

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 17, 2020

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
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, considering the worsening conditions in the country. 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 your administration must act quickly to extend protection from deportation to Cameroonian nationals in the United States. The Trump Administration has shamefully mistreated and deported Cameroonian asylum seekers back to danger just this year. We urge you to do much better.

TPS is a statutory status given to nationals of a certain country living in the United States if conditions in the country make return unsafe. The Secretary of the U.S. 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 temporarily prevent safe return. TPS provides protection from deportation and permission to work in the United States for the duration of the designation.

DED was established to provide the president with a vital tool in U.S. foreign policy and is also used to protect foreign nationals in the United States 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 United States foreign policy or domestic interests. DED provides similar protections as TPS, but DED does not require a registration process and is triggered when an individual is identified for removal. In this way, a DED designation uses minimal resources administratively and has an immediate effect for those who qualify.

Country conditions in Cameroon are both extraordinary and temporary, making return untenable and warranting immediate protection for Cameroonians living in the United States. Human Rights Watch estimates that 3.9 million people in Cameroon are in need of humanitarian assistance, with over 720,000 people displaced. Eighty-nine percent of the half a million internally displaced civilians were displaced due to armed conflict, and a staggering 64 percent of those internally displaced are children under eighteen. Thousands of people are fleeing to areas wracked with drought, floods, and epidemics of cholera and COVID-19. Violence and

heavy rains have catastrophically degraded infrastructure essential to deliver humanitarian aid and pandemic relief.

Civilians in Cameroon are caught between multiple and complex armed conflicts between Anglophone separatists, the government, and Boko Haram (a jihadist terrorist group). Boko Haram in particular is known for their use of child soldiers in suicide bombings of crowded civilian areas, such as schools, markets, mosques, churches, and refugee camps. In its yearly human rights report on Cameroon, the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. State Department have identified an extensive and troubling catalogue of human rights abuses against Cameroonian civilians, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and targeted violence against vulnerable populations such as children and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The State Department has issued a “Do Not Travel” warning for most of the country, citing “violent crime, including kidnapping by terrorists and/or kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, assault, and carjacking.”

The global COVID-19 pandemic has only served to compound the existing violence and humanitarian need in Cameroon. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have marked Cameroon as a Level 4, or “Very High Level” of COVID-19, urging people to avoid all travel to Cameroon. Cameroon has over 73,000 reported cases and 1,197 deaths as of December 15, 2020 according to the World Health Organization.

Conditions in Cameroon continue to worsen as violence continues and the pandemic continues to take its public health and economic toll. We call upon the administration do its part to protect Cameroonians in the United States from deportation back to unsafe conditions by designating Cameroon for TPS or DED. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

/s/

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

/s/

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

/s/

Val Demings
Member of Congress

/s/

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

/s/

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Ron Kind
Member of Congress

/s/

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

/s/

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/

Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

/s/

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/

Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

/s/

Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress

/s/

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/

David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress