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AAJC

February 24, 2022

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

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 230 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we write to renew the call for an immediate designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Cameroon.¹

Conditions in Cameroon continue to deteriorate and thus continue to qualify for TPS. Cameroon faces extraordinary and temporary conditions that clearly warrant a designation of TPS.² Violence due to armed conflict between the Cameroonian government and Boko Haram and the crisis in the Anglophone regions pose significant threats to the safety and well-being of Cameroonian nationals. This violence has resulted in humanitarian and refugee crises, alongside a “Presidential Transition crisis,” as the country also struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19. According to Human Rights Watch, since 2016 armed separatist groups have targeted aid workers, students, and teachers for harm, while boycotting children’s education.³ Security forces have committed arson, sexual violence, murder, and torture against Cameroonian nationals.⁴ Violent attacks by Boko Haram plague the country’s

¹ *Over 100 Organizations Call for Life Saving Executive Action for Black Migrants*, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (Jan. 28, 2021), available at <https://civilrights.org/resource/over-100-organizations-call-for-life-saving-executive-action-for-black-migrants/>; *Trump Must Protect Cameroonians in the United States*, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (Oct. 26, 2020), available at <https://civilrights.org/resource/trump-must-protect-cameroonians-in-the-united-states/>.

² *Temporary Protected Status*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>.

³ *Cameroon*, Human Rights Watch, available at <https://www.hrw.org/africa/cameroon>; *How Can You Throw Us Back?: Asylum seekers abused in the U.S. and deported to harm in Cameroon*, Human Rights Watch (Feb. 10, 2022), available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/10/how-can-you-throw-us-back/asylum-seekers-abused-us-and-deported-harm-cameroon#>.

⁴ *Id.*

Interim President and CEO
Wade Henderson

northernmost regions, while the Cameroonian government has suppressed freedom of expression and association by targeting opposition party members.⁵ The mass displacement of Cameroonians within the country and in neighboring African nations has put a dire strain on resources in the region. Such conditions clearly warrant a grant of TPS.

Report documents the shocking and violent harm Cameroonian returnees face when deported.

Human Rights Watch released a report on February 10, 2022, describing the unspeakable horrors that await Cameroonian returnees. They and their families have been subjected to rape, torture, physical abuse and beatings, arbitrary arrest, extortion, threats, and detention, as well as inhumane, unsanitary, and degrading treatment while in detention.⁶ Perpetrators of this harm have included Cameroonian police, gendarmes, military personnel, other agents of the state, as well as armed separatists.⁷ Many of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch say that when detained, they received little to no food, medical care, sanitation, or protection from COVID-19.⁸ Returnees were punched, kicked, and beaten with batons, belts, machetes, guns, and whips.⁹ Human Rights Watch found that many interviewees were targeted because of their deportation to Cameroon from the U.S. and presumed opposition to the Cameroonian government.¹⁰ These documented harms demonstrate the critical need for U.S. protection from deportation for Cameroonian nationals and those who last habitually resided in Cameroon.

Designating TPS for Cameroon is the just choice, given the unique plight of Black immigrants.

Multiple reports indicate that Black immigrants face disproportionate harms within the U.S. immigration system, including higher rates of deportation, bond amounts, and criminalization.¹¹ Black immigrants from Haiti, Jamaica, and Somalia have faced some of the highest asylum denial rates in years. For Cameroonians, the US immigration court grant rate for asylum or other relief dropped by approximately 24 percent from fiscal year 2019 to 2020, compared to a 6 percent drop in the overall asylum grant rate.¹² A surge of deportations to Cameroon took place in late 2020, and after a hiatus of several months, the Biden administration deported several other Cameroonians in October 2021.¹³ As our country honors the indelible contributions of Black people to American life during Black History Month, we must offer

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *How Can You Throw Us Back?: Asylum seekers abused in the U.S. and deported to harm in Cameroon*, Human Rights Watch (Feb. 10, 2022), available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/10/how-can-you-throw-us-back/asylum-seekers-abused-us-and-deported-harm-cameroon#>; *The United States Has Failed Cameroonian Asylum-Seekers*, Foreign Policy (Dec. 13, 2020) available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/12/13/united-states-cameroon-asylum-seekers-ice-deportation/>.

⁷ *How Can You Throw Us Back?: Asylum seekers abused in the U.S. and deported to harm in Cameroon*, Human Rights Watch (Feb. 10, 2022), available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/10/how-can-you-throw-us-back/asylum-seekers-abused-us-and-deported-harm-cameroon#>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *The State of Black Immigrants*, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, available at <https://stateofblackimmigrants.com/>; *Black Immigrant Lives Are Under Attack*, RAICES Texas, available at <https://www.raicestexas.org/2020/07/22/black-immigrant-lives-are-under-attack/>.

¹² *How Can You Throw Us Back?: Asylum seekers abused in the U.S. and deported to harm in Cameroon*, Human Rights Watch (Feb. 10, 2022), available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/10/how-can-you-throw-us-back/asylum-seekers-abused-us-and-deported-harm-cameroon#>.

¹³ *Id.*



security and protection to Black immigrants who face imminent harm should they be returned to their country of origin.

Designating TPS for Cameroon moves us toward an America as good as its ideals. Offering help, safety, and security to those in need is foundational to our country's values. It is imperative that the United States ensure Cameroonian nationals and those who last habitually resided in Cameroon are protected from deportation to ever more dangerous conditions. We urge you to immediately grant the maximum protection possible through an 18-month designation of TPS for Cameroon, including the prompt publication of a Federal Register Notice informing eligible persons how they can apply for relief.

We thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please contact Rob Randhava, Senior Counsel, at randhava@civilrights.org and Breanne Palmer, Immigration Policy Counsel, at palmer@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
African Communities Together
Amnesty International USA
Cameroon Advocacy Network
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Action Network's Washington Bureau
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Urban League
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
UndocuBlack Network

CC:

Molly Phee, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Susan Rice, Director, Domestic Policy Council
Cedric Richmond, Senior Advisor and Director, Office of Public Engagement