News
Ministry



Orphans work on sketches Feb. 8, 2022, at the Catholic Bilingual School of Our Lady of Resurrection in Yaoundé, Cameroon. (OSV News photo/Ngala Killian Chimtom)

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On a bright Monday morning in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé, the Catholic Bilingual School of Our Lady of the Resurrection looks like any other school, bustling with activity.

But that school also is home to children haunted with horrors of the past: children who lost their parents in the raging separatist conflict in Cameroon's English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions.

The Missionary Sisters of the Resurrection own the orphanage and started running the preschool in 2011. After starting with just 17 children, the school now enrolls 300 and counting.

Many children carry deep psychological wounds. Ransom, a 16-year-old boy, still clearly remembers the day soldiers stormed his community in Babessi in the Northwest region in 2017.

"We were about to go to bed when soldiers attacked. I looked through the window and some houses were already set on fire," he told OSV News.

Ransom and his two sisters crawled out of the house and sought refuge in the surrounding bushes.

"A bullet whizzed over our heads, and we all fell to the ground, but then continued running," he said.

Ransom's eyes turned misty when he recalled that his younger sister fell into a deep pit while on the run.

"I tried to get back to save her, but the bullets came and my other sister and I had to keep running for our lives," he said, crying.

"It's been over two years now, and we don't know where our sister is," he told OSV News. "I just hope she survived. I hope we shall one day meet again."

Ransom and his older sister spent four years out of school following a separatist-enforced school boycott, which Human Rights Watch said separatists started enforcing in 2017 "as part of a perverse attempt to pressure the government for political recognition."

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According to the United Nations, more than 600,000 children have been deprived of effective schooling because of the conflict between the government and separatists from the English-speaking minority. The conflict has killed over 6,000 people and displaced 765,000 people to date. Of the 2.2 million people in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, 4 million need humanitarian support.

When schools tried to break the boycott, separatists would often burn them to the ground, kidnap teachers and pupils, and even stage deadly attacks on classrooms.

Ransom said the Catholic orphanage in Yaoundé has offered him and his sister a lifeline and a decent place to stay.

Clarise, 22, has her twin 4-year-old girls in the Catholic Bilingual School of Our Lady of the Resurrection. She knows that without assistance from the institution, it would have been hard.

"I don't know the father of my kids," Clarise told OSV News. "I was raped by two masked men five years ago. ... I think they were separatist fighters."

Clarise fled her native Kumbo when life became unbearable as a result of the conflict.

"If we were still in Kumbo, schooling would have been off the table for them," Clarise said.

Sr. Marie Louise Messina Nsamba, who coordinates the orphanage, said taking care of the orphaned children is a "love story." It was she who recognized the importance of education and turned what was initially just an orphanage into a school.

"We feed them, but we also believe that they need an education that life circumstances have deprived them of," she told OSV News.

She said the children have different needs, including medical care, school materials and fees, and prayers.

"We do thank those who have been helping, and we appeal for help to provide these kids with basic needs, and the education they deserve," she added.

Ransom said he will forever remain grateful for the school that has given him hope when all seemed lost.