

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 9, 2020

The Honorable Tibor Nagy
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of African Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Nagy,

We write to you today to express our grave concern over the deteriorating conditions in Cameroon and the danger posed to persons that are forced to return there from the United States. We understand that there is a deportation flight to Cameroon scheduled for 10 November. In light of U.S. recognition of the violence and political instability within Cameroon, as acknowledged by the State Department, we urge you to oppose deportations to that country and advise the Department of Homeland Security to immediately discontinue any such action.

The Department of State has been clear about the rising violence and instability in Cameroon. Just this past Friday, November 6, the United States Embassy in Yaoundé condemned the continued escalation of attacks on civilians in the Northwest and Southwest Regions in the country, declaring that the attacks showed absolute disregard for the social fabric of communities. You also provided a rebuke of the brutality and pledged to stand against the violence in the continued quest for peace. In addition, your public entreaty to the diaspora in the United States to play a critical role to end the violence in Cameroon was another laudable effort to address this ongoing crisis.

These recent statements follow significant actions to hold perpetrator of human rights abuses in Cameroon accountable, including cutting some planned military assistance to Cameroon due to allegations of human rights abuses by state security forces. The United States has also terminated duty-free trade benefits under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act over “persistent human rights violations being committed by Cameroonian security forces.” Strong actions by the U.S. government have been mirrored by calls from the House Foreign Affairs Committee for all parties to the ongoing conflict in Cameroon to come to the negotiating table and for an immediate cessation of violence against civilians.

The Department of State’s own 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices cited extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances by security forces, torture, and arbitrary detention by security forces and nonstate armed groups in its review of Cameroon. It also called attention to harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and significant problems with the independence of the judiciary.

It is heartening to see U.S. recognition of Cameroon’s plight, which has also been well documented by human rights organizations. In its 2020 report, Human Rights Watch reported that the Anglophone conflict has claimed an estimated 3,000 lives, although aid workers on the ground think the figure is several times higher, and displaced over 773,000 civilians. The report further documented widespread human rights abuses committed by armed groups as well as government forces and noted that the terrorist organization Boko Haram carried out over 100 attacks last year.

However, despite the widely acknowledged danger and instability in Cameroon, lawyers for detained Cameroonians report that the U.S. government is continuing to schedule deportation flights to several countries in the Central African region, including Cameroon. These planned deportations follow a deportation flight on October 13 that contained 60 Cameroonian citizens and 28 citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Family members of some of those on board the flight report that they are unable to locate their loved ones.

Based on the conditions in Cameroon, and the U.S. government's recognition of its severity, we urge you to assist in halting these flights immediately. In the State Department's role of carrying out U.S. foreign policy, it is critical that we stand by our articulated posture of ending persistent unrest in Cameroon, while upholding human rights and due process universally. Allowing deportations to continue would support the false depiction by Cameroon that the country poses no risks to deportees and that reports of human rights abuses are overblown. Indeed, Cameroon's state-sponsored Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) put a "positive spin" on the return of people from the U.S., claiming they would help rebuild the country. This calculated misrepresentation decreases the incentive for the Biya administration to come to the negotiating table, and severely undermines our policy imperatives and standing in the region.

We, therefore, ask that you use every tool at your disposal as the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs to stop the November 10 deportation flight and all future deportations to Cameroon. If you decide not to cancel that flight, and future flights, please notify us and provide the basis for those decisions as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



JOAQUIN CASTRO

Chair
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations
House Foreign Affairs Committee



KAREN BASS

Chair
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights, and International
Organizations
House Foreign Affairs Committee



ILHAN OMAR

Member of Congress



CEDRIC RICHMOND

Member of Congress