying big bags filled with babies' dresses
Looking at everybody 's faces, you can tell the frustration
Hoping that the bush will be quiet and safe
To brighten our faces again.





Hopes

My homeland now feels like a strange land
 Like a place I have never been to
 A place full of hatred, a place where people
 No longer feel safe and secure
 Because anything can happen at any time
 Families have been separated, lives have been lost
 We no longer have rights, we are governed by fear

Hopes are lost and no one thinks of the future
 Because you may see young boys have been killed
 Young girls have been raped, some into forced marriages
 Others into early marriages with lots of unwanted pregnancy
 Our hearts are heavy, our eyes are full of tears
 Nowhere to go or run to, we sleep every night
 Thinking that when we wake up, it will all be a nightmare
 But every day we keep hoping.

We Are Tired

We are tired!
Tired of burying our dead daily
Tired of fleeing into the bushes daily
Tired of hiding under the bed from flying bullets
Tired of putting out flames from burning corpses, houses, and hospitals.

We are tired!
Tired of lying politicians
Tired of armchair leaders telling us that everything is under control
Tired of being victims of terror from warring parties
Tired of losing money to kidnappers and thieves at gun point

We are tired!
Tired of the silence of religious moral authorities nationwide
Tired of the loud sounding silence of the other eight regions of the country
Tired of the silence of the international community in the face of such inhumanity
Tired of waiting on God to answer our prayers for peace.

How Can We Protect Ourselves?

We thought it was just a teachers' strike
But it turned out to be a war
A war that began with rubber guns, machetes and spears
Much to the laughter and mockery of all.

Then came machine guns, trucks and the full war
Houses, schools, churches, hospitals burned
Men, women, children and the elderly killed mercilessly
Young girls, women, pregnant or not, raped pitilessly.

Churches and hospitals no longer safe, we run to the bushes for our protection
We formed vigilante groups for our protection
We blew vuvuzelas, whistles for our protection
We formed WhatsApp groups, disseminate information
All for our protection.

But how do we protect ourselves against kidnappers
Whose sole aim is ransom
How do we protect ourselves when old age,
Illness and physical challenges prevent us
From fleeing into the bushes?
How do young men protect themselves when they are most targeted?
How do we protect ourselves from bullets flying in all directions?

Security Challenges

Many schools were closed especially government schools
 How will children go to school with many security challenges?
 Then I discovered many lay private and community schools had been opened
 Which makes movements shorter and more secure for children to go to school.

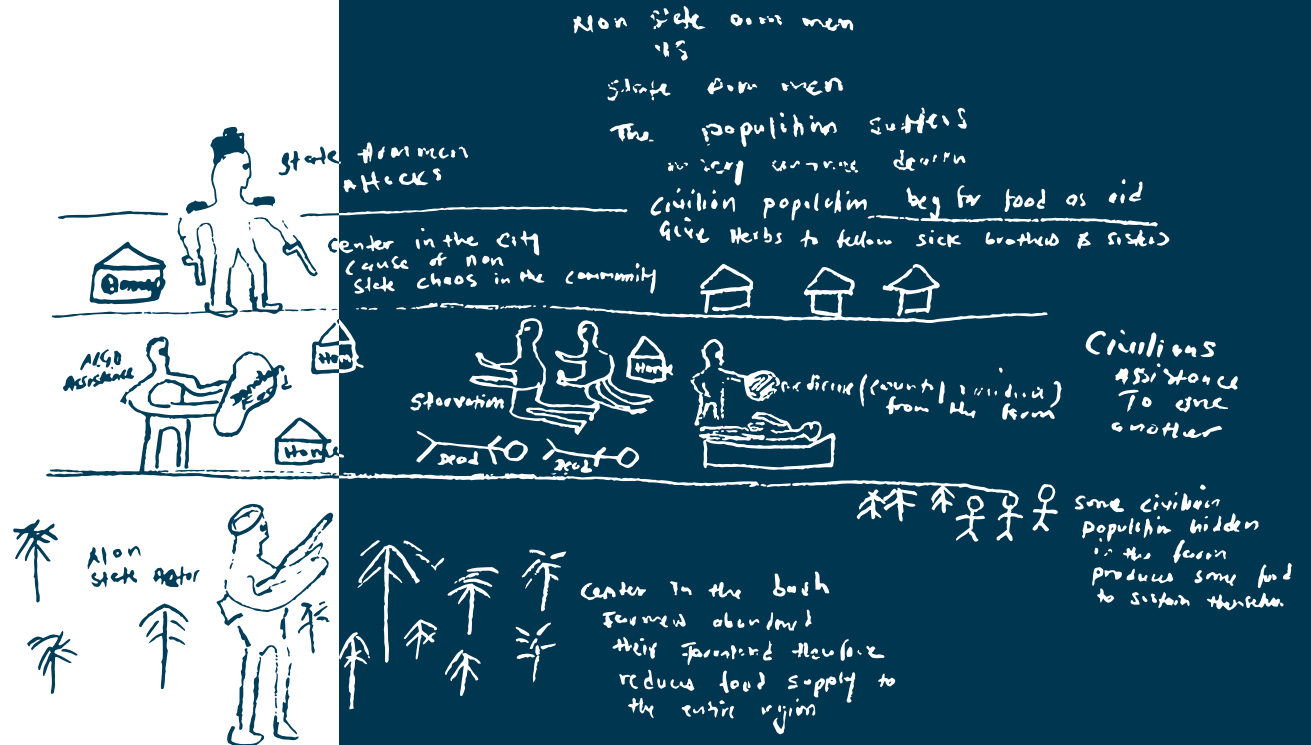
Dressing becomes a problem
 If badly dressed, you are gone
 Especially the young men
 Dress neatly and decently in order to avoid
 Problems and embarrassment
 Communities have formed quarter meetings
 For identification of community members
 WhatsApp groups have also been formed
 For dissemination of information
 Whistles and bells have been adopted
 For members of the community to use
 In times of problems and danger
 Information is not given to a stranger
 Especially during crises
 Avoid unnecessary discussion in public.

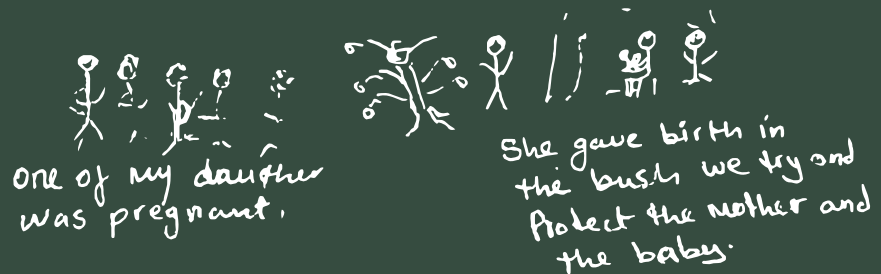
Keeping late nights is prohibited
 Many hideouts have been put in place
 Many roads have been formed
 To ease movements during trouble
 The community will prefer time in their farms
 During lock down than being at home.

Those serving the community are well known
 And they are identified by community leaders
 Services done by external people is done
 With the help of community leaders
 Health services for example
 Is done via community leaders.

Quarter heads and executive members of
 Quarter meetings have been empowered
 By community members to oversee and cross examine
 Problems and security issues within the community.

Always make sure you have identification papers
 Or gadgets when you are out for any service or any movement
 Make sure you obey the orders passed by
 Any armed group around your community.





Our Mothers, Our Strength

Guns blazing, houses razed
Confusion and panic everywhere
Where do we go? Who do we turn to?
Who can protect us?

In our confusion our mothers arose
As phoenix from the burning ashes
They empowered the young
They carried the elderly, our children
They carried the disabled too as we ran into the bushes.

In the bushes they fed the hungry,
Consoled the broken and nursed the wounded
With their pans they sounded the alarm
They provided us shelter as war drums drew near.

They gave us hope amid hopelessness
Encouraged our weak to persevere
Don't give up! They said,
Victory is on the horizon, they encouraged.

Where would we be without our mothers?
Our strength amid the turmoil.

Unpleasant Surprise

As I stepped into the village square
I was so excited but for some reason
My heart beat faster for an unknown reason
I could see people in the square
But something unusual caught my sight
A mother carrying a baby on her back
Another boy carrying an old man on his back
Ah! The sounds of Poom! Poom! Poom!

Just one long blast of the whistle
Then everyone uses their mouth to whistle
Not the whistle that is melodious
But that whistle that everyone knows
They all take to flight through the village square
I have no time for questions
I just have to follow the trend.

Reverence God's Temple?

When we grew up
It was said that God's house is safe
If one has a threat or malaise
Only In God's house could solace be sought

Now everything has become so strange and scary
We can now hear boom, boom, boom
Even in the house of God
If we cannot find solace in the house of God
Then we are really truly doomed
You have pulled down their gods
And sent their worshippers to flight
But please fear God and give him honour

God's temple is not a war zone
God's temple is not a playground
God's temple is not for settling scores
Keep upheavals out of church
Fear God! Fear God!

Undesired Holiday

We have gone on a forceful holiday
Not knowing the duration of this holiday
The house is not safe anymore
So we must flee, not to have a sore.

Our new home is the forest
With so much natural unrest
Cooking just what we can find
And eating with no peace of mind.

A meal for one is a meal for all
We must share, so we don't fall
But how long will this holiday last?
So we can go back home at last?

Say No to Armed Conflicts

During the period of armed conflicts in our country
I have witnessed a lot of killing and bloodshed
Which has brought untold suffering to human life
On the community, especially the vulnerable ones.

I have seen many innocent civilians being killed
Some raped and treated badly as if they are not human beings
As a notable community leader, I have devoted myself as a volunteer
To raise awareness sessions on protection concerns
And the dangers of arms on human beings
I also talk to community members
About the need for neutrality to stay safe from harm
And also stop violence in any form.

I quote one Pa Samantha in 2018
Who was saved from the hands of the military
Because after thorough investigation he was found neutral
Say no to armed conflicts and neutrality is the way out for civilians.

Local measures are many and varied
Be law abiding, avoid illicit drug consumption,
Be independent, so you can cope with challenges.

Peace Should Be Maintained

In 2018 when gunshots started at 10pm
Many people were still awake,
As the sounds continued, places were calm, no movement.

My family and I were in the house
We were there until the next day
It was not easy to bear the sound we were hearing
We had to run to the C.D.C.¹⁵
We stayed there for many days
Life became difficult for us because we were many
With no roads, no place to buy food
Things became difficult, starvation, stress and poverty
Because it was not our home where we could get everything.

Others also ran to the C.D.C. for help as people were living there
One day at about 5am, my people started running to an unknown place
Some were running with things like bags of clothes,
Pots and some other items
Since we did not know where to go
We went to the bush and others followed us
It was because they did not have a place to go
In all, we were about twenty nine.
When we reached the bush that evening
Men built a small hut with palm branches
They put up tents and others were outside
Under a cocoa tree sleeping.

15. Cameroon Development Corporation. A state-owned agribusiness corporation, the country's largest agricultural producer and exporter, based in the South West Region of Cameroon.

After some months we returned to our house
Places had become calm, compared to the past
Some people starting bringing us support,
like I.R.C.,¹⁶ Danish Reach Out and others
This helped to bring our lives back to normal
But some people had died of stress and hunger
Due to sounds of gunshots and what we never experienced before
We had lived like animals in the bush with nothing good to think of.



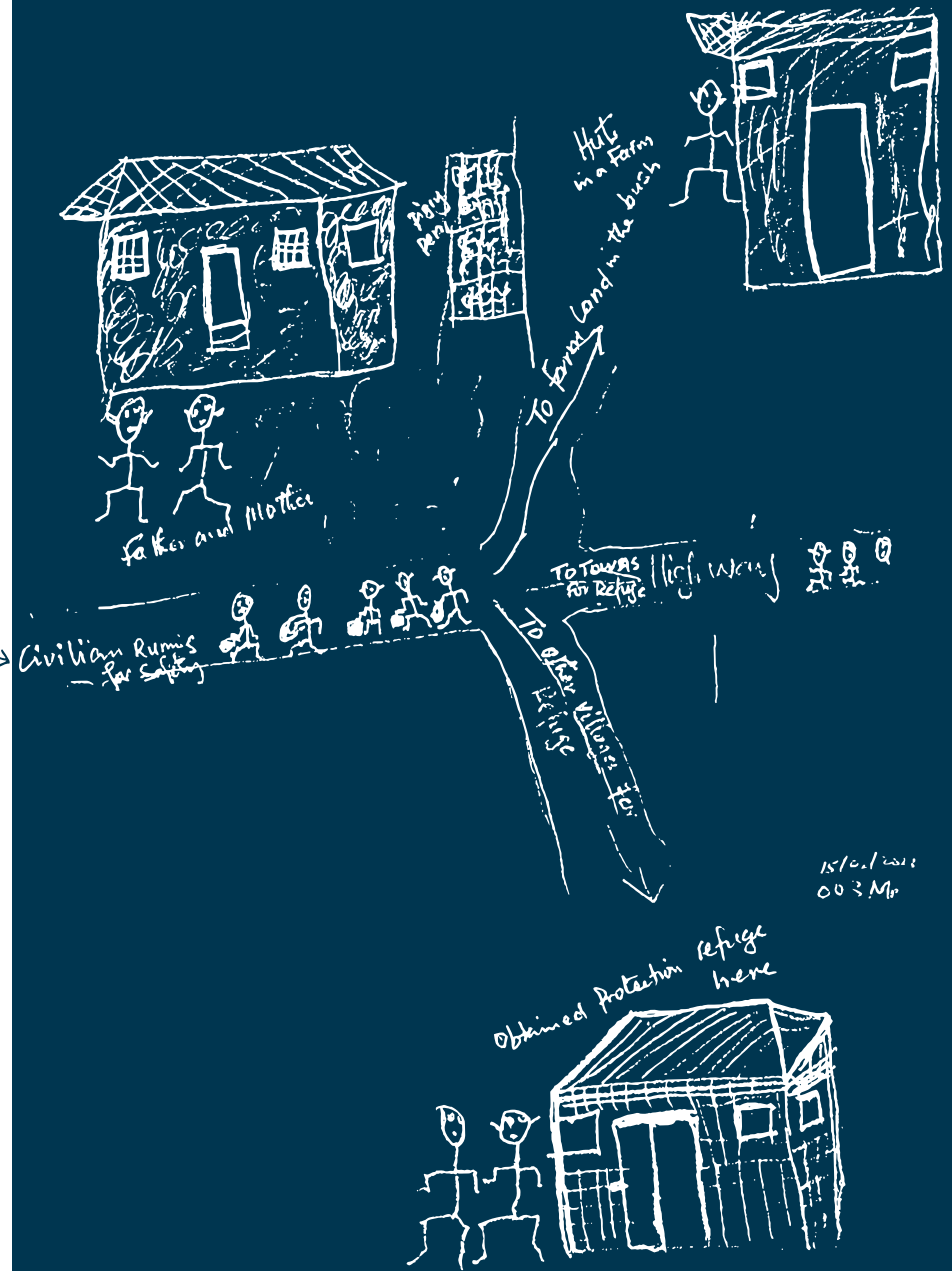
16. International Committee of the Red Cross

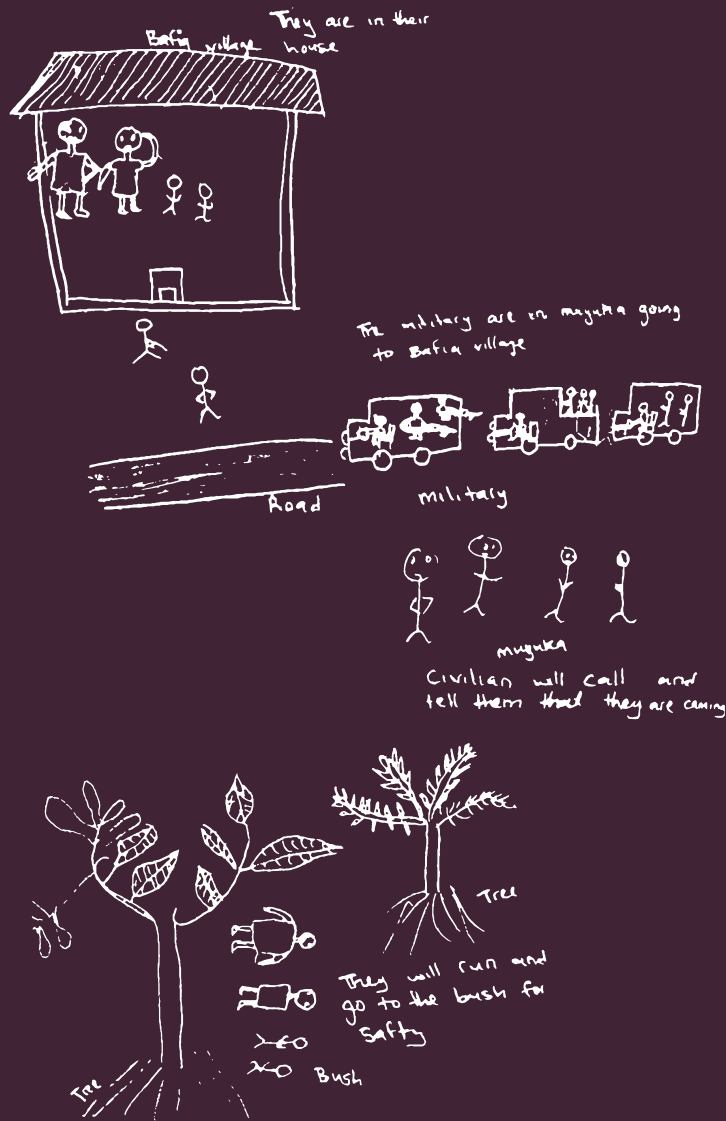
Say No To War

In a community when there's a gunshot
My family and I will run to a place
Where we can hide ourselves from the bullets

We always run and go to our farms and bushes for safety
In the bushes we have built a shade with nets
Which protects us from mosquitoes too

We love going to the bush because it's the only place
Where we can be safe at that time
It is so boring in the bush with people dying
Pregnant women put to bed without medical attention.





War Is Bad

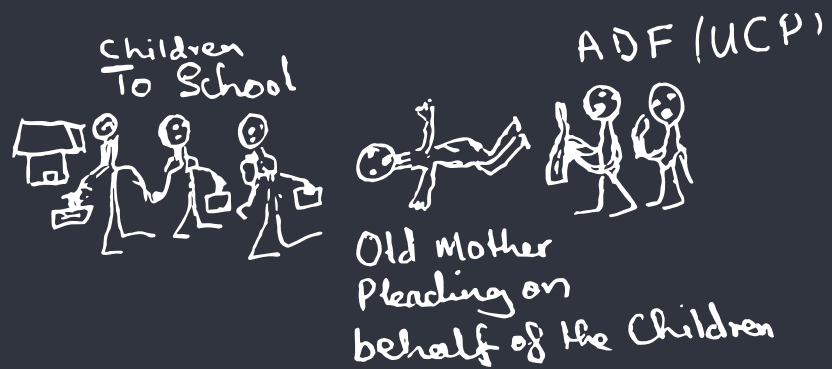
I gave help to many people in 2018
 When the war started in my area it was like a dream
 One person was shot and many people became confused
 People had nowhere to go so I took them to my cocoa farm
 They stayed there from June to November.

Then one time I got information that a car was burnt around my quarter
 And the military had been informed
 So I told everyone to run for safety.

One day I was coming back from church
 A military vehicle stopped by and carried me away
 They asked me to explain why they were being shot
 I said I did not know but they beat me up
 Until a civilian came and pleaded my innocence
 He said I was from church, so I was rescued.

One guy was shot near my house and when places were calm
 Some people and I carried him to the hospital
 He had been wounded.

A friend called me one day, he was a military man
 He said his colleagues were coming to my area that night
 So I gave this information to people around to run away.



Life In Our Community

In the year 2018, everything started gradually
And now many years have gone by but things are worse
The community has become dry land where nobody lives
Instead our farms have become our homes.

In the year 2020, people who were living in the bush
Started coming back home even in fear
Pregnant women gave birth in the house with no medical care.

It's been so difficult and youths and children no longer school
Due to killing of teachers and burning down of schools
I pray this comes to an end and things return to normal
So that schooling can continue and
Women and children will no longer live in fear.

A Humanitarian Worker

I am a bike rider in my community
I supply potable water to people in my community
I give door to door lectures about Human Rights,
I discourage gender-based violence like rape,
Physical assault and early and forced marriages.

I also go in search of internally displaced persons
I seek them in the bushes and offer items to them
These include, mosquito nets, tarpaulins, jugs of water.

I advise young boys not to rape our women
I also help pregnant women to give reports on their condition
I also take my kids to school on my bike
We pray this war comes to a stop.

