

# Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

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12 November 2021

His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya  
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Your Excellencies,

## **Re: Death threats against human rights defender Mr. Felix Agbor Nkongho**

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee of lawyers and human rights defenders who promote international human rights, the independence and security of human rights defenders, the integrity of legal systems, and the rule of law through advocacy, education, and legal research. LRWC has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (UN).

We are alarmed by reports of death threats made against Mr. Felix Agbor Nkongho (also known as Agbor-Balla) during his attendance at a Leadership Retreat in Toronto, Canada, organized by the "Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations" from 29 October to 1 November 2021. Throughout the Toronto event, Mr. Nkongho received multiple death threats and calls for violence against him on social media. Such threats and calls for violence against Mr. Nkongho put his life and well-being at immediate risk.

Mr. Nkongho is human rights lawyer, a member of the Governing Council of the African Bar Association (AFBA), and the founder of the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). He is a key figure in the international calls for protection of human rights in Cameroon and for the non-violent resolution of conflicts involving the Anglophone minority in Cameroon. In 2018, Mr. Nkongho addressed Canada's House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights to raise international awareness of the need for peaceful and constructive solutions to the serious conflict, human rights and humanitarian situation in Cameroon.

The recent threats are part of lengthy history and pattern of harassment and retaliation against Mr. Nkongho as a result of his promotion of nonviolent conflict resolution and human rights protection in Cameroon, particularly in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country. We are dismayed that threats and reprisals against Mr. Nkongho have not stopped and have now escalated to threats against his life.

We draw your attention to the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders which guarantees to all persons “the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>1</sup> The Declaration also requires States to ensure protection of all human rights defenders against any “retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action” as a result of exercising these rights.

Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council have in the past urged your government to “put an end to escalating intimidation and aggression towards human rights defenders to ensure they can continue their work and NGOs operate safely.”<sup>2</sup> As a current member of the Human Rights Council, Cameroon has particular responsibilities “to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, shall fully cooperate with the Council” as stipulated in UN General Assembly resolution 60/251.<sup>3</sup>

We request that your government take urgent steps to:

- Ensure the protection of Mr. Nkongho, and all human rights defenders in Cameroon;
- Conduct an immediate, thorough, transparent and independent investigation into the above-mentioned death threats against Mr. Nkongho to identify all those responsible and bring them to justice according to law before an independent, impartial tribunal; and
- Put an end to all forms of harassment, including at the administrative and judicial level, against Mr. Nkongho and all human rights defenders in Cameroon, and ensure their ability to carry on their legitimate activities without hindrance or fear of reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Catherine Morris, BA, JD, LL.M.  
Executive Director  
Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada

Copied to:

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: resolution*, 8 March 1999, A/RES/53/144, see, particularly Article 12, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CivicSpace/Pages/DeclarationHumanRightsDefenders.aspx>. The Declaration, while not in itself a binding instrument, is based on human rights standards enshrined in other international instruments that are legally binding, including the ICCPR. The Declaration was adopted by consensus of the General Assembly and thus represents a unanimous commitment by States to its implementation.

<sup>2</sup> UN OHCHR, *Cameroon must protect human rights defenders – UN experts*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25835&LangID=E>.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *Human Rights Council : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*, 3 April 2006, A/RES/60/251, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4537814814.html>.

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