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Effects of Cameroon 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Case of North west and South West Regions

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism is a threat to sustainable peace in the world. The scars of the September 11 attacks in United States of America compelled global war on terror and the introduction of anti-terrorism laws to combat terrorism. The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001), obliged member states to implement measures to strengthen institutional and legal capabilities to combat terrorism. From the foregoing, Cameroon introduced the anti-terrorism without taking into cognizance it may put human rights at risk. The introduction of the 2014 anti-terrorism law has negatively impacted the promotion and protection of human rights. This paper examines the effects of the 2014 anti-terrorism on the promotion and protection Human Rights in the North West and South West regions. This paper applied the Legal Realism theory to highlights these effects. With the use of purposive sampling technique, this paper interviewed 5 Lawyers, 5 Journalists and 5 Human rights activists based in the Northwest and Southwest Regions and data was analysed using thematic analysis. This paper found out that the understanding people have about the 2014 anti-terrorism law is that it creates fear, the law is vague and it is a threat to human rights. The paper also found out that the 2014 anti-terrorism law has negatively impacted the promotion and protection of human rights, which includes; violation of press freedom and expression, creates unsafe working environment, absence of rights to life, absence of rights to life, arbitrary Arrest, detention and torture, and reduction in media coverage, underreporting and limited cases in the Northwest and Southwest regions. This paper concludes that the Cameroon 2014 anti-terrorism was hurriedly introduced due to the pressure from Western Powers without taken into consideration the realities and contexts of Cameroon thus it has negatively impacted the promotion and protection of human rights in Cameroon in general.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Anti-Terrorism Law, Promotion, Protection and Human Rights*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of anti-terrorism laws has significantly impacted human rights globally. These laws are designed to protect national security and public safety by preventing and punishing acts of terrorism. In today's development discourse, the relationship between national security concerns and the protection of human rights has received a lot of attention. Counter terrorism laws have a significant role in protecting national security, public safety, and peace. Human rights and security are essential for promoting sustainable development, specifically; effective anti-terrorism legislation has a major impact on the advancement and protection of these rights as well as the process of development. As Mary Robinson puts it: "people will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights Robinson, M (2012). This also applies to those Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) who advocate for the advancement of socioeconomic justice and equitable resource distribution. However, the broad and often vague definitions within these laws can lead to their misuse, resulting in violations of fundamental human rights. The global war on terror and ant-terrorism laws were introduced in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, which put human rights at risk globally. With the adoption of Resolution 1373 (2001), the UN Security Council urged its member nations to take steps to strengthen their institutional and legal capabilities to combat terrorism.

The anti-terrorism law's sweeping and ambiguous definitions of "terrorist act" and "encouraging act" worry national, regional, and international human rights organisations. Nonetheless, state organs at all levels are legally required by the constitution and international human rights treaties to guarantee the preservation of the fundamental freedoms and human rights guaranteed by the bill of rights. This clause states that the state has a negative obligation to refrain from interfering with people's and groups' ability to exercise their human rights. However, opposition figures, such as human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists were unlawfully detained, unfairly arrested, and convicted, while others were slain by police using excessive force while going about their daily business. There is a heated discussion between the protection of human rights, especially the rights of human rights defenders, and the interests of national security in the wake of the passing of Law No. 2014/028 of December 23, 2014 in Cameroon, which deals with the suppression of acts of terrorism. The debate is intensified by the intensified human rights violation but attempted to justify in the name of countering terrorism. Whether these measures are in line with their human rights obligations and in respect for fundamental freedoms and provides sufficient guidance to those charged with their execution to enable them to ascertain what sorts of freedoms are properly restricted and what sorts are not, when, and how,

is a matter of great attention. Although the aim of every state is to protect national security, anti-terrorism measures are often misused by states at the detriment of fundamental liberties.

In its fight against terrorism, the state of Cameroon has passed the anti-terrorism law. This law is a legal framework aimed at countering terrorist activities within the country. However, like many anti-terrorism laws globally, it raises concerns about its impact on human rights. In particular, the law's provisions that intersects with fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, press freedom, and the right to peaceful protests. Nevertheless, neither human rights nor terrorism are defined clearly in this resolution. Consequently, arbitrary definitions of terrorism have surfaced, resulting in wide applications that cover non-terrorist-related cases. In 2014, the state of Cameroon enacted Law No 2014/28 of December 2014 of the suppression of All Acts of Terrorism. In the implementation of this law, human rights violations have been on the rise and significantly affect the promotion and protection of human rights especially in the North West and South regions of Cameroon. Amnesty International (2019) underscores that the government of Cameroon has used the anti-terrorism law to silent critique of the government as lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders who been critical on the government have been accused of act of terrorism. It worth noting that the definition of ant-terrorism law is so broad that makes it difficult to understand, thus any action such as peaceful protest could be linked to terrorism. In these regions (North West and South West), Amnesty International (2017) documents that between 2014 to 2017, hundreds of individuals have been held incommunicado and tortured by the Cameroonian security forces and authorities in facilities run by the military and intelligence services. In all the cases, the victims had been accused often on the basis of little or no evidence of supporting armed groups. They were all arrested without a warrant, and rarely provided with a reason for their arrest. Brought to a number of unofficial detention facilities, where they were held without any access to the outside world, they were eventually transferred to an official prison to await trial. Furthermore, Amnesty International (2022) revealed that the anti-terrorism law has negative effects on the promotion and protection of human rights in these regions. Amnesty International further states that over the past five years, the human rights situation has grown increasingly bleak as people from Anglophone regions, including journalists, human rights defenders, activists and supporters of political opposition, have been arrested and jailed for expressing their opinions or peacefully protesting. There have been credible reports from human rights organisations (Amnesty International, 2017) and the international press (Peter, 2018) that allege that security forces, particularly the BIR, have conducted extrajudicial, and likely unlawful killings of civilians in the Anglophone region, including summary executions and deaths that occurred as a result of torture in order to

enforce 2014 anti-terrorism law. the of anti-terrorism law has had negative effects on the promotion and protection of human right as Human Rights Watch (2018) reports that security forces have attacked people in and around health facilities, summarily executing suspected separatists and in two separate incidents killing a pregnant nurse (Human Rights Watch (2019) and a woman attempting to alert residents at a security facility that a government raid was about to occur.

II. GLOBAL ANTI-TERRORISM LAW ON PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

(A) Impact on Freedom of Expression, Association, and Assembly

The CCPR General comment (2011) underscores that freedom of expression, association and assembly are considered as one of the most paramount liberties for the development of societies, being the kernel of all successful democratic systems. In fact, freedom of expression is a necessary precondition for other fundamental rights to be enjoyable such as the right to assembly, the exercise of political life, and the freedom of association. The UN Human Rights committee in this perspective noted that the “freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are indispensable conditions for the full development of the person. These are basic civil rights which are crucial to any functioning democracy. However, they are also rights which have increasingly been curtailed or are under threat from anti-terrorism legislation as governments move to ban public demonstrations in the name of state security. Anti-terrorism legislation threatens to undermine democracy, not only in Africa, but across the world. Such legislation can easily be used to suppress or undermine democratic opposition. To illustrate, the Zimbabwean Public Order and Security Act of 2002 makes it an offence to publish statements that promote public disorder or undermine public confidence in the law enforcement officials or to insult the office of the President. According to Kagari (2003), the Ugandan government has been criticised for using the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002 to repress political dissent and strictly limit freedom of expression. In September 2002, Ugandan radio stations were warned against giving publicity to an exiled political leader whom the government had labeled a terrorist and threatened with prosecution under the Act, in terms of which it is an offence to give publicity to terrorists. The impact of anti-terrorism law on freedom of expression, association and assembly, has limits that growth and development of many countries especially African countries who were forced to implement these anti-terrorism laws without understanding its implication in the continent. Duffy and Pitcher (2018) establish that the limitations on freedom of expression imposed by anti-terrorism legislation primarily involve

prohibiting various terrorism-related speeches. This includes broadening the offences of incitement of criminal acts to include ‘indirect incitement of terrorist violence speech that justifies or glorifies terrorist acts.

(B) Detention, Torture and the Right to a Fair Trial

One of the most important rights of a criminal suspect is the right to be informed of the reason for their detention and the right to seek legal advice. Anti-terrorist legislation often curtails these under the pretext that more detention time is required for the law enforcement officials to complete their investigations. Where it is permitted, the right to counsel is limited to consultation with ‘approved’ legal practitioners. Human Rights Watch (2006) reports that in Mauritius, under the Prevention of Terrorism Regulations 2003, a terrorist suspect can be detained for up to 36 hours without access to anyone other than a police officer or medical officer on request. In similar vein, anti-terrorism legislation passed in the UK, France, Germany and Italy introduced severe restrictions on freedoms including prolonged detention and refusal to grant the right of asylum and immigration on the mere suspicion that the individual or individuals concerned belonged to a terrorist group. In the aftermath of the July 2005 London underground and bus bombings, the British government proposes to increase the period of detention without charge of terrorist suspects from 14 days to three months. Human Rights Watch (2001) expressed concern over the USA anti-terrorism legislation as it describe it as the breadth and vagueness of the criteria for the certification and detention of non-citizens raise the possibility of arbitrary or abusive application. In another report in 2004, Amnesty International revealed that in 2003, there was widespread torture in Algeria, particularly in cases which the government described as ‘terrorist activities’. To support this, Human Rights Watch (2004) underscores that a number of people were detained in a facility controlled by the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force in Uganda were tortured. In relation to the detention of individuals by the USA in its so-called ‘war against terror’, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in 2003 that their conditions of detention were arbitrary.

(C) Rights to Life

The right to life is recognized under international human rights law and treaties as the “supreme right” because without its effective guarantee, all other human rights would be without meaning. So, even in times of crisis, governments have the duty to protect the life of every citizen within their territory and are accountable for failing to do so. As part of this obligation, States must implement effective criminal justice and law enforcement systems, such as measures to deter the commission of offences and investigate violations where they occur; ensure that those

suspected of criminal acts are prosecuted; provide victims with effective remedies; and take other necessary steps to prevent a recurrence of violations (The Economics of Post-Conflict Reconstruction in MENA, 2017). Anti-terrorism laws can significantly impact the right to life by enabling excessive state power, leading to arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and the erosion of due process, particularly when such laws are poorly drafted or implemented, potentially putting individuals at risk of being wrongly accused and deprived of their lives without proper legal safeguards. International and regional human rights law recognizes the right and duty of States to protect those individuals subject to their jurisdiction. In practice, some states have adopted measures to protect individuals from acts of terrorism have themselves posed grave challenges to the right to life. Some include targeted killings to eliminate specific individuals as an alternative to arresting them and bringing them to justice. The Human Rights Committee has stated that targeted killings should not be used as a deterrent or punishment and that the utmost consideration should be given to the principle of proportionality. State policies should be spelled out clearly in guidelines to military commanders and complaints about the disproportionate use of force should be investigated promptly by an independent body. Before any contemplation of resort to the use of deadly force, all measures to arrest a person suspected of being in the process of committing acts of terror must be exhausted (Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck, 2005). Furthermore, the protection against arbitrary deprivation of life is non-derogable even in a state of emergency threatening the life of the nation.

(D) Right to Privacy

The constitutions of most of the countries surveyed guarantee the right to privacy. However, their legislation confers powers on law enforcement agencies that potentially threaten this right. Some of the anti-terrorist legislative measures give the police extensive powers to combat terrorism, including the use of electronic surveillance to identify terrorists. The Ugandan Anti-Terrorism Act gives law enforcement officials extensive powers to monitor bank accounts, e-mails, telephone calls and other electronic communications of suspects. The potential for abuse under these provisions is considerable. Bossa & Mulindwa (2004) argued that the phrase articles of a kind which could be used in connection with terrorism in the Ugandan Anti-Terrorism Act is vague that it could be used to search for almost any object. Amnesty International (2017: 27-36) reports that surveillance powers continue to expand, impacting the right to privacy. In France, a 2015 law allows for “the use of mass surveillance tools that capture mobile phone calls and of black boxes in internet service providers that collect and analyse the personal data of millions of internet users” (Amnesty International, 2017: 27-36). It is widely held that mass surveillance measures carry over to curtail the enjoyment of other rights: individuals do not

engage in legitimate activities because of their knowledge of being observed. Surveillance thus impacts not only the right to privacy but also the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly (Martin, 2018). Murray and Fussey (2019) however find out that the existence of this phenomenon has not been subject to much empirical scrutiny. Indeed, identifying such impacts is a complex matter due to challenges related to generalisability, discerning intentions, and establishing causality.

(E) Freedom of Religion

Although the UN Charter cannot be described as either being of a theistic or a non-theistic character, Article 1 which lists the purposes of the UN implicitly asserted on the freedom of religion which include in its third section: “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. Shortly afterwards, 48 nations participated in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is much more precise on affirming explicitly the right to exercise religious beliefs. Article 18 of the UDHR states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Anti-terrorism measures that limit religious freedoms by closing places of worship, as practised in Austria and France (Deutsche Welle, 2020). During the 2015-2017 state of emergency, 19 mosques were closed in France (Yaël B., Éric, C., and Raphaël, G, 2020). The power was extended beyond the emergency period by a law that allowed the executive, for the sole purpose of preventing the commission of acts of terrorism, to close a place of worship in which the ideas or theories spread or the activities held provoke violence, hate or discrimination, or the commitment of acts of terrorism, or glorify such acts for up to six months. Since the adoption of this law in November 2017, eight further mosques have been closed, one of which reopened. Le Parisien (2022) posits that in 2022, with 99 mosques suspected of separatism, and 21 closed due to administrative prescriptions, a court decision, a lease takeover, works or an administrative closure. The UN Special Rapporteur (2019) illustrates that the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism highlights the danger of securitising certain religious practices, as well as instituting norms that intentionally or unintentionally target individual adherents or groups of persons of a particular faith who are perceived to be predisposed to terrorist or other violent acts.

III. THE APPLICABILITY OF LEGAL REALISM BY CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS LANGDELL (1920S)

Legal realists challenged the notion that law is a closed system of rules that can be objectively applied. Instead, they argued that law is inherently indeterminate and that legal outcomes are influenced by a variety of factors, including the personal biases of judges, the specific facts of each case, and the broader social, economic, and political environment. The anti-terrorism law enacted has deprived the enjoyment of human rights in the North West and South West region because it has hindered freedom of expression, press and public opinion given the vagueness of the law. The applicability of the law is based on the prevailing social interests and public policy (legal realism) as opposed to purely formalistic legal considerations. Here, judges focus on social interests and public policy when deciding a case. Thus the decision of judges should focus on social interests and public policy that advocates actions that foster happiness or pleasure and oppose actions that cause unhappiness or harm. The introduction and application of the anti-terrorism law in the North West and South West regions has diverted from social interest as it has acted on the human rights of the people. Freedom of expression, public opinion and the press has been curtailed ushering unhappiness or harm instead of happiness. Enacting a law and its applicable should rest on social interest that would aim for the betterment of the society as a whole. While enacting the law based on prevailing social interests, judges must ensure that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights. In the context of anti-terrorism laws, such as those implemented in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, legal realism provides a critical lens for examining how these laws are applied and their impact on human rights. Realists would focus on the ways in which these laws are enforced, the discretion exercised by authorities, and the broader social and political context in which they operate. This perspective is crucial for understanding whether these laws are being used to genuinely combat terrorism or to suppress dissent and target specific groups.

IV. APPLIED METHODOLOGY

The methodology explores a case study research design with the use of qualitative research approach that allows this paper to explore the effects of the 2014 anti-terrorism law on the promotion and protection of human rights in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon. The target population for this paper comprised respondents that provided an in-depth understanding of the effects of the anti-terrorism law. The target population was divided as follows;

- ✓ Lawyers

- ✓ Journalists
- ✓ Human rights Activists, all residing in the North West and South West regions

In this article a purposive sampling was used. The choice of this sample technique was guided by the desire to get in-depth understanding from the targeted respondents. With regards to Sample Size, 15 respondents were sampled, 5 Lawyers, 5 Journalists and 5 Human rights activists all resident in North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. Qualitative data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of Themes, Thematic Explication, and Quotes.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

(A) Understanding of the Cameroon 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law

In examining the effects of the 2014 anti-terrorism law on the promotion and protection of human rights, it was imperative to ascertain respondents understanding of the contextual applicability of the Anti-terrorism law in the North West and South West regions. the following thematic analyses reveal the understanding of Lawyers, Journalists and Human rights activists of Cameroon 2014 anti-terrorism law.

✓ Creates fear

Anti-terrorism laws can create fear, particularly when they are broadly defined or implemented in a way that allows for potential abuse, as the very nature of such laws is to deter terrorism by creating an atmosphere of fear. This sometimes led to intimidation of innocent individuals or groups perceived as potential threats, even if unintentionally. From the inception of the anti-terrorism in Cameroon, not only has it created uncertainty to the people of the North West and South West regions, it has created fear among the people as every topic of discussion is considered a taboo topic.

My impression of the anti-terrorism law is one of concern and fear. I am concerned because it inhibits the lengths to which my reporting on sensitive issues can stretch. And the fear comes as a result of the uncertainty that engulfs those tried using the law (Journalist AS, 2025)

As a practicing lawyer, the Anti-terrorism Law adopted by Cameroon on December 23, 2014, has limited the ability of lawyers to report cases human rights violations, particularly in these regions. Many of my colleagues practice with fear because our action may be interpreted that we are defending a terrorist or act of terrorism (Lawyer EL, 2025).

Each time I am in these regions advocating for the promotion and protection of human rights, fear always grip me not to get myself into trouble with the government. I frequently stay away

from sensitive issues, even though these issues are important to the common man (H.R Activists CD, 2025)

A law that I don't understand, I fear to report because I don't want to be accused of violating the Anti-terrorism law. I have seen many of my colleagues been arrested and detained. I fear because I don't want such fate to befall me (Journalist TA, 2025)

The law itself creates fear and panic among us journalists. It is deliberate by the government so that we don't inform the citizens on the realities of government action (Journalist IH, 2024).

Anti-terrorism laws creates fear, particularly when they are broadly defined or implemented in a way that allows for excessive surveillance and arbitrary detention, as this can lead to a climate of suspicion where individuals feel they could be targeted simply for their beliefs or associations, even if they are not involved in any terrorist activity; this is a major concern raised by critics of such laws.

✓ **Vagueness of the law**

The vagueness of the law is seen as people can be apprehended without a warrant and detained for weeks prior to appearance before a judge, not only is the law broad enough to permit the detention of people for social media posts critical of the government, it also makes it criminal offense to incite others to commit terrorism through speeches, proclamations, writings, further restricting freedom of expression and the media.

Because its definition of terrorism remains vague, journalists who have reported on sensitive security issues have been tried using provisions of the law. Invariably, this keeps me mired in worry about what my fate might be, if I were vaguely implicated in terrorism claims for simply doing my job. Undesirable to me — or any professional for that matter (Journalist GF, 2025)

The law is problematic because of its vagueness of the law. The law has a disastrous impact on freedom of information, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The vagueness of the law has made it difficult for journalist to exercise their duties without fear (Journalist AR, 2025)

Because of how vague the law is, most human rights activists fear the unknown because one could be arrested and taken into jail at any time. Practicing journalism in this context is very difficult (H.R. Activist BC, 2025)

The law is to set out, not to protect the citizenry, but rather to protect the state... making it indicative of the consolidation of excessive power in the hands of the executive (Lawyer MF, 2024)

The findings indicate that anti-terrorism laws have expanded over time, becoming increasingly

vague, and often overturning basic procedural safeguards for defendants. In enforcing these anti-terrorism laws, investigating officers often use vague allegations and inconsistent evidence to attempt to punish human rights defenders and that are critical of the government of Cameroon. The process of prosecuting individuals under these laws has also become punishment itself through the use of extensive pretrial detention and repeated denial of bail.

✓ **Threats to Human rights**

Different schools of thoughts have demonstrated how terrorism poses a major threat to core human rights, such as the rights to life, physical integrity but also freedom of movement. It justifiable for states to fight terrorism under their obligation to protect, however, fighting terrorism without a concise understanding of the anti-terrorism law may imply restrictions/interferences with human rights guarantees. It is worth mentioning that more often; there is interference with the concerned individuals' rights to freedom of expression, private and family life or liberty and security of person. The fight against terrorism is thus characterized by the tension between a state's duty to respect and the duty to protect human rights. The introduction of the 2014 anti-terrorism law in Cameroon is could serve as threat to human rights due to its applicability. It undermines the rule of law; the enforcement is discriminatory, persistent threats to human rights defenders.

I want to be honest with you; my understanding of the 2014 anti-terrorism law is that it is a threat to human rights (Activist TH, 2024)

I think this law is meant to target us, human rights defenders, to threaten us and to an extent a threat to human rights (Activist GD, 2024)

From the above, the respondents reveal that the 2014 anti-terrorism law is a serious threat to human rights. Many human rights violations have been reported since the enactment of the anti-terrorism law, the national legal framework overseeing the fight against terrorism. In addition, the recent amendment of this law has extended the definition of "terrorist act" and increased the government's ability to repress, with impunity, any kind of public contestation. Hence, under the pretext of anti-terrorism, the government has clearly exploited the threat of regional terrorism to pass anti-terrorism measures that increase its power of repression and legalize illegal practices resulting in a deterioration of its citizen rights.

(B) Cameroon 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

✓ **Violation of Press Freedom and Expression**

The misuse of the 2014 anti-terrorism law has become one of the most widespread threats to freedom of expression, including press freedom in Cameroon, particularly in the North West and South West regions. The law has restricted the rights of journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers in expressing their views while exercising their duties.

The advent of the law has played an ostensible role in limiting press freedom and freedom of expression in the country. Journalists are petrified by the vagueness of the law and its provisions, to the point where they are scared of becoming victims of legal crackdowns. The fact that a civilian could be charged with supporting terrorism and tried in a military court injects a high dose of fear, making it difficult for some professionals to delve into rigorous, investigative journalism to unravel the mystery behind certain issues of national concern (Journalist IH, 2025).

Worse still, the fear of the capital punishment — the death penalty — which those found guilty are liable to face, doesn't help matters. So, this law is a brutal demonstration of how much human rights activists are stifled by the system (H.R. Activist DA, 2025)

Due to the existence of such a heinous law, I am forced to choose my words wisely while publishing any human rights reports, limit the depth and extent to which I put certain sensitive national issues in context. Before I carry out activism, I read between the lines, thoroughly scanned, scrutinized to ensure the inherent elements are devoid of aspects that could endanger my own safety. Given the unruly conditions set for activists, one needs to be the master of their own personal wellbeing (H.R. Activists BA, 2025).

Our freedom as journalist have been stifled by the law, hence hindering us to report of so many issues thus depriving the audience from vital information about the north west and south west that the public needs to know (Journalists MP, 2025)

It chills freedom of expression. It chills free speech. It chills freedom of the press. It chills freedom of association (Lawyer AB, 2024)

From the above responses of the respondents, it is evidence that prohibiting freedom of expression and freedom of the press is among the effects of the 2014 anti-terrorism law on the promotion and protection of human rights in the North West and South West regions. Anti-terrorism laws significantly violate press freedom and freedom of expression by allowing governments to broadly criminalize critical reporting, silence dissenting voices, and restrict access to information under the guise of national security, often leading to journalist arrests, censorship, and self-censorship due to fear of legal repercussions; essentially creating a chilling

effect on investigative journalism and public discourse.

✓ **Absence of Rights to Life**

Both international and regional human rights law recognize the right and duty of States to protect those individuals subject to their jurisdiction. In practice, however, some of the measures that the government of Cameroon have adopted to protect individuals from acts of terrorism have themselves posed grave challenges to the right to life. The anti-terrorism law has led to the disappearance of many people in the North West and South West because once one's activity is perceived as an act of terrorism, the person is arrested and, in most cases, not seen or heard again.

To be honest with you, since the introduction of the anti-terrorism law in Cameroon and its applicability in the North West and South West regions, many people have lost their rights to life. This is a serious impact of this law on the promotion and protection of human rights (H.R. Activist BG, 2025)

My cousin was arrested in 2018 in Muyuka and accused of terrorist activities. Till date, we have not seen him, we have searched all the prisons in the South West, and even gone to Kondenqui prison in Yaoundé but we cannot trace his whereabouts (Lawyer JN, 2025)

In 2020, a human rights activist was arrested by the security forces and accused of abiding act of terrorism in Bamenda. We mobilized and storm the military court for his release. With that pressure, the government released him but 4 days after he was killed in his home by gunmen (H.R. Activist SM, 2025)

My colleague Samuel Wazizi was arrested, tortured and his right to life terminated by the Cameroon military under the pretext that he was abiding terrorism in Buea (Journalist MP, 2025)

Human rights defenders, Lawyers, Journalists are those brave individuals courageously fighting for the interests of rights holders, victims of violations and society as a whole. For carrying out their legitimate work, these professionals are targeted, attacked and killed in these regions. Absence of right to life can be considered an effect of poorly designed anti-terrorism laws when they allow for excessive state power, leading to arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, or trials with inadequate due process, essentially putting individuals suspected of terrorism at risk of losing their lives without proper legal safeguards, effectively negating their right to life.

✓ **Arbitrary Arrest, Detention and Torture**

One of the most important rights of a criminal suspect is the right to be informed of the reason

for their detention and the right to seek legal advice. The 2014 Anti-terrorism law often curtails these under the pretext that more detention time is required for the law enforcement officials to complete their investigations. Many people in these regions have been subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment with the introduction of the 2014 anti-terrorism law, which has negatively impacted the promotion and protection of human rights.

I have intervened in many cases of arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention. Here in Bamenda it is very common to see mass arrest of young people, being ferry away to unknown destination (Lawyer AR, 2025)

I can cite you some of my colleagues who have been arrested, tortured for reporting on gross human rights violations. I wrote a feature story on how the government is hiding under the pretext of the 2014 anti-terrorism to arrest and torture, intimidate people in Bamenda (Journalist EN, 2024)

I have been arrested, detained and tortured and called a terrorist. We were transported from Buea to Kondegui prison in Yaoundé, stayed in prison for 9 months then later released (Human rights defender AB, 2024)

Arbitrary arrest is a significant potential effect of anti-terrorism laws, as these laws often allow for broad powers of detention, enabling authorities to apprehend individuals without sufficient evidence or due process, leading to situations where people can be arrested without a clear legal basis, particularly when the definition of terrorism is vaguely defined. In addition, detention and torture can be significant negative effects of anti-terrorism laws, as broad definitions of terrorism coupled with expansive powers given to law enforcement can lead to arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without charge, and increased susceptibility to torture or other forms of ill-treatment, particularly when proper legal safeguards are not in place; essentially creating an environment where individuals suspected of terrorism can be held and interrogated without due process, raising serious human rights concerns.

✓ **Reduction in media coverage, underreporting and limited cases**

Many journalists and media organs have limited their media coverage of event due to intimidation and threat of life. Many societal ills go unreported, hindering the public rights to know and be informed. Cases of human rights violation and attacks on rights defenders have been underreported by human rights defenders because these rights defenders are persistently under threats, attacks and intimidation. Most of the rights defenders have abandoned the course of defending the oppressed and victims of human rights abuse since the introduction of the 2014 anti-terrorism law in these regions. Lawyers have abandoned cases in courts especially cases

termed by the government as act of terrorism.

Our media coverage has dropped drastically because of uncertainty, thus violating the public rights to know. It is the fundamental human rights for the public to be informed. Limiting our coverage because of the anti-terrorism law is negatively affecting our profession (Journalist MN, 2025)

The law has led to underreporting of human rights violations in the North West and south west regions because many journalists don't want to risk their lives digging a story. So many stories of violations are not reported because activists are not informed and in cases where they are informed, they are powerless (Activist AB, 2025)

Many people in the regions who may have committed minor offences such as protesting and resisting illegal arrest are called "terrorists," the anti-terror law has eliminated democratic avenues for dialogue on the issue. In such cases, the accused is ended up without a lawyer (Lawyer EL, 2024)

From the above thematic analysis, the introduction of the anti-terrorism law has significant negative impact on event coverage by journalists as many become scared to report, many human rights abuses are unreported or underreported by human rights defenders for fear of being tagged as a terrorist, cases in court have been abandoned by lawyers because most of these cases are seen by the government as terrorist linked cases.

VI. CONCLUSION

The international community has a responsibility to debate the issue of balancing human rights with anti-terrorism laws in a pragmatic manner and develop solutions that take into account both the security considerations of individual states as well as the imperative need to respect established human rights principles for each and every person. The activities of Boko Haram in the Far north region of Cameroon in 2010 compelled the government of Cameroon to introduce the anti-terrorism law in 2014. The introduction of the 2014 anti-terrorism law was made applicable to all ten regions of the country including the North West and South West regions. The effective implementation of the law has had significant impacts on the promotion and protection of human rights in these regions. With no clear definition of the law, scope and jurisdiction, the implementation of the law has stifled the works of journalists, lawyers and rights defenders working in these regions. The Anti-terrorism Law provides for the death penalty for a significant number of crimes related to terrorist activity and it allows authorities to detain terrorist suspects indefinitely. However, the law has been used by authorities to arrest and intimidate local journalists, lawyers and human rights activists. The law is considered too

broad and susceptible to abuse, violating the right to a fair trial. From the forgoing, this study concludes that respondents hold different understanding of the 2014 anti-terrorism law, which includes among others; creates fear, vagueness of the law and above all the law is a threat to human rights.

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