

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 2, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to you today to request that you issue an immediate 18-month designation of either Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for Cameroon. A humanitarian crisis and civil war characterized by massive internal displacement, war crimes, and shortages of essentials like water, food, healthcare, and housing make safe return impossible, and we must act quickly to extend protection against deportation to Cameroonian nationals in the United States (U.S.).

TPS is a form of statutory deferred action afforded to nationals of a country living in the U.S. if conditions in the country make return unsafe. The Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may designate a country for TPS if conditions in the country meet requirements regarding ongoing armed conflict, natural disasters, or other *extraordinary and temporary* conditions in the country that prevent safe return. TPS provides protection from deportation and permission to work in the U.S. for the duration of the designation.

DED serves as a vital foreign policy tool of the President and another mechanism to protect foreign nationals in the U.S. from civil, political, and humanitarian crises in their home country that make it unsafe for them to return, or whose suspension of deportation serves other U.S. foreign policy or domestic interests. DED provides similar protections as TPS, but it does not require registration and is only triggered when an individual is identified for removal. A DED designation uses minimal administrative resources and has an immediate effect for eligible individuals.

Based on the high risk of armed conflict and kidnapping, the U.S. State Department has issued “Do Not Travel” warnings for six regions: the North, Far North, North-West, South-West, East, and parts of Adamawa.¹ In its most recent human rights report on Cameroon, the State Department identified a troubling catalogue of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detention, violence against women and children, and targeted attacks against members of the LGBTQ+ community.² The United Nations estimates

1 “Cameroon Travel Advisory,” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Aug. 9, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/cameroon-travel-advisory.html>.

2 “Cameroon 2020 Human Rights Report,” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, March 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1387181/download>.

that 4.4 million people in Cameroon need assistance, with over 1.5 million people internally displaced and another 67,000 Cameroonian refugees displaced in Nigeria.³ An estimated 38,790 Cameroonians currently living in the U.S. would benefit from a DED or TPS designation for Cameroon.⁴

Cameroon is facing three separate humanitarian crises sprawling across its ten regions: conflict with the armed Islamist group Boko Haram in the Far North region; a political and humanitarian crisis in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions; and a refugee crisis in the East, near the border with the Central African Republic. Inter-communal violence has also affected several regions. The government's continued crackdowns on peaceful political opposition and security forces' documented use of *incommunicado* detention and torture contribute to the danger of return.⁵ Deportees from the U.S. are at particular risk of being targeted for actual or imputed opposition to the government and have experienced arbitrary detention and other abuses upon return.

Since late 2016, Cameroon, a bilingual country with eight Francophone and two Anglophone regions, has faced a protracted humanitarian crisis in its Anglophone North-West and South-West regions resulting in the internal displacement of more than 712,000 civilians and the displacement of over 67,000 Cameroonian refugees across the border to Nigeria.⁶ Grassroots advocacy in the Anglophone regions in late 2016 called for more political autonomy or secession. In response, government security forces cracked down on protests and non-state armed groups continued to seek independence, with both sides committing serious and widespread human rights violations. As a result of this crisis, at least 4,000 civilians have been killed in the Anglophone regions alone.⁷

The Far North region of Cameroon has been severely impacted by armed conflict between government forces and the armed Islamist group Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State in West Africa Province. The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in Nigeria in 2009 and spread to Cameroon in 2014, has led to the deaths of more than 3,000 Cameroonians and has resulted in the internal displacement of over 340,000.⁸

3 "Cameroon 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan," UN OCHA, March 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Cameroon%20Humanitarian%20Response%20Plan%20%28March%202021%29.pdf>; Cameroon Humanitarian Bulletin Issue N°23, UN OCHA, Aug. 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Cameroon%20Humanitarian%20Bulletin%20Issue%20N%C2%BO23%20-%20August%202021.pdf>; "UNHCR Operational Update: Cameroonian Refugees in Nigeria - August 2021," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR"), September 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88749>.

4 "Backgrounder: TPS for Cameroon," CLINIC, Jan. 25, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://cliniclegal.org/resources/humanitarian-relief/temporary-protected-status-and-deferred-enforced-departure-4>.

5 "Secret Torture Chambers in Cameroon," Amnesty International, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/07/cameroon-torture-chambers/>; "Cameroon: Right cause, wrong means: human rights violated and justice denied in Cameroon's fight against Boko Haram," Amnesty International, July 14, 2016, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/4260/2016/en/>.

6 "Cameroon: North-West and South-West: Situation Report No. 33," UN OCHA, July 31, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_cmr_nws_w_sitrep_july2021.pdf.

7 Jess Craig, "Violence in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis Takes High Civilian Toll," Al Jazeera, April 1, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/1/violence-in-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-takes-high-civilian-toll>.

Conflict in the neighboring Central African Republic (CAR) also impacts Cameroon, which currently hosts over 330,000 refugees from the CAR in its East, Adamawa, and Northern regions after a new wave of refugees crossed the border following election-related violence in CAR in late 2020.⁹ The influx of refugees has put significant pressure on the already limited natural resources and basic social services in host communities, severely exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and leading to increased incidents of criminality, kidnappings, and inter-communal violence.¹⁰

The conflict in the Far North and the crisis in the Anglophone regions have also exacerbated long-standing inter-communal tensions over natural resources, resulting in violence and increased civilian casualties. In August 2021 in the Far North Region, clashes between ethnic Choa Arab herders and ethnic Mousgoum fishermen and farmers killed at least 32, injured at least 74 people, and razed at least 19 villages, representing the most violent inter-communal attack to date in Cameroon.¹¹

The Cameroonian government and security forces create risks for deportees nationwide, including crackdowns on political dissent, the security forces' documented use of torture, and criminalization of and targeted violence towards LGBTQ+ people. Political and ethnic tensions in Cameroon have been further frayed by uprisings and violence following the 2018 presidential and 2020 local elections.

On three known deportation flights in October, November, and September of 2020 the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported an estimated 80-90 Cameroonians *en masse*.¹² According to press reports and interviews with deportees, Cameroonian authorities confiscated the identification documents of most Cameroonians deported on the October and November 2020 flights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the humanitarian crises and human rights issues in Cameroon, where violence and heavy rains have catastrophically degraded infrastructure essential to the delivery of humanitarian aid and pandemic relief. Citing limited medical resources and a high risk of contracting the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned against all but essential travel to Cameroon.¹³ The Cameroonian government has also been criticized for its lack of transparency on the misuse of millions of dollars in pandemic relief funds.¹⁴

Announcing a TPS or DED designation for Cameroon would serve as a key and strategic part

8 "UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Refugee Situations, Cameroon," UNHCR, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>.

9 Ibid.; "Number of Central African refugees soars as violence intensifies," UNHCR, January 15, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/1/600152d24/number-central-african-refugees-soars-violence-intensifies.html>.

10 *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Cameroon*, OCHA, March 2020, accessed October 14, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cmr_hno_2020_print1.pdf; "Central African Republic (CAR) Situation," UNHCR, April 16, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/86262>.

11 "Intercommunal clashes in Cameroon force 11,000 people to flee to Chad," UNHCR, Aug. 19, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/intercommunal-clashes-cameroon-force-11000-people-flee-chad>.

12 Julian Borger, "US to send asylum seekers home to Cameroon despite 'death plane' warnings," *The Guardian*, Nov. 9, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/09/us-to-send-asylum-seekers-home-to-cameroon-despite-death-plane-warnings>.

13 "COVID-19 in Cameroon," CDC, Aug. 9, 2021, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/covid-1/coronavirus-cameroon>.

of the U.S. government’s commitment to human rights and international stability, safeguarding Cameroonians in the U.S. from a return to these dangerous conditions. We call upon this administration do its part to protect Cameroonians. Given that the devastating human consequences of these humanitarian crises in Cameroon have escalated in recent months, this protection is urgently needed now more than ever.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



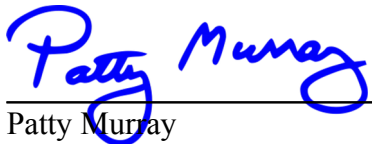
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



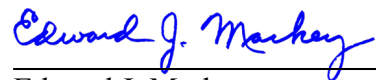
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

14 Moki Edwin Kindzeka, “Cameroon Investigates Missing \$335 Million in COVID Funds,” *VOA News*, May 31, 2021, https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-investigates-missing-335-million-covid-funds/6206445.html; Sarah Saadoun, “In Cameroon, Government Secrecy in the Management of Funds Destined for COVID-19 Response,” *Le Mode*, Sept. 24, 2020, trs. Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/cameroon-government-secrecy-management-funds-destined-covid-19-response>.



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



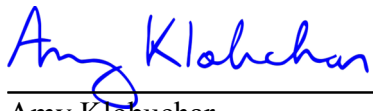
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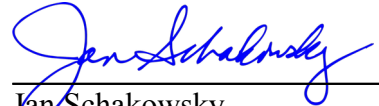
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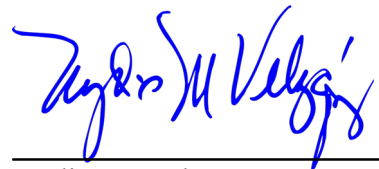
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Jr.
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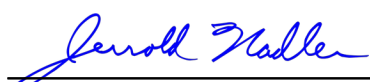
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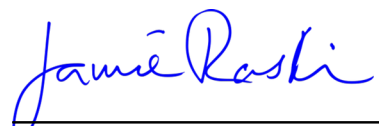
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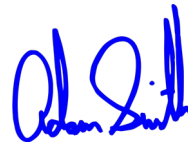
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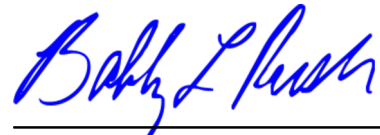
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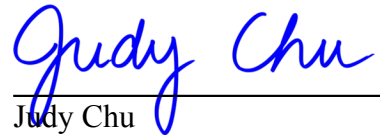
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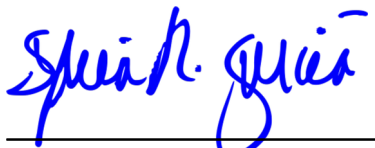
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Betty McCollum
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Judy Chu
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Yvette D. Clarke

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