

RÉPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN

Paix – Travail- Patrie

MINISTÈRE DE LA COMMUNICATION

REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

Peace- Work- Fatherland

MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION

**ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE AND EXTRA-JUDICIAL
KILLINGS UTTERED BY REDHAC NGO AGAINST THE
CAMEROONIAN DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES IN THE
FIGHT AGAINST BOKO HARAM**

PRESS CONFERENCE

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF
HIS EXCELLENCY ISSA TCHIROMA BAKARY
MINISTER OF COMMUNICATION**

Yaoundé, March 13, 2015

Distinguished Journalists,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country is once again negatively and wrongfully spotted in the headlines of recent news. This is the reason why I have decided to convene you here today to throw light against these ungrounded allegations.

Meanwhile, allow me, before getting into the core of the matter, to wish you all a warm welcome to this meeting and equally extend to you my sincere gratitude for accepting to honour my invitation within a very short notice.

Distinguished journalists,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It should be made known that for some weeks now, our defense and security forces, committed for the past eight months in the war front against the Boko Haram criminal organization, are, unexpectedly, the target of vehement and unjustified attacks from an NGO called « Network of Human Rights Defenders in Central Africa » - in its French acronym « REDHAC », led by two of our compatriots.

In fact, in a statement issued on January 15, 2015 and broadcast through a press release on February 18, 2015, the spontaneous spokesman of RHEDAC goes on to denounce what he qualifies as severe abuses committed by our defense and security forces against the populations of the Far-North Region of Cameroon.

He hammers that the investigation conducted by our armed forces is done under abnormal circumstances on the fallacious ground of gathering information within the framework of the fight against Boko Haram by petrifying and terrorizing the populations they are called to protect.

Moreover, the spokesman of « RHEDAC », goes further to uphold the opinion that our elements of defence forces are leaving no stone unturned to attain their aim, in other words, extracting either confessions or denunciations from sleeper cells of the terrorist sect in areas exposed to Boko Haram attacks.

The author of this statement emphatically indicates that he holds an evidence of a mass slaughter perpetrated by our soldiers towards the end of December 2014, by asphyxia, on civil populations, with suspected connections with the Boko Haram criminal sect and detained on custody in the Far-North Gendarmerie Legion.

On the fallacious ground of being fed up with such cruelty, the managers of the NGO decided to call on the Human Rights Council of the UN, for reparation to be made and that the culprits, that is to say, our defense and security forces, be tried and punished by the international community, and that in the mean time, calling on the UN to support the civil society in its effort to abolish paragraph 1 of Article 2 of the law of December 23, 2014 to suppress acts of terrorism in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Journalists,

It is therefore left on everyone of us to realize the extreme gravity and the magnitude of the ill-fated information widespread by the allegations contained in the public outing of the leaders of this NGO.

It should be highlighted that the leaders of this NGO have made a wide broadcast of the ungrounded release which they published on this occasion and have campaigned towards our bilateral and multilateral partners with the intention to discredit the efforts of our valiant defence and security forces and our country itself, to prevent Cameroon from the support of the international community in the valuable fight they are engaged in against the barbarous hordes of Boko Haram.

You now understand why it is important for us in the first place to emphatically and categorically denounce these ill-fated allegations, and secondly to bring back the truth of facts in this sensitive context where the national community works together with the international community to definitely eradicate the dreadful threat represented by Boko Haram.

My first reaction would be against the ungrounded and ill-fated allegations of the « REDHAC » NGO on the alleged killing of several dozen persons by our defense and security forces having suspected connections or being informants of Boko Haram.

I would only state facts, which would speak for themselves with regard to the reality on the field.

Face with the repeated attacks of the criminal horde of the Boko Haram terrorist group in certain areas of the Far-North, the local administrative authority and the military high command competent for the territory, ordered a series of dragging and search operations along the roads of localities affected by the said attacks, particularly along the No. 1 national road between the towns of MORA and KOUSSERI, with a special focus on the localities of MAGDEME and DOUBLÉ.

In fact, bandits of the Boko Haram terrorist group were perniciously used to infiltrate within the population, to attack civil and military convoys. They repeatedly killed peaceful citizens, razed down their villages and in each time, carried along hundreds of cows belonging to the farmers of the region.

The MORA-KOUSSERI road had become particularly dangerous and it was almost impossible to move along that road at any hour of the day.

It is in this vein that an encirclement operation was organized in the MAGDEME and DOUBLÉ villages on the night of December 26 to December 27, 2014, in an attempt to counter an attack planned by aggressors according to information from military intelligence services.

The encirclement operation, conducted by a combined detachment of the national security, led to the arrest of seventy suspects, who were transferred to the Maroua Gendarmerie Legion for a wide-ranging inquiry.

The convoy transporting the suspects arrived in Maroua on December 27, 2014 at about 10:30 p.m. Fourteen of the arrested

suspects were conducted to the cells of the Maroua Territorial Brigade, while the other suspects, fifty-six in number, were kept under custody in a building that had been purposely prepared at the Maroua Gendarmerie Legion of the Far-North, due to the overcrowded cells of the Maroua Gendarmerie as well as those of the Maroua Central prison.

The screening process was to take place the following day to eventually free those of the suspects who were found innocent after examining their situation, and to sue the others before competent courts.

In the early morning of December 28, 2014, after opening the premises where the suspects had been detained the day before in the Gendarmerie Legion, it was noticed that twenty-five out of the fifty-six had died.

The requested forensic doctor expert performed autopsies on the corpses and ordered their burial.

The burial of corpses was immediately ordered to avoid any further contamination.

Two senior military officers of the central services of the gendarmerie, among which a magistrate, were sent on the field to conduct wide-ranging inquiry and throw more light in this matter.

The case was then handed over to the military judiciary. Its investigations are underway while awaiting a ruling against the culprits.

Nevertheless, I can already state here that, at this stage of investigations, no evidence has been established to corroborate that these persons were deliberately killed.

Meanwhile, while waiting for more clarification, the Commander of the Far-North Gendarmerie Legion who was on command at the time of the incident has been sacked and handed over to competent court for further investigations.

It is also worth mentioning that some terrorists of the Boko Haram group, who escaped during the dragging and encirclement operations in MAGDEME and DOUBLÉ, returned to these localities on the night of December 28, 2014, to ambush our defence forces, in response to the arrest of their criminal counterparts.

Two Cameroonian soldiers were killed in that ambush, without provoking any emotional strain to the managers of the « REDHAC » NGO, and who, never deemed it necessary to express their solidarity following the brutal and mutilated killing of hundreds of their innocent and defenceless compatriots, not leaving behind the raping of women or the cold-blooded killing of children in an indescribable barbarism.

This is therefore, **Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Journalists**, the facts underpinning the truth which I had to bring to you, for you to properly inform both national and international public opinion.

Let us not get confused, the criminals here are the Boko Haram adepts, who go about killing, plundering, abducting and strangling peoples' lives.

The defence and security forces are there to defend the populations, safeguard the peace and stability of our dear and beautiful fatherland, and sometimes at the expense of their own lives.

We still have in mind the painful ceremony which took place last week at the Military Headquarters in tribute of our fallen soldiers at the war front.

Had it been that these forces were perceived by the populations as repressive and persecuting, they wouldn't have provided them with precious information as it the case right now.

Allow me, all the same, to refresh their memories with these statements of the **Head of the State, His Excellency Paul BIYA**, echoed on last February 16, 2015, in his address on the occasion of the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government Conference of the Central African Peace and Security Council, COPAX, in Yaoundé. And I quote:

“The reality is simple. On one side, there are our forces, defenders of a modern and tolerant society which guarantees the exercise of human rights, including that of religion, as well as representative democracy. On the other side, namely Boko Haram and similar movements, there are partisans of an obscurantist and tyrannical society which has no consideration for human dignity.”

End of quote.

From a broader view, the issue of Human Rights, considered by our attackers to not have been respected by our soldiers, I would like to note that the training for the respect of Human Rights, in time of peace and of war, is an integral part of the training of our defence and security forces, who have always proven to be able to meet this requirement.

Concerning the claim formulated for the abolition of some provisions of the law to suppress acts of terrorism, it is important to note that our detractors are willingly trying to carry on the media front, a fight they had lost on the legislative and even social fronts.

In fact, the entire Cameroonian People, through its representatives in Parliaments, chose to keep its ideals of peace, solidarity and togetherness, against the terrorism scourge. This choice was rightfully welcomed by the entire international community.

A resolution of the United Nation Security Council called on all countries to adopt laws against terrorism. Cameroon complied without any hidden agenda.

Let us therefore put an end to wrong intentions and remain concentrated on what is essential.

Everyone is aware of what a terrorist is and what terrorism is not.

Attempting to question this law is merely an act of marginal blindness, in which the defenders of this hopeless cause should better try to cure.

I would also like to recall that Cameroon, after freely ratifying the convention against torture and other sentences or cruel inhuman and degrading treatments, had to set up, in its Penal Code, means to repress the acts targeted by this international legal instrument.

And this is what was done in **Article 132 BIS** of the Cameroonian Penal Code.

Before then, Cameroon had already ratified the United Nations Convention on Human Rights and that of the African Union on Human Rights and Freedoms.

It is on the basis of these prescribed laws that our defence and security forces are carrying out their operations on the war front.

Allow me also to recall to their consciences, that while they are wasting their time in doom prophecies, hundreds of Boko Haram terrorists, are being detained in our prisons by our defence forces without any exaction or acts of torture being done against them.

Many of them have also been caught red-handed. Some had mobile phones with videos displaying acts of slaughter. They have, for God's sake, never been subdued to any extra-judicial killing. They have been jailed and will be prosecuted in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic.

Important financial means, which are actually required, are invested for their watch, feeding and keeping. In the mean time, their criminal counterparts, those still at large, continue to threaten our compatriots and plunder their wealth, and endangering the entire pillars of our economy in those areas.

Cameroon should not be blamed even on the issue of respect of Human Rights by our defence and security forces in their daily fight against Boko Haram.

Allow me to seize this opportunity, once again, and on behalf of the Government, to pay a vibrant homage to our valiant armed forces for the courage, determination and competence showcased in meeting with their commitments to preserve the territorial integrity of our country as well as to protect and secure goods and persons living within our borders.

I would like, to this effect, to recall that the prowess of our valiant armed forces against Boko Haram is well known worldwide and call

for admiration of all. But we should keep in mind that if our defence forces are recording these good results it is partly thanks to the excellent collaboration it receives from the populations, especially with the provision of useful information.

I would like to seize this opportunity to laud the appointment by the **Head of State** of top ranking women of our armed forces at the helm of major commandment units, notably at the positions of Commander of the Legion and Commander of the Battalion.

Let me also use this opportunity to laud the merit of the coalition forces against Boko Haram, who, every day, are fiercely knocking out the criminals of this barbarous and tyrannical organisation, pushing them back to their very edge, until the ultimate moment of their total eradication and final suppression.

I call on you, **Fellow Journalists**, to keep supporting the **President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul BIYA, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the army**, as well as our defence and security forces in this merciless fight against the Boko Haram terrorist organisation, enemy of the nation and of the modern world.

Be assured that this is a rational, citizen-centred and responsible choice, which no real Cameroonian should leave behind.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.