



December 5, 2023,

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 8:29 am, Dec 08, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary,
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20528

RE: Urgent Request for Special Humanitarian Parole for Cameroonian Refugees

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

On behalf of the Cameroon American Council, Cameroon Muslimahs of North America, Cameroon Muslim Students Union, Council on American-Islamic Relations, and — other signatories, we urgently appeal to the Department of Homeland Security to consider granting Special Humanitarian Parole to Cameroonian refugees profoundly affected by the ongoing five armed conflicts in Cameroon.¹

These ongoing armed conflicts include Boko Haram violence in the North, activities of Seleka and Anti-Balaka militias in the East, and the Anglophone Conflict in the West. They also include the religious freedom and herder-farmer crises, which stem from the Sahel region through Cameroon and into the Central Africa Republic. The fifth conflict is the persisting electoral crisis, destabilizing the entire country and sub-African region.

Between 2014 and 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a 56% surge in Cameroonians seeking asylum in the United States.⁴ Since 2016, approximately 10,000 Cameroonians have sought refuge in the United States, driven by unrest in the northwest and southwest regions. These English-speaking areas experienced turmoil after a U.S.-backed Francophone government violently suppressed peaceful protests against the marginalization of the Anglophone minority, constituting about 20% of the total population, as documented by Pacific Standard.²

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2938440662843891&set=a.623931719766484>

² DIAS, ISABELA, ed. “PEOPLE ARE BEING KILLED LIKE FLIES’: DENIED ASYLUM IN THE U.S., CAMEROONIANS FEAR INCREASING VIOLENCE BACK HOME.” <https://psmag.com/social-justice/people-are-being-killed-like-flies-denied-asylum-in-the-u-s-cameroonians-fear-increasing-violence->

In October 2023, the United States Government rightly extended and redesignated Cameroon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months, from December 8, 2023, through June 7, 2025, due to persistent armed conflict and extraordinary conditions preventing migrants' safe return to their homes, communities, and way of life in Cameroon.

Cameroon grapples with severe armed conflicts, displacement, and human rights abuses, prompting widespread consensus among community and immigration advocates that TPS for Cameroon is inadequate. Remarkably, while programs like TPS and Special Humanitarian Parole aid migrants from non-African countries like Ukraine, Afghanistan, Haiti, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, no African country has ever been granted Special Humanitarian Parole. This discrepancy warrants urgent attention.

To address this issue, we urge DHS to raise awareness about the absence of African countries in the Special Humanitarian Parole program. Additionally, we implore DHS to prioritize Cameroon being the first African country to receive access to the Special Humanitarian Parole Program as an initial step toward rectifying this disparity.

Background on Challenges Faced by Cameroon Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- The 2022 World Report from Human Rights Watch³ sheds light on the situation in Cameroon. As of August 2021, the Anglophone crisis resulted in more than 712,000 internal displacements, impacting English and French-speaking regions. At least 2.2 million people were in need of humanitarian aid. The report further highlights that over 4,000 civilians have lost their lives in the Northwest and Southwest regions since late 2016 due to actions by both government forces and armed separatist fighters.
- At present, Cameroon still faces a significant humanitarian challenge, with an estimated 4.7 million people in need of assistance. The devastating impact of floods in 2022 affected over 313,000 individuals, intensifying the vulnerability of the affected population. Humanitarian aid and protection services are specifically geared towards reaching 2.7 million of the most vulnerable people in Cameroon, requiring a budget of **\$407.3 million**.⁴
- As of March 31, 2023, the internal displacement crisis in Cameroon is pronounced, with over 2.1 million people on the move, including one million internally displaced persons

[back-home.](#)

³ Human Rights Watch. "Cameroon," January 13, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon>.

⁴ ReliefWeb. "West and Central Africa: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot- Cameroon," July 7, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/west-and-central-africa-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-28-june-04-july-2023>.

(IDPs), nearly 646,000 returnees, and more than 480,000 refugees and asylum seekers. *ibid.*

- Allies to the Cameroon diaspora have already introduced various resolutions in state legislative assemblies, including Georgia, Texas, and Oklahoma, promoting the adoption of Special Humanitarian Parole for Cameroonians.⁵ These resolutions shed light on the specific challenges faced by Cameroonians, including medical abuse, protest and deportation, displacement, and the tragic boat incident involving Cameroon migrants in the Caribbean.
- On March 28, 2023, the Coast Guard of Saint Kitts and Nevis rescued 17 Cameroon nationals whose boat was capsized after departing from Antigua and Barbuda.⁶ Three of the 17 Cameroonians were found deceased. Although there was an initial agreement to repatriate the remaining 14, Antigua and Barbuda has subsequently retracted the offer.

Emblematic of the struggles faced by many Cameroonian refugees that deadly boat capsizes underscores the urgent need for immediate action is the story of ██████⁷, a 19-year-old devout Muslim Cameroonian of Fulani and Wimbun in the North West Region. He is one of the individuals who survived being submerged in the Atlantic Ocean during the deadly boat capsize after leaving Antigua and Barbuda. ██████ is still stranded in Saint Kitts and continues to endure severe conditions following the terrible experience of being lost at sea. Losing all his belongings to his boat capsizing, including his prayer beads and mat, he still is not able to receive a proper Islamic prayer mat and prays on a flat cardboard. Special Humanitarian Parole is urgent for individuals like ██████, who have endured unimaginable hardships.

- On February 24, 2020, 150 Cameroonian women asylum seekers detained at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Taylor, Texas, staged a protest against their harsh living conditions, anti-Blackness, anti-Africanness, and lack of adequate medical care. The women's protest took an unsettling turn when, just a day after speaking out against their treatment, many of them claim they were coerced by ICE agents into signing deportation orders. In a letter titled "A Cry for Help," dated February 23, 2020, a day before the protest, the women, self-identifying as "Southern Cameroon Refugees," recounted their

⁵ HR 2285 - Introduced Version - Bill Text, (TX, 2023)
<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/html/HR02285I.htm>.
H.R. 521, 110th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (GA, 2023)
<https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/65389>
H.R1021, Introduced Version Bill Text, (OK, 2023)
<https://legiscan.com/OK/text/HR1021/id/2819888>

⁶ Coto, Dánica. "3 Dead, 13 Missing in Caribbean Sinking; 14 Africans Saved | AP News." AP News, March 28, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/antigua-boat-capsized-missing-dead-3a4393548ee5ad91a44d9687ec96a4d7>.

⁷ Change.org. "Sign the Petition," June 12, 2023.
<https://www.change.org/p/congressionalcaribbeancaucus-for-juneteenth-help-cameroonmigrant-survivors-of-deadlyboat>.

experiences of medical neglect, discrimination, and prolonged detention without parole or bond, some for up to seven months.

- On Juneteenth 2020, 40 Cameroonian men held at Pine Prairie Detention in Louisiana staged multiple protests highlighting the issues of anti-Blackness and anti-African sentiments within immigration, particularly emphasizing prolonged detention without parole or bond.⁸ Among those previously detained at Pine Prairie is ██████, a Cameroonian Muslim. The implementation of a Special Humanitarian Parole for Cameroon could facilitate ██████ reunion with his family, currently stranded in Batibo, located in the North West region of Cameroon.
- The protests by Cameroonians against discrimination and anti-Africanness are not confined to U.S. immigration jails. In contrast to caravans mainly comprising non-African migrants, Cameroonian asylum seekers traveling to the United States encounter exceptional hurdles, including a scarcity of basic necessities like food due to corruption. These difficulties have spurred protests among Cameroonians in locations outside the United States in Tapachula and Tijuana in Mexico, as well as in St. Kitts and the British Virgin Islands.

Driven by a shared sense of desperation and an urgent need for change, these courageous Cameroonian individuals have bravely raised their voices to shed light on the dehumanizing conditions they and other refugee communities face within ICE detention centers. Their powerful protests have attracted widespread attention from national and international media as they recounted their experiences of medical neglect, discrimination, and prolonged detention without parole or bond, some for up to seven months.

Conclusion

Given these dire circumstances, we request DHS to extend Humanitarian Parole to Cameroonians in particularly vulnerable situations, providing them with the opportunity to seek refuge in the United States and escape ongoing violence and persecution. In this context, Humanitarian Parole is not just a legal provision; it is a vital means to ensure the safety and well-being of Cameroonian refugees, offering them a temporary reprieve from imminent danger and providing an avenue to rebuild their lives.

Granting Cameroonian individuals the opportunity to seek refuge in the United States through mechanisms like Special Humanitarian Parole is not merely an act of compassion for those who have endured persecution, abuse, and displacement. It embodies the principles of empathy and

⁸ Penney, Joe. "Cameroonian Immigrants Lead Juneteenth Protest against Racist Treatment at ICE Detention Center." *That Can't Happen* (blog), June 19, 2020. <https://joepenney.substack.com/p/cameroonian-immigrants-lead-protest>.

compassion that have long been the aspirational goals of American immigration policy and a stated goal of your administration.

We are confident that DHS will meticulously evaluate this request and take decisive action to address this major anti-African oversight in immigration relief and aid those Cameroonians in dire need.

To respond to this request and meet with concerned Cameroonian organizations and allies, please contact CAC Chief Executive Officer Sylvie Bello at Cameroon.American.Council@gmail.com and CAIR Director of Government Affairs Department Robert S. McCaw at Rmccaw@cair.com.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We appreciate your commitment to human rights, global justice, and racial justice.

Sincerely,

Cameroon American Council (CAC)

Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Mbei Cultural Association

Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention

Team Brownsville

Adas llc

CAMEROON MUSLIM STUDENTS UNION

International Human Rights Art Movement

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Guadalupe Presbyter Church, USA

Cameroon America council

ESTA Solutions Inc

Migration Ministry, Grace St. Paul Episcopal Church Tucson AZ USA

Espacio Migrante

Hindus for Human Rights

El Otro Lado

AIRE (Alliance for Immigrant and Refugee Empowerment)

Deported Asylum Seekers Assistance Project
Congresslounge

UNIA-ACL RC 2020

Iskashitaa Refugee network

Islamophobia Studies Center

Indivisible

AVAN Immigrant Services (Adelanto Visitation & Advocacy Network)

Siren - Protectors of the Rainforest, inc

San Fernando Valley Indivisible

Venice Resistance

Birmingham Islamic Society

US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)

LSSNCA

Equality Labs

Bethesda Holdings LLC

Sapelo Square

Masjid Wadud



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

January 30, 2024

Sylvie Bello
Chief Executive Officer
Cameroon American Council
916 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
Cameroon.American.Council@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Bello:

Thank you for your December 5, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I am responding on behalf of DHS.

DHS recognizes the seriousness of the situation in Cameroon. In response to the conditions in Cameroon, as noted in your letter, on October 6, 2023, Secretary Mayorkas announced the extension and redesignation of Cameroon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months, from December 8, 2023 through June 7, 2025. On December 7, 2023, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) held a national stakeholder engagement to provide an overview and answer questions on the extension and redesignation of TPS for Cameroon.

We acknowledge your request for a humanitarian parole program for nationals of Cameroon and will take this suggestion under advisement as we consider the most appropriate ways to continue to assist Cameroonians. Please know, however, that noncitizens, regardless of nationality, outside the United States may request an Advance Parole Document on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit by filing Form I-131, Application for Travel Document, with all required supporting documentation. If granted, the Advance Parole Document permits the noncitizen to appear at a port of entry and seek parole into the United States. We note that parole is not intended to be used in place of established refugee or visa processing channels or to provide protection to individuals at generalized risk of harm.

DHS remains steadfast in its commitment to assist with the resettlement of qualified refugees from Africa and elsewhere in the United States. In fiscal year (FY) 2024, the Presidential Determination (PD) for total proposed refugee admissions is 125,000, including 30,000-50,000 refugees from Africa. In the first quarter of FY 2024, USCIS completed initial interviews of 14,840 refugee applicants from Africa and issued 17,390 final decisions, of which over 17,000 were approvals. In FY 2023, the PD for total proposed refugee admissions was also 125,000, including 40,000 refugees from Africa. In FY 2023, USCIS completed initial interviews

Sylvie Bello

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of 42,470 refugee applicants from Africa and issued 44,663 final decisions, of which over 44,000 were approvals. Ultimately, 22,348 refugees were admitted to the United States from Africa in FY 2023, which is 38% of the total refugee admissions for the year. Noncitizens outside of the United States who believe they are in need of protection due to persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion should contact the UN Refugee Agency to determine whether resettlement is the best option for them or their families. More information can be found at <http://www.unhcr.org>. For further information on access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, please see <http://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions>.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this response with the other organizations that cosigned your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ur M. Jaddou" followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director