

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT JOSEPH R. BIDEN

Urgent Call to End the Atrocities and Human Rights Violations in the Cameroons and the Non-Compliance with the eligibility requirements of section 104 of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).



April 27, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Open Letter to President Biden – Urgent Call to End the Atrocities and Human Rights Violations in the Cameroons and the Non-Compliance with the eligibility requirements of section 104 of the AGOA.

Dear President Joseph R. Biden,

We, the undersigned human rights, women, youths and humanitarian organizations, write to express our deep concern about the ongoing armed conflict in our homeland and especially atrocities and gross human rights violations against the people of the former United Nations Trust Territory of the British Southern Cameroons (former British Southern Cameroons), referred to as the Anglophone minority population of the South West and North West regions of Cameroon. Your administration has committed to safeguard human rights and good governance as critical pillars for the United States' engagement in Africa's security, economic growth, and partnership. The continuous engagement of the United States in holding the Cameroon government accountable is vital in the pursuit of justice and peace in the former British Southern Cameroons.

Following numerous calls from international and local rights organizations denouncing the gross violation of human rights by Cameroon government forces and authorities and pursuant to section 506A(a)(3) of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Cameroon did not meet the requirements described in section 506A(a)(1) of the Trade Act. Despite intensive engagements between the United States and the Government of Cameroon, the government has failed to address concerns regarding persistent human rights violations being committed by Cameroon government security forces. These violations have continued unabated and worsened since the AGOA suspension that took effect on January 1, 2020. This was followed by United States Senate Resolution 684 of January 1, 2021, highlighting the burning of villages and rights violations by government forces and calling for the respect of human rights, sanctions, ceasefire, and genuine dialogue facilitated by a third party.

On June 7, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a policy imposing visa restrictions on individuals who are believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, human rights violations and abuses and threats against advocates for peace or humanitarian workers as well as on those undermining the peaceful resolution of the conflict in the former British Southern Cameroons. He indicated that the decision was a reflection of the United States commitment to advance a dialogue to peacefully resolve the conflict and support respect for human rights. However, international rights violations have continued unabated and with impunity. No publicly known action has been taken by the United States as a consequence of this commitment.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) situation report of April 12, 2023, close to 700,000 persons remain displaced internally. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees' March 2023 monthly brief reported over 87,000 refugees in neighboring Nigeria. Thousands of civilians have been killed and more than 300 villages burnt down. As a result of the ongoing conflict, former British Southern Cameroonians have become one of the leading asylum seekers from Africa at the U.S. Southern border with Mexico. To demonstrate the persistent rights violations, on April 15, 2022, Homeland Security Secretary, Alejandro N. Mayorkas designated Temporary Protection Status to Cameroon based on both ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions in the country that prevent Cameroonian nationals from returning to Cameroon safely.

Dear President Biden,

To demonstrate the Cameroon government's consistent violations since her suspension from AGOA and Secretary Blinken's visa sanctions policy, permit us to share with you credible reports of serious and gross human rights violations committed by Cameroon government authorities and forces, consistent with United States Government rights reports of 2021 and 2022 on Cameroon. This illustrates the Cameroon government has neither established nor is making continual progress as provided in section 104 of AGOA, undercutting any attempt to seek readmission.

Snapshot of 2021 human rights violations by the Cameroon government:

1. On January 10, 2021, according to multiple credible sources, including Reuters, the Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa and Reach Out Cameroon, soldiers carried out an offensive raid in Mautu, a village in Muyuka, killing at least nine civilians, including a child and an elderly woman. Three witnesses reportedly told Reuters that soldiers raided homes and shot civilians as they ran for cover. Reach Out Cameroon identified the deceased as Takang Anyi Roger, age 20; Tambe Daniel; Shey Keisa, age six; Obenegwa David, age 30; Egoshi Lucas, age 25; Takang Bruno, age 22; Ndakam Pascal, age 22; Tambe Ann, age 50; and Ngoto Valentine Akama, age 32.
2. Multiple media outlets reported that on January 23, 2021, security officers killed four unarmed teenagers in the Meta Quarter neighborhood in Bamenda. The victims included Sale Saddam and Aloysius Ngalim, both aged 16, and Blaise Fon and Nelly Mbah, both aged 17. On January 25, 2021, after Defense Ministry spokesperson Atonfack Guemo denied the reports, the Guardian Post newspaper reported that local residents identified two of the boys as students at Government Bilingual High School downtown and categorically stated that the teenagers were not armed and had nothing to do with the ongoing conflict in the former British Southern Cameroons.
3. On February 13, 2021, a video emerged on social media and television news programs showing a mixed unit of government defense forces abusing a civilian. They interrogated the man in French and pidgin English, poured water on him, beat him with a machete until he fell unconscious. This act is consistent with a culture of impunity in the Cameroon military and where such cases are recorded and published on social media, authorities deny them or attempt to detain and later release security forces in connection with these abuses.
4. Human Rights Watch (HRW) wrote that on June 8 and 9, 2021, members of the security forces killed two civilians and raped a 53-year-old woman around Bamenda. Survivors and witnesses reportedly told HRW

that in the early hours of June 9, approximately 150 government security force members were present in Mbuluf village. The husband of the raped woman was later found dead with multiple gunshot wounds on June 11 in Tatum village around Bamenda. They also broke into, damaged, and looted at least 33 shops and homes, including the residence of the Fon in Ndzeen village, HRW reported.

5. In Gom village, on June 8, 2021, two soldiers broke into the house of a local traditional authority and harassed eight people, including a 72-year-old man whom they beat up. They also shot and killed Nwang Lydia, a 60-year-old woman, HRW reported.
6. A Buea-based NGO, Human Is Right reported in August 2021 that it documented several cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions by defense and security forces in Mutengene, Muea, Mile 16, Mile 14 and Molyko, in Fako, from August 18 to August 30, 2021. According to Human Is Right, security forces patrolling neighborhoods arrested persons, especially young men and searched their homes without warrants. A witness reportedly told Human Is Right how his 24-year-old son was arrested in Molyko, despite having his national identification card and subsequently was asked to pay a bribe of 50,000 CFA francs (\$91) to secure his release.
7. On October 14, 2021, a government security official shot and killed Caroluise Enondiale, a 4-year-old girl, on her way to school in Buea, HRW reported. The officer was reportedly asking for a bribe of 500 CFA Franc (less than a dollar) from Caroluise's mother who was driving her to school.

Snapshot of 2022/2023 human rights violations by the Cameroon government:

1. In January 2022, a Human Rights Working Group Coordinated by NGO, UN MONDE AVENIR, with funding from the Canadian Government published a report indicating 1,440 cases of human rights violations, 559 cases of murder and 101 incidents of burning of civilian homes, schools, and hospitals in the former Southern Cameroons. Gender-Based Violence was also reported to be on the rise as well as forced disappearances, much of which was carried out by Cameroon forces. Human Rights Watch reported that on April 26, 2022, soldiers from the government's Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) severely beat and detained between 30 and 40 motorbike riders outside of Ndop because the soldiers allegedly suspected them of belonging to armed groups.
2. In February 2022, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting 14 cases of physical abuse or assault (torture) of individuals who had been deported to the country. A woman told Human Rights Watch she was tortured and raped by gendarmes or military men during her six weeks in detention in Bamenda. She said they used ropes, tubes, boots, and belts to hit her all over her body. She said they told her she had destroyed the image of the country, so she had to pay for it.
3. On April 21, 2022, in Konye, Meme division, members of government security forces reportedly burned down several civilian houses in Matondo II village, popularly known as Number 19. This is a pattern that began in 2018 when an entire village called Kwakwa and over 300 others were razed by government security forces.
4. In May 2022, the UK-Swiss commodity firm Glencore confessed before courts in London and United States to paying \$28 million and \$700 million respectively in bribes to secure preferential access to oil in five African countries, including paying \$11 million to Cameroon officials of the National Hydrocarbons Corporation (SNH) and National Refining Company (SONARA) to secure preferential access to oil between 2011 and 2016. Despite several calls from civil society, independent media and anti-corruption NGOs, including Transparency International, there have been no reports concerning any investigation, thus confirming the country's noncompliance with AGOA requirements.
5. On the night of June 9, 2022, government forces killed at least two unarmed civilians during a reconnaissance operation in Belo, Boyo. Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) reported the young men, one of them identified as Gideon Alahfuchi, were returning home when soldiers

detained them. At some point, when Gideon Alahfuchi complained that he was tired because he was recovering from a waist wound, the soldiers allegedly slit his throat with a knife and dumped his corpse by the roadside. CHRDA reported that the soldiers left Belo in approximately 10 trucks and moved to Njinkfuin, removed a man in his 50s known as "Bo Luh " from bed and executed him after accusing him of making charms.

6. Multiple rights organizations have reported that a Cameroon BIR soldier, Ewome Eboko John, better known by the pseudonym "Moja Moja," arrests many civilians and administers harsh treatment to secure confessions. Moja Moja often records videos of his victims as he abuses them and publishes the videos on his Facebook page called "Moja Moja Chief." On June 27, 2022, one of the videos went viral on social media depicting Ewome beating an unarmed civilian with a metal object and forcing him to confess to being a separatist fighter.
7. On July 15, 2022, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) announced its decision to close project bases in Kumba and Mamfe, beginning on August 1, 2022. The decision followed the suspension of MSF activities by authorities three months earlier, prior to which security forces arrested and detained four MSF staff members in December 2021 and January 2022.
8. In November 2022, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the deprivation of liberty of 15 individuals detained arbitrarily. These individuals include the 10 former British Southern Cameroons leaders; Sisiku AyukTabe & others, whom the Yaoundé Military Tribunal sentenced to life imprisonment in 2019 and are still in prison. In the same report, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the deprivation of liberty of these 10 individuals to be arbitrary.
9. Multiple credible sources, including the Working Group on Human Rights, reported that on April 24, 2022, BIR soldiers beat and detained between 30 to 40 motorbike riders who were part of a funeral convoy heading to Oku from Ndop. HRW indicated that the soldiers then transferred 23 of the bike riders to the BIR base in Bafut, approximately 27 miles from Ndop, where they held them incommunicado for approximately three weeks. This is a consistent pattern of government security forces. Samuel Wazizi, a local journalist in Buea who was critical of the government's handling of the conflict was arrested arbitrarily in 2019 and detained incommunicado by government forces without access to his family or attorneys. 15 months after his enforced disappearance and six months after it was confirmed that he died in detention, the government denied acknowledging his passing and to reveal his location. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) later reported he died in detention without any notice to his family, who till date have not seen his remains.
10. On August 11, 2022, Peace activist Abdul Karim Ali was arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge. While the authorities have provided no formal reason for his detention, he was interrogated repeatedly about a video he made on July 9, 2022, denouncing a Cameroonian military chief for allegedly torturing civilians, Amnesty International reported. He was later transferred to the Secretariat of State in charge of the National Gendarmerie (SED) and detained incommunicado under severe torture. In February 2023, he was transferred to the Yaounde Kondengui Central prison. On April 17, 2023, without any notice to his attorneys, security officials attempted to transfer him back to SED but faced resistance from other detainees. HRW had reported that SED has been generally described as a torture chamber of Cameroon government security forces.
11. On March 2, 2023, 157 youths from Matchoh, Mbonge Mateke, Barombi and other nearby villages in Meme, were arbitrarily and summarily arrested following an Administrative Order issued by the Senior Divisional Officer for Meme, Chamberlain Ntou'ou Ndong to arbitrarily arrest these civilians. Credible sources including rights organizations have reported that one week later, the number of arbitrary arrests rose to 190 including even elderly persons. Till date, these civilians remain in detention.

Dear President Biden,

It is evident without any doubt that the government of Cameroon has neither established nor made continual progress pursuant to Section 104 of AGOA and continues to undermine efforts that seek to peacefully address the root cause of the conflict. Cameroon's March 12, 2023, senatorial elections that preceded the second Summit for Democracy co-hosted by the United States was a testimony of a decline of a seemingly struggling authoritarian regime. Cameroon received over \$173 million of assistance in 2022 from the United States and given the corrupt nature of the regime, it is fair to say much of United States taxpayers' money may have been embezzled into private pockets.

Your administration has consistently encouraged the government to engage in genuine dialogue. Secretary Blinken in his June 7, 2021, policy statement emphasized this, preceded by Senate Resolution 684 of January 1, 2021. While the Swiss government offered their good offices to facilitate dialogue, encouraged by the United States, the Cameroon government withdrew before the commencement of talks. The Canadian government invited both parties to explore the possibility of genuine substantive negotiations to end the armed conflict. An official statement was issued on January 20, 2023, by Honorable Melanie Jolie, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, acknowledging a commitment by the parties to substantive talks, followed by a commitment statement by representatives of the Southern Cameroons on January 21, 2023. On January 23, 2023, the Cameroon Minister of Communication, government spokesman, published a statement denouncing Minister Jolie's statement and announcing that the Cameroon government did not engage the Canadian government to facilitate the dialogue. This further undermines the spirit of the U.S. Senate Resolution 684 and Secretary Blinken's policy of June 7, 2021.

Former President Bill Clinton said his inaction in Rwanda was his biggest regret of his presidency. Over 300 of our villages razed and the targeted killing of our people continue on daily basis by Cameroon government forces. The salient question now is how is this genocide different? On April 25, 2019, you said, "America is an idea. An idea that is stronger than any army, bigger than any ocean, more powerful than any dictator or tyrant. It gives hope to the most desperate people on earth, it guarantees that everyone is treated with dignity and gives hate no safe harbor. It instills in every person in this country the belief that no matter where you start in life, there is nothing you can't achieve if you work at it. That's what we believe." These are the hopeful words from your speech you delivered 4 years ago that our people want to see translated into deeds. Will the misery of our poor people end anytime soon? And why is the US not taking actions strong enough to end the war?

President Biden,

As we seek justice and peace, we remain committed to a peaceful, just, and political settlement of the conflict in our homeland. We call on you to:

1. Use your authority to compel the Cameroon government to demonstrate continual progress provided in the AGOA, in the respect of human rights by respecting international law, stop arbitrary arrests, release those detained in connection with the conflict and pay reparations to the families whose houses were razed by government forces.
2. Mobilize allies to impress on the Cameroon government to genuinely engage in a political settlement of the conflict to address the root cause facilitated by a third party and allowing the people of the former Southern Cameroons to collectively determine their future through inclusive democratic means. So far, the government is divided as some prefer a military solution that continues to promote a culture of impunity.
3. Impose sanctions on any individual from the Cameroon government or armed groups who commit international rights violations on civilians, including the burning of villages, schools, churches, and hospitals.

4. Demand an independent international investigation of the atrocity crimes, gross and serious human rights violations committed and to hold perpetrators to account in order to prevent, mitigate and respond to a culture of impunity that continues to breed violence.
5. Impress on the Cameroon government to allow humanitarian access so that close to 2 million people who need aid can be reached without any blockage or interference of the government as was the case with Doctors Without Borders. This request aligns with United Nations Resolution 2417 (2018) condemning the starving of civilians, and unlawfully denying humanitarian access as warfare tactics.

Respectfully,

- The Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)
- Southern Cameroons Women's League (SCAWOL)
- Southern Cameroons European Women (SCEW) e.V.
- The Global Takumbeng (GT)
- Cameroon Humanitarian Relief Organization (CHRI)
- The Southern Cameroons Civil Society Consortium (The Consortium)
- The Southern Cameroons Congress of the People (SCCOP)
- The Southern Cameroons Youth Council (SCYC)
- Mother of the Southern Cameroons (MoFSC)
- The West Cameroon Association (WCA)
- Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Activists Front (SCAAF)
- Diaspora Ambazonia Community (DAC)
- Ambazonia International Policy Commission (AIPC)
- Ambazonia Prisoners of War (APOW)
- Ambazonia Youth Council (AYC)

CC:

- Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, Department of State of the United States of America.
- Janet Yellen, Treasury Secretary of the United States of America.
- Ambassador Katherine Tai, United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President.
- Judd Devermont, Special Assistant to the President of the United States and Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council.
- Senator Robert Menendez, Chair, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Senator James Risch, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- All members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Senator Ron Wyden, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance.
- Senator Mike Crapo, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Finance.
- All Members of the Senate Committee on Finance.
- Senator Thomas Carper, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs and Global Competitiveness.
- Senator John Cornyn, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs and Global Competitiveness.
- Senator Cory Booker, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy.
- Senator Tim Scott, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy.
- Senator Tim Kaine, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, And Global Women's Issues.
- Senator Marco Rubio, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, And Global Women's Issues.

- Representative Michael McCaul, Chair, House Committee on Foreign Affairs.
- Representative Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs.
- All members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.
- Representative John James, Chair, House Subcommittee Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights.
- Representative Sara Jacobs, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights.
- Representative Jason Smith, Chair, House Ways and Means Committee.
- Representative, Richard Neal, Ranking Member, House Ways and Means Committee.
- All members of the House Ways and Means Committee.
- Representative Adrian Smith, Chair, House Subcommittee on Trade.
- Representative Earl Blumenauer, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Trade.
- All members of the United States Congress.
- Ambassador Christopher J. Lamora, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon.