

DEVELOPED WITHIN THE
Southern Cameroons Legal Clarity Framework

WHAT HAS NOT BEEN DONE FOR 65 YEARS

Southern Cameroons, Legal Completion,
and the Missing Institutional Work

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*A public paper about law, public duty, and the completion of the
Southern Cameroons trusteeship process.*

UN General Assembly Resolution 1608 (XV)

4. *Decides* that, the plebiscites having been taken separately with differing results, the Trusteeship Agreement of 13 December 1946 concerning the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration shall be terminated, in accordance with Article 76 b of the Charter of the United Nations and in agreement with the Administering Authority, in the following manner:

(a) With respect to the Northern Cameroons, on 1 June 1961, upon its joining the Federation of Nigeria as a separate province of the Northern Region of Nigeria;

(b) With respect to the Southern Cameroons, on 1 October 1961, upon its joining the Republic of Cameroun;

5. *Invites* the Administering Authority, the Government of the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroun to initiate urgent discussions with a view to finalizing, before 1 October 1961, the arrangements by which the agreed and declared policies of the parties concerned will be implemented.

*994th plenary meeting,
21 April 1961.*

Highlighted extract of paragraphs 4 and 5. The red lines are annotations, not part of the original UN document. Paragraph 4(b) addresses termination on 1 October 1961 upon joining the Republic of Cameroun. Paragraph 5 invites urgent discussions to finalize arrangements before that date. Read the full resolution alongside the White Paper.

READ THE FULL PRIMARY DOCUMENT

assessment.scclarity.org/materials/un-resolution-1608-xv.pdf

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

This paper is about work that may still be unfinished. Southern Cameroons was under a United Nations trusteeship. That process ended in 1961. But the legal papers meant to finish the process have not been shown to the public, checked, and proved in a clear way.

So the question did not go away. It stayed open. Over time, people faced political pressure, lost their homes, and lived through years of armed conflict. Public bodies also failed to give a clear legal record. This paper does not choose a final political result. It asks for a lawful end to the question. It asks: What was done? What was not done? What must be done now?

SECTION I

Introduction

People often call the Southern Cameroons question a political fight. This paper says the first issue is legal. The key question is simple: Was the move out of United Nations trusteeship finished in the way the law required?

This matters. Political fights can change through talks, votes, or power. Legal questions need proof. We must find the papers. We must know who made them, who signed them, who approved them, and where they were filed.

For 65 years, this full work has not been done. The paper says the Cameroon state has not done it. The United Nations has not done it. British bodies that came after colonial rule have not done it. Southern Cameroons groups have also not done enough of it. This paper explains the gap and a path ahead.

***A political fight can be managed. A legal question must be answered.
The Southern Cameroons question has been treated like the first. This
paper says it is mainly the second.***

SECTION II

The System Producing the Confusion

A hard crisis can last when the system gives people a reason to keep it going. So we should ask: What rules and groups shape this problem? What do they reward? What do they punish?

Weak institutions may reward loud talk instead of proof. If no trusted body checks claims, slogans can beat facts. Group loyalty can replace law. Strong feelings can replace public duty. Short-term survival can replace a long plan.

Strong institutions do the opposite. They reward proof, careful work, and claims that can be checked. They help people build trust over time.

The Southern Cameroons debate has mostly worked in a weak system. Groups in the diaspora, armed groups, campaign groups, and diplomats all have different goals. Few get a reward for solving the legal question. Some may gain attention or power when the question stays open.

This paper also says the Cameroon state has gained from unclear answers. A clear legal answer can create duties. An unclear answer can delay them. There has not been enough pressure to show the key papers.

SECTION III

What Was Right in the Conversation

It would be wrong to say every past claim was wrong. Some claims are strong.

Southern Cameroons had its own legal place in the United Nations trusteeship system. The United Kingdom ran the land, but this paper says Britain did not own it as its own sovereign land. Running a place is not the same as owning it. Britain's power was limited and watched by the United Nations.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 set out a strong rule for ending colonial rule. It said people under colonial rule or trusteeship had a right to choose their future. This rule mattered then. It can still help us read the law today.

The February 1961 vote also mattered. Southern Cameroons voters chose to join La Republique du Cameroun, not Nigeria. That vote started a legal move. The open question is whether the move was fully finished.

SECTION IV

What Was Only Partially Right

We must separate what is proved from what is only partly proved. Some claims are partly right, but people have treated them as final. That can hurt trust.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1608 is more important for the next steps after the vote than Resolution 1514. Yet people often talk more about 1514. The key question is not only what rule applied. It is whether the steps in Resolution 1608 were done, who did them, and how.

It is also different to say, 'the union was always illegal,' and to ask, 'was the union ever lawfully completed?' The first gives an answer before the proof is checked. The second asks for proof. Lawyers, courts, and states may take a clear open question more seriously.

Care with words is not a small thing. It is part of the plan.

The words 'this was illegal' give a final claim. The words 'this was never lawfully completed' ask a legal question. The second one needs an answer.

SECTION V

The Main Misconceptions

The misconception that international sympathy equals legal traction. A foreign state, rights group, or diaspora group may care about people and still not act on the legal status question. Sympathy is not proof. Clear papers and law give the claim more force.

The misconception that the plebiscite itself resolved the question. A plebiscite is a public vote. It records what people chose. It is not a constitution. Moving a land from United Nations trusteeship into a new legal relationship can need papers that create and define that relationship. The question is whether those papers exist.

The misconception that armed conflict advances the legal argument. Fighting has not made the legal question clear. It has led to deaths, people leaving home, damage, and harder views. It has also let the Cameroon state treat the issue as a security problem instead of a legal one. This has made outside help harder.

The misconception that time itself establishes legitimacy. Sixty-five years of control is not the same as sixty-five years of a lawful constitutional relationship. Time cannot replace proof. The legal question is not closed just because many years have passed.

SECTION VI

What Has Not Been Done for 65 Years

The main failure has been a lack of careful institutional work. Here, that means a planned and public effort to find the legal papers, check if they had legal power, and make a record that other lawyers and states can test.

This paper says no government, world body, or advocacy group has shown one full legal memo that answers all of these questions: What paper or papers lawfully joined Southern Cameroons to La Republique du Cameroun? What law gave them force? Who were the parties? Who signed? Who approved them? Where were they filed? What world body got and accepted them?

The missing record is not a small office mistake. It is part of the problem. It is also where good legal work can begin.

Strong institutions have also not been built to carry this work for many years. Movements rise and fall. Leaders can lose trust, go to jail, leave home, or split apart. Groups form and break. That is political action. It is not the same as building a lasting institution.

Sixty-five years of action without the papers is motion without progress. The missing work was not only marching. It was filing and checking the record.

SECTION VII

Why This Has Weakened Local and International Support

People outside Cameroon may care about the people in the Northwest and Southwest regions. Reports of abuse are serious. Many people have been forced from home.

But care about suffering does not always lead to action on legal status. For that, diplomats and lawyers need a clear claim backed by papers. They need to see that the work was done well. They need a short legal brief they can use, not only a story of pain.

The many groups in the Anglophone advocacy space also make this harder. When there is no trusted body giving one clear legal case, outside actors may treat the issue as an internal Cameroon problem. They may support talks that do not deal with the legal status question. This paper says that response can come from weak institutions, not only from hostility.

SECTION VIII

The Missing Institutional Work

What is needed now is not one more political movement. It is a different kind of work.

Legal Documentation. Skilled international lawyers should write one full legal memo. It should study every paper said to have completed the Southern Cameroons move. This includes the Foumban Conference arrangements of 1961, the Federal Constitution of 1961, and later constitutional papers. Each paper should be checked. Did it have legal power? Did it fit the trusteeship rules? Could it create a binding international legal act?

Archival Research. The main archives in the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and Cameroon should be searched in a careful way. If a legal paper finished an international process, it should be possible to find it in the right archives. If it cannot be found, that fact can matter under law.

Institutional Consolidation. Groups should create a way to work together on the legal case. They do not all need to want the same political result. They do need to agree to use law, proof, and careful work. The bodies doing this work should be answerable for its quality.

Diplomatic Engagement. When the legal memo is ready, it should go to the right international bodies and interested states. It should ask for a clear answer. This is more than general lobbying. It is putting a legal question before the right forum.

SECTION IX

The Strongest Public Doctrine

The strongest public claim is not the biggest claim. It is the clearest one. Clear words build trust.

Southern Cameroons was under a United Nations trusteeship. The process was guided by the United Nations Charter, the Trusteeship Agreement of 1946, and later General Assembly resolutions, including Resolution 1608 of 1961. The process had to be lawfully finished. A lawful finish needs legal papers that can be named and checked. This paper says those papers have not been publicly named and verified. Until they are, the legal status of Southern Cameroons with La Republique du Cameroun remains an open question under international law, not a closed one.

This does not decide the answer first. It asks for an answer. In law and diplomacy, a clear question can be stronger than a claim that already assumes the result.

We pray like everything depends on God, but we work hard like everything depends on us.

SECTION X

The Way Forward

The way ahead does not need one more huge political fight. It needs a new way of working. These are the least steps needed.

First: Establish the legal record. Hire skilled lawyers to write and publish the full legal memo. Let scholars, diplomats, and the public read it. Let other experts test it.

Second: Separate the humanitarian from the legal. People in the Northwest and Southwest regions need help now. That work should not wait for the legal question to end. The legal issue and the human suffering are linked, but they are not the same. Mixing them can weaken both.

Third: Build durable institutions. Any group that says it speaks for Southern Cameroons people should show how it is run. It should publish its rules, money records, duties, and a record of careful public work.

Fourth: Engage the United Nations directly. The United Nations watched the trusteeship process. It has old records and duties tied to that process. A formal request to the United Nations Secretary-General or the right United Nations body to review how the 1961 process was completed is a fair next step.

Fifth: Win the argument before winning the outcome. Force will not settle the Southern Cameroons question. The legal case must be clear, well backed by papers, and told the same way over time. Then it becomes harder to ignore. This takes time, discipline, and support for strong institutions.

SECTION XI

Core Public Question

All of this comes down to one public question. It is a legal question. It needs a public answer.

What legal paper lawfully completed the move of Southern Cameroons from United Nations trusteeship into a valid constitutional relationship with La Republique du Cameroun? What is its name? Who were the parties? Who signed it? How was it approved? Where is it registered?

This paper says this question has not been answered. For years, all sides have talked around it. Asking for a clear public answer is not an attack. It is a call for accountability.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Southern Cameroons has waited 65 years, this paper argues, because key work was not finished. The legal question was not asked clearly enough. The papers were not brought together in a strong record. Lasting institutions were not built.

This is not a reason to give up. It is a way to name the problem. Once the problem is clear, good work can begin.

The path ahead is not louder talk. It is better work. Better work finds papers, builds institutions, and puts one clear legal question before bodies that should answer it. It also shows serious people that the claim is being handled in a serious way.

What has not been done for 65 years can still be done now. The rules for good institutional work have always been there. The work is possible. The question is whether the people carrying the cause will do it.

***Sixty-five years is not a verdict. It is a delay. The question is still open.
The work begins now.***

APPENDIX

Back-Cover Summary

Southern Cameroons went through a United Nations trusteeship process that ended in 1961. This paper says the legal papers meant to finish that process have not been publicly named, studied, and checked.

It argues that the Southern Cameroons question should first be treated as a legal question that needs documents, not only as a political fight that needs talks. The paper explains why the unclear status has lasted. It shows which claims are strong, which are weaker, and which common ideas have cost time. It also gives a clear path ahead. The rules for good legal and public work have always been there. The next step is to meet them.

APPENDIX B

Alternative Titles

The Unfinished Business of 1961: Southern Cameroons and the Missing Legal Instruments

Legal Completion or Legal Fiction: The Southern Cameroons Trusteeship Question

What Was Never Closed: Southern Cameroons and the Governance of Unresolved Status

The Missing Instruments: Southern Cameroons, Trusteeship, and the Demand for Documentation

Sixty-Five Years Without an Answer: The Southern Cameroons Legal Completion Question

APPENDIX C

Pull Quotes for Design Layout

"A political dispute can be managed. A legal question must be answered."

"Sixty-five years of work without the papers is motion without progress. The missing work was not only the march. It was the filing."

"Sixty-five years is not a verdict. It is a delay. The question is still open. The work begins now."
