

VERIFICATION REPORT

Shooting of Five Civilians in Mile 90, Nsongwa, Cameroon

Date of publication: October 21, 2022



Date of event: April 18, 2021

Coordinates: 5°56'0.06"N, 10°7'42.70"E

Location: Mile 90, Nsongwa, Mezam Division, North-West Region, Cameroon

Team: Leiden University Database Team

Synopsis: The Database retrieved three videos showing the aftermath of the shooting of five civilians at a drinking spot allegedly in Nsongwa in Mezam Division, North-West Region. Geolocation and chronolocation confirmed that the shooting took place in the Nsongwa area between Mile 90 and Bamenda on the night of April 18, 2021.



Cameroon Anglophone Crisis
Database of Atrocities

Contents

1. About the Database	2
2. Executive Summary	2
3. Data Sources.....	3
4. What Is Depicted	3
5. Location.....	4
6. Date and Time	6
7. Perpetrators	7
8. Conclusion	8
9. References.....	9

1. About the Database

The Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities is the product of an impartial, independent group of researchers and civic leaders, dedicated to recording and investigating human rights abuses committed by all actors during the Anglophone Crisis. Our team includes researchers at University of Toronto, Leiden University, the Edinburgh International Justice Initiative, and University of Exeter, with support from the Anglophone Crisis Monitoring Project, other OSINT verifiers, University of California - Berkeley's Human Rights Center Investigations Lab, and the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA).

The Database accepts incidents through an anonymous reporting portal, using Ushahidi software, and also through WhatsApp, Signal, and email submissions. Researchers work to investigate and verify incidents where the level of evidence permits. This Database is apolitical and will always avoid any partisan interference. It is hosted at University of Toronto (Canada) for reasons of neutrality and cybersecurity.

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2. Executive Summary

Three videos were retrieved from social media by the Database on April 23, 2021. The videos purportedly showed the aftermath of a shooting at a drinking spot allegedly in Mile 90/Nsongwa area, on the outskirts of Bamenda, Mezam Division, North-West Region. Online media reports and social media posts stated that gunshots were fired inside the drinking spot in the late evening on Sunday, April 18, 2021. There were allegedly five victims – three males and two females.

Researchers examined the footage from the incident. Using landmarks visible in the video, researchers managed to geolocate the drinking spot to **5°56'0.06"N, 10°7'42.70"E**. Chronolocation supported reports that stated the incident occurred on April 18, 2021.

The videos display the aftermath of the shooting, and do not contain evidence of the perpetrators. Following the shooting, numerous reports emerged pointing to different perpetrators, with some accusing the Cameroon military and others accusing armed separatist fighters. Researchers reviewed the various accounts but could not determine with certainty who the perpetrators were.

3. Data Sources

Videos

Three videos of the aftermath of this shooting incident were retrieved by the Database from social media on April 23, 2021.

- Video 1 – Chain of custody: The video was posted to Facebook by user Marrielle Haezel on April 19, 2021 (<https://www.facebook.com/banlav.mary.9/posts/837085696884433>). An excerpt of the same video, without the part showing the bodies, was posted to Facebook by news page *Mimi Mefo Info* on April 19, 2021 (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1119278918578738>). The Database downloaded copies of the videos from Facebook, and the researchers observed the videos directly. The provenance of the videos before their uploading to Facebook is unknown.
- Video 2 – Chain of custody: The video was posted to Facebook by Cameroon News Agency on April 19, 2021 (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=947987539361420>). The Database downloaded a copy of the video from Facebook, and the researchers observed the video directly. The provenance of the video before its uploading to Facebook is unknown.
- Video 3 – Chain of custody: The video was posted to Facebook by MbuH Stella official on April 22, 2021 (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=185385670077697>). The Database downloaded a copy of the video from Facebook, and the researchers observed the video directly. The provenance of the video before its uploading to Facebook is unknown.

Satellite Imagery

Researchers used satellite imagery from Google Earth Pro, Google Maps, Planet Explorer, and OpenStreetMap to geolocate the incident.

Metadata Analysis

Researchers ran Videos 1, 2, and 3 through the InVid Toolkit; however, this yielded no metadata results. This is likely because the videos were saved from social media posts on Facebook, which strips their metadata.

Other Sources

Researchers also consulted online media reports and social media posts.

4. What Is Depicted

Video 1: This 3-minute, 16-second video depicts the daytime scene inside and outside the drinking spot following the shooting. It begins with the camera walking down a crowded street, with people milling about and talking. The camera moves past a billboard on the left, then turns to the right toward a blue building which appears to be a drinking spot. The person taking the video says, “This is a nearby bar where it actually happened,” then pans the camera down to show broken bottles on the dirt road. The camera then enters the blue drinking spot, while other people also go in and out, and a woman can be heard crying. The camera pans down to show several dead bodies in pools of blood, along with furniture knocked over. The video ends with a shot of the bar, which has shelves full of beer bottles and glasses.

Video 2: This 24-second video depicts a crowd of people surrounding a red car directly outside the blue building (drinking spot).

Video 3: This 1-minute, 53-second video is a news report of the incident by “Mbuh Stella.” It shows footage of a crowd outside the blue drinking spot, images of the bar with the dead bodies on the floor, and footage of bodies wrapped in blankets being removed from the building.

The narrator says: “Inhabitants of Mile 90 Nsongwa say they heard gunshots last night at about 10pm. This Monday morning, a huge crowd turned out at this popular drinking spot. What they saw: corpses littered on the floor. They were shot at night by yet-to-be-identified gunmen.” She continues, “The gunmen targeted people in the bar. They shot and killed five persons, wounding several others. People are yet to understand why.”

A woman is then pictured, sharing her account of the incident: “We are drinking in the bar. I don’t know what time. I hear gunshots. Then I discover that I am injured, on my back.”

The narrator continues: “Mile 90 Nsongwa has been a hotspot in Bamenda II since the war began. In November 2020, about four persons were shot dead in a car said to be returning from Batibo in Momo Division. Speaking off camera, some inhabitants express their beliefs separatists carried out the attack, but no one is confirming yet. At the time of this report, no official statement regarding the incident had been made, but family members have identified and deposited the corpses of the loved ones at the mortuary pending burial.”

The video ends with footage of people loading bodies into a silver car and driving away.

5. Location

Process of Geolocation

Researchers observed the alleged drinking spot in the videos, noting its bright blue exterior and green striped details on its front. The roof of the drinking spot is brown and slanted. Next to the drinking spot is a taller beige building with a distinctive roof.

Video 1 begins on a crowded market street, at the left end of which is a billboard. On the right, across from the billboard, is the drinking spot, with another road extending past it. Video 1 also gives a look down that road.



Figure 1: Screenshot from Video 1



Figure 2: Screenshot from Video 1

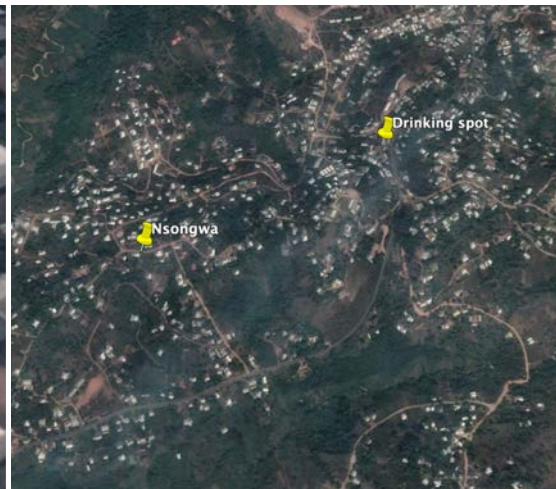
Researchers located Nsongwa using OpenStreetMap, then found it on Google Earth Pro by matching the roads. Searching satellite imagery on Google Earth Pro for landmarks visible in the video, researchers located a match for the drinking spot location at **5°56'0.06"N, 10° 7'42.70"E**. This spot is located just outside of Nsongwa, between Mile 90 and Bamenda.



Figure 3: Screenshot of Nsongwa from OpenStreetMaps



Figure 4: Google Earth Pro satellite image of Nsongwa



Figures 5 and 6: Suspected location of drinking spot labelled by researchers on Google Earth Pro satellite images

Features visible in the satellite image, including the configuration of roads, distinctive roofs, and other landmarks, were consistent with the area as depicted in Video 1.



Figure 7: Comparison of several features in satellite image and Video 1

6. Date and Time

Reports of this incident, including an article by online news outlet *Mimi Mefo Info*, allege that the incident occurred around 21:30 (Cameroon Local Time) on April 18, 2021. The footage in Videos 1, 2, and 3 was all taken during daytime hours; thus, researchers believe the videos were filmed on the morning of April 19, 2021. Video 1 shows the dead bodies from the incident lying in wet blood, adding to the likelihood that the video was taken within hours of the incident.

The earliest posting researchers found of Video 1 was in a Facebook post by user Marrielle Haezel at 10:24 (Cameroon Local Time) on April 19, 2021. The footage must therefore have been captured before that time.

The weather depicted in Videos 1, 2, and 3, appears to be dry and cloudy. Historical weather reports from TimeandDate.com show that the weather in Nsongwa was partly cloudy with no precipitation on April 19. This is consistent with the researchers' belief that the video footage is from that day.

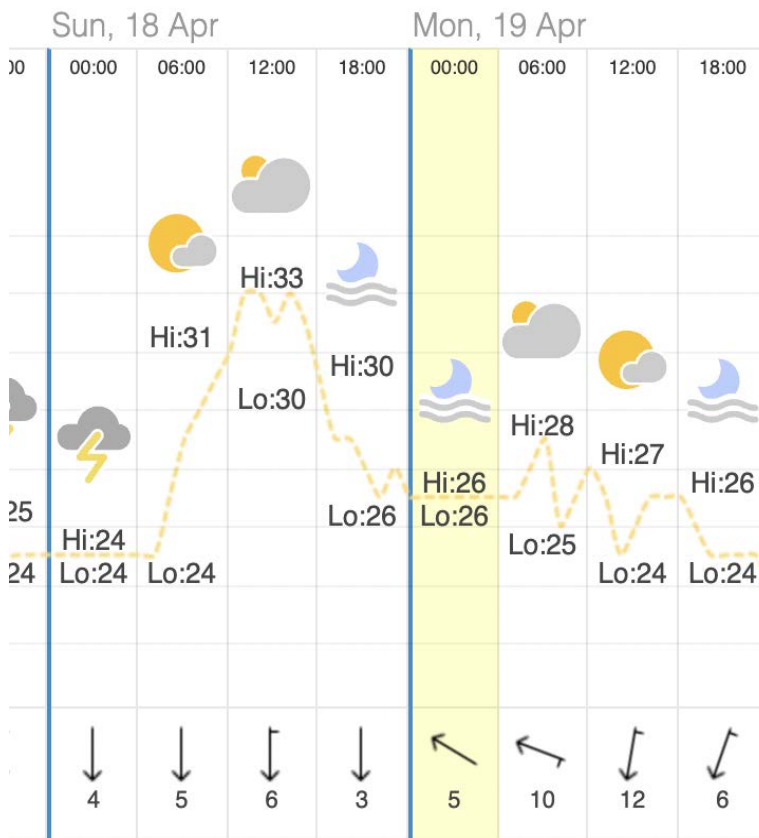


Figure 19: Weather in Nsongwa from April 18 to 19, 2021
<https://www.timeanddate.com/weather/@7107986/historic?month=4&year=2021>

7. Perpetrators

Videos 1, 2, and 3 show the aftermath of the incident so do not show the perpetrators. Thus, researchers searched media reports to uncover possible perpetrator details.

There are many conflicting reports about the perpetrators of this shooting. Some sources point to armed separatist fighters, while others point to the Cameroon military.

Notably, Video 3's narration said: "Speaking off camera, some inhabitants express their beliefs separatists carried out the attack, but no one is confirming yet."

A Facebook post by the news outlet *Mimi Mefo Info* (2021, April 19) stated: "Sources have told Mimi Mefo Info that separatists attacked a local drinking spot 'after issuing warnings to the owner in the past.' 'The reason why the bar was being targeted is because soldiers come there often to drink.'" Separately, an article by *Mimi Mefo Info* (2021, April 19) quotes a source saying, "Some say separatist fighters were in the locality and there was a set up to kill the separatist fighters...many people say the military was responsible."

The online news outlet *Cameroon News Agency* posted Video 2 on Facebook with the caption: "At least five civilians were brutally murdered in Mile 90, outskirts of Bamenda in the northwest region. Government forces who came in search of Separatist fighters on Sunday night, invaded a local bar and shot indiscriminately, killing five on the spot. This is not the first time civilians are killed in this area. Each time members of Cameroon Military have information that Separatists are around, they always invade the place ready to kill even a fly."

The first post of Video 1 that researchers found, by Facebook user Marrielle Haezel, stated: "Gathering from the bartender who was on duty, some military men came to his bar earlier on that evening and drank, paid their bills and left leaving other customers behind. Then after some minutes that they left, Unidentified Gunmen stormed the bar and started a shooting spree based on information the [sic] got that military men are drinking in that particular bar. When the military got the shooting, they fell back and the exchange between the two parties lasted for over an hour."

The accounts pointing to the Cameroon military indicate that the shooting was indiscriminate or that the military performed the shooting while searching for separatist fighters. The accounts pointing to separatist fighters suggest that the shooting was a reprisal against the drinking spot because soldiers frequently drank there.

Numerous other social media users posted about the attack, with some alleging armed separatist responsibility and others alleging military responsibility. In most cases, the language used in the posts indicated bias in favour of the separatist side or the government side; thus, researchers gave little weight to these social media accusations.

Thus, after review, researchers could not conclude the perpetrators with certainty. It is notable, however, that both the Cameroon military and non-state armed separatist groups could plausibly have perpetrated this attack.

8. Conclusion

This analysis concludes that the shooting of five civilians in Nsongwa occurred at **5°56'0.06"N, 10°7'42.70"E**, between Mile 90 and Bamenda. Researchers geolocated this location by matching features from three videos of the aftermath of the incident, retrieved by the Database, with features visible on Google Earth Pro satellite imagery.

Media reports indicate that the shooting occurred on April 18, 2021. Researchers' chronolocation efforts determined that the video footage showing the aftermath of the attack was most likely taken before 10:24 (Cameroon Local Time) on the morning of April 19. This is consistent with the shooting having occurred on April 18.

Footage showing the incident aftermath does not indicate the perpetrators, and there are numerous conflicting reports in the media and on social media. Researchers were not able to determine the perpetrators with certainty; however, it is noteworthy that both the Cameroon military and non-state armed separatist groups could plausibly have perpetrated this attack.

9. References

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