



The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

October 26, 2020

President Donald. J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20016

RE: 81 STATE, LOCAL, AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR IMMEDIATE 18-MONTH DESIGNATION OF DEFERRED ENFORCED DEPARTURE OR TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS FOR CAMEROON

Dear President Trump and Acting Secretary Wolf:

The undersigned 81 state, local, and national organizations write to call for an immediate 18-month designation of Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Cameroon in light of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, civil and political unrest, economic and humanitarian strife, and the COVID-19 crisis in the country. DED and TPS are effective and proven policy tools to ensure that the United States does not return anyone to a country that has become temporarily unsafe for its residents. Given the conditions in Cameroon, including the “Anglophone crisis”, “Presidential Transition crisis” and Boko Haram insurgency, an immediate designation of either DED or TPS is warranted and necessary.

I. DEFERRED ENFORCED DEPARTURE (DED) AND TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS (TPS)

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 (including epidemics), 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

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AAJC

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Vanita Gupta

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.

II. DESIGNATION OF TPS OR DED FOR CAMEROON IS WARRANTED UNDER THE LAW AND BY MORALITY

Cameroon is currently facing both extraordinary and temporary conditions that warrant an immediate 18-month designation of either TPS or DED. The U.S. State Department has issued a level three travel warning for Cameroon with “Do Not Travel” notices for most regions due to a high risk of carjacking, kidnapping, and armed conflict. Human Rights Watch estimates that 3.9 million people in Cameroon living in eight of its ten regions 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. Cameroon is in the throes of several humanitarian crises, the consequences of which are compounded by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Cameroonian civilians are caught between multiple armed conflicts between the government, Anglophone separatists, and Boko Haram, based near the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Boko Haram is particularly known for its suicide bombings in crowded civilian areas, such as markets, schools, mosques, churches, and refugee camps. The group also horrifyingly kidnaps children to use in such attacks. Over 720,000 people in Cameroon have attempted to flee the violence, many without a home to return to. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations announced a resolution in September of this year condemning the violence and grave human rights abuses by Cameroonian security forces, including suppression of free speech, detainment of government critics, torture, sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, and the burning of entire villages. Humanitarian workers are not immune to the violence, with workers targeted for kidnapping and even death. Thousands of Cameroonians find themselves in an impossible situation, risking violence from Boko Haram and separatists for any perceived pro-government sentiment and violence from Cameroonian security forces for perceived anti-government sentiment.

A surge of over 350,000 refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic since 2017 has also overwhelmed social services systems and resources in eastern Cameroon, exacerbating the existing shortages of food, water, healthcare, and housing. Thousands of people continue to flee to areas already experiencing recurrent droughts, floods, and epidemics of cholera and COVID-19. Essential infrastructure to deliver humanitarian aid and pandemic relief has been severely degraded by violence and heavy rains, and only 15 percent of households currently have access to electricity.

These three parallel humanitarian crises have only been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention warns against all but essential travel to Cameroon, citing limited medical resources and a high risk of contracting the virus. Cameroon has reported more cases and deaths than most other central African countries, with over 21,000 cases and 423 deaths as of October 13, 2020 according to the World Health Organization. The Cameroonian government has also been under fire for lack of transparency on the misuse of millions of dollars in pandemic relief funds. Medical workers report that hospitals have seen no additional aid or construction for new facilities, resulting in a lack of personal protective equipment, limited bed space, and a hampered ability to treat patients. Some attempts to distribute masks, hand sanitizer, and other protective materials by non-governmental groups have even been politicized and squashed by the ruling party.

III. DESIGNATION OF TPS OR DED FOR CAMEROON IS IN LINE WITH U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND OTHER NATIONAL INTERESTS

It is in the U.S. national security and foreign policy interest to issue an immediate 18-month designation of DED or TPS. In recent months the Department of State as well as Congressional officials, have called for the government in Cameroon to comply with human rights norms and laws. If we expect allies in Cameroon to heed our calls for calm and human rights, then we too, must comply with international norms, including not deporting persons to conflict zones during a global pandemic. Today, the circumstances in Cameroon are dire and deporting Cameroonians in the middle of a pandemic to a country struggling to fight off armed militants will exacerbate an already challenging crisis for the ailing central government. Cameroon lacks the health infrastructure to protect its citizens as well as continues to face deep sectarian strife. As a global leader, U.S. legitimacy as a nation requires that we lead by example, which is why it makes sense to put in place an 18-month designation of DED or TPS for Cameroon, given the totality of the factors on the ground coupled by the global pandemic.

IV. CONCLUSION

Offering help, safety, and security to those in need is foundational to U.S. values. With Cameroon rapidly descending into multiple crises with devastating human consequences, it is imperative that the United States ensure nationals and those who habitually last resided in Cameroon are able to remain here. Even under the devastating impact of humanitarian strife and recent events, Cameroon can build toward a stronger future with the support of its allies and humanitarian aid.

In line with the above policy principles, we urge you to grant the maximum protection possible through an 18-month designation of DED or TPS for Cameroon. This relief will not only benefit and protect Cameroonian individuals in the United States, but also their families and communities here and in Cameroon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Center for Constitutional Rights

AFL-CIO

African American Ministers In Action

African Peoples Campaign

African Public Affairs Committee

American Friends Services Committee

America's Voice

Amnesty International USA

Angry Tias and Abuelas of the Rio Grande Valley

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta

Batibo Cultural & Development Association (BCDA)

Bend the Arc: Jewish Action - Prince George's County, Maryland Chapter

Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC)

BORDER ANGELS

Cameroon American Council
CASA
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Victims of Torture
Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA)
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Chula Vista Partners in Courage
Church World Service
Congregation Action Network
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Dallas Pioneer Association (DPA)
Detention Watch Network
Doctors for Camp Closure
Families Belong Together
Fellowship Southwest
First Focus on Children
Freedom for Immigrants
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Haitian Bridge Alliance
HIAS
Human Rights First
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Legal Aid Justice Center
Lemkin House: An Asylum Community
Linda Vista United Methodist Church
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention
LUCHA Ministries, Inc.
Maryland Against ICE Detention
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Moghamo Restoration Council
Multicultural Community Service
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG)
National Organization for Women
New Sanctuary Coalition
North Texas Dream Team
Oasis Network for Community Transformation
Ohio Immigrant Alliance
Onicha Amairi International Union
Open Society Foundations
Our Prince George's MD
PG Change Makers Coalition
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York
RAICES

Restore The Fourth
Services, Immigrant Rights & Education Network (SIREN)
Shreveport-Bossier City Interfaith Immigrant Solidarity Committee
Solid Foundation, Inc.
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Bay People Power
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network (SEIRN)
Southern Poverty Law Center
Torture Abolition And Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) International
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
Union for Reform Judaism
United We Dream
WCAPS
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Witness at the Border
Women Empowerment Network