



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4302

December 12, 2019

His Excellency Paul Biya
President of the Republic of Cameroon
Unity Palace, Etoudi
P.O. Box 100
Yaoundé
Republic of Cameroon

Dear President Biya,

As members of the U.S. Congress, we are writing to express our deep concern over the ongoing insecurity and violence in the predominantly Anglophone Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon. Conflict between your security forces and non-state armed groups has led to an ever-increasing number of casualties and of internally displaced persons and refugees, and has kept hundreds of thousands of children out of school for going on a third year in a row. These factors are having devastating social, political, and economic impacts on the regions, on the country itself, and more broadly in Central and West Africa.

The situation is not getting better, as your government asserts: it is getting worse. According to the United Nations, as of November 2019, more than 2,000 people have died, as many as 710,000 people have been internally displaced, and 44,000 refugees have fled to neighboring Nigeria due to the ongoing conflict in the Northwest and Southwest. Roughly 2.6 million people in these areas are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 855,000 children, the majority of whom are internally displaced, do not have access to education. Ongoing insecurity and violence in the Northwest and Southwest have had a ruinous effect on the economy as documented by Cameroon's leading employers' confederation, the *Groupement Inter-Patronal du Cameroun*. GICAM noted that Ghost Towns effectively shut down economic activity for 30.6 percent of the time in the past two and a half years and that the situation is getting worse. The conflict has severely hurt the timber, agro-industry, cocoa, energy, telecommunications, tourism, and transport sectors.

Given the failure of various internal initiatives to halt the crisis and bring peace to these regions of Cameroon, the government of Cameroon should demonstrate political will by engaging in the Swiss-led facilitation process, which could lead to future negotiations between the Cameroonian government and the opposition in the Northwest and Southwest, as well as the diaspora. A process of inclusive negotiation and institutional reforms would lead to greater power-sharing and decision-making, facilitate peace, and save Cameroonian lives. Children, particularly in rural areas of the Northwest and Southwest, need to resume their education, but that is not going to

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happen until there is a resolution of the conflict. We know you value education: the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest, if left unchecked, could very well lead to a generation of unskilled and underdeveloped people who are prone to unemployment, and prone to violent extremism and criminality. A peaceful and inclusive resolution of the crisis would strengthen bilateral ties and lead to greater trade and investment between our two countries.

Military action cannot solve this conflict. We understand that non-state armed groups are responsible for horrific acts of violence and we condemn those acts in the strongest terms. But a broad spectrum of international and domestic experts disagree with the Cameroonian government's assertion that non-state armed groups are responsible for most of the violence: on the contrary, there is consistent and convincing evidence from a variety of unbiased and independent sources that Cameroonian security forces are responsible for the majority of killings of unarmed Cameroonian citizens and destruction of property including the burning of homes. There is evidence of soldiers dragging wounded people out of hospitals and their lifeless bodies found abandoned later. Soldiers have raped women, either for opportunistic or punitive reasons.

Promises for national dialogue have been made by the government, and some positive gestures have been carried out including the release of 333 lower level Anglophone prisoners and 225 political prisoners including Cameroon Renaissance Movement leader Maurice Kamto. There is evidence that government officials at the sub-Divisional Officer level deliberately misused their positions to prevent opposition candidates from registering and the government has blocked attempts of opposition parties to organize and hold rallies on spurious security grounds while allowing the ruling party to celebrate openly and lavishly the anniversary of your rule. Some opposition parties have voiced skepticism that the government and the national elections body ELECAM will be able to conduct February 9 municipal and legislative assembly elections in the Northwest and Southwest.

If there is not a durable ceasefire in the Northwest and Southwest, February elections, let alone plans for bilingualism, decentralization, DDR, reconstruction, and resumption of education are unlikely to succeed. A process of inclusive negotiations and a genuine commitment to establish peace is a necessary condition for all of the good suggestions from the national dialogue to move forward.

Many of us in congress are currently assessing U.S. policy toward Cameroon. As you know, the United States recently terminated the designation of Cameroon as a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country under the African Growth and Opportunity Act because the Government of Cameroon engages in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. This follows the U.S. decision in February of this year to scale back military assistance to Cameroon, also because of human rights violations. Further considerations regarding U.S.-Cameroonian relations will depend on your commitment to engage in sincere dialogue. Only sincere dialogue can lead to an end to the violence and insecurity in the Northwest and Southwest, allowing people to return and rebuild their homes, children to return to school, and economic activity to

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resume safely. Your lasting legacy as President of the Republic of Cameroon also depends on this commitment.

Sincerely,

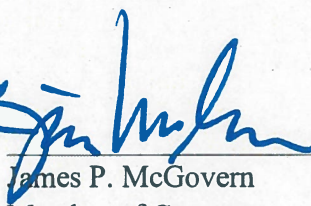
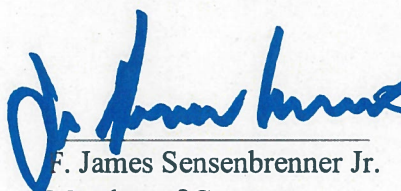


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Member of Congress

Christopher H. Smith
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Member of Congress

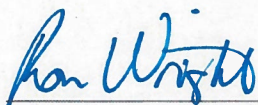
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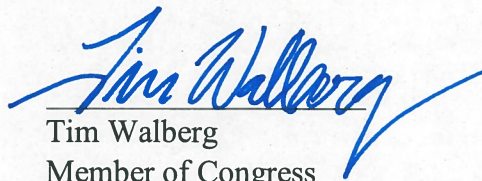
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