

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 7, 2018

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing in response to concerns that have been raised about the recent elections in Cameroon, the ongoing crisis in the Anglophone regions of the country, and human rights abuses related to the crisis and the campaign against Boko Haram.

Cameroon has become an increasingly important regional counterterrorism partner and the United States has increased its commitment of security assistance in recent years. However, rising tensions in the Anglophone North West and South West regions, coupled with credible reports of human rights abuses by the Cameroonian armed forces in those regions and the Far North, where Boko Haram is active, have changed the tone of discussions regarding U.S. security assistance.

Reports indicate that government forces are responsible for extrajudicial killings, the burning of villages, torture, and other human rights abuses, including a much-publicized video reportedly showing soldiers executing two women, a child, and a baby they accused of being members of Boko Haram.¹ The violent death of American missionary Charles Wesco underscores the level of bloodshed engulfing the Anglophone areas of the country. United Nations figures indicate that more than 21,000 Cameroonians have fled to neighboring countries and 160,000 are internally displaced.²

In addition, recent elections were marred by irregularities and intimidation. Voter turnout in the Anglophone regions was reportedly “marked by apathy, and in some regions, outright fear,” and driven to unprecedented lows by the military’s campaign against Anglophone separatists,³ which has often veered into human rights abuses against civilians. The results of the election remain

¹ Freudenthal, Emmanuel. “‘The Old Don’t Let Go’: 36 Years of Rocky ‘Stability’ in Paul Biya’s Cameroon,” *World Politics Review*, October 2, 2018. <<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/26205/the-old-don-t-let-go-36-years-of-rocky-stability-in-paul-biya-s-cameroon>>

² UN High Commissioner for Refugees. “UN Human Rights Chief deeply alarmed by reports of serious rights breaches in Cameroon,” July 25, 2018. <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23404&LangID=E>>

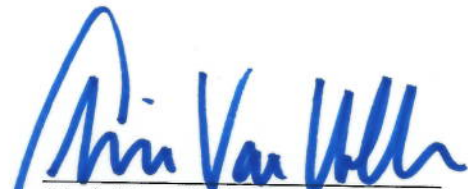
³ O’Donnell, Jefcoate and Robbie Gramer. “Cameroon’s Paul Biya Gives a Master Class in Fake Democracy,” *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2018. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/22/cameroons-paul-biya-gives-a-master-class-in-fake-democracy/>>

heavily disputed, and multiple presidential candidates have petitioned for the results to be voided, citing allegations of ballot stuffing and intimidation.⁴ The program director for Central Africa at the International Crisis Group told *Foreign Policy* that “[t]here is an emerging civil war. Anglophones feel completely disenfranchised, but they didn’t need the elections to tell them that.”

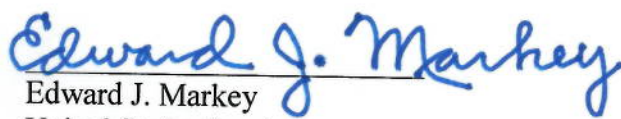
The U.S. government should make clear to the government of Cameroon that, while we remain dedicated to the fight against Boko Haram, our commitment to human rights and the rule of law is steadfast and we expect our regional partners to share that commitment. We must also emphasize the critical importance of a political solution to the crisis in the Anglophone regions, support civil society groups to ensure that elections are free, credible, and transparent, and offer our assistance as mediators. The United States should impose sanctions on individuals found to have committed gross violations of human rights, consistent with the law.⁵ In addition, we will work with our colleagues in the Senate to assess whether additional conditions should be imposed on security assistance to Cameroon.


We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator


Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

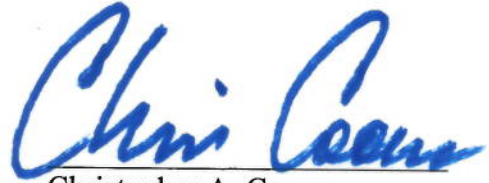

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

⁴ Dionne, Kim Yi and Landry Signé. “Cameroon’s election still isn’t decided. What happens next?” The Washington Post, October 12, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/12/what-just-happened-in-camerouns-elections/?utm_term=.07e7d69f53c0>

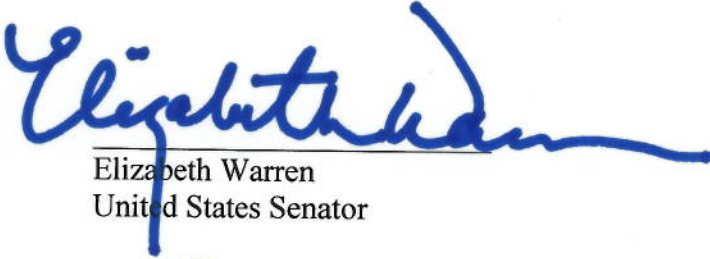
⁵ Under the Global Magnitsky Act, individuals can be sanctioned if they are responsible for or acted as an agent for someone responsible for “extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.” Additionally, the Department has the authority under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2018 (P.L. 115-141; 8 U.S.C. 1182 note) to make ineligible for U.S. entry foreign officials involved in “gross violation[s] of human rights.”



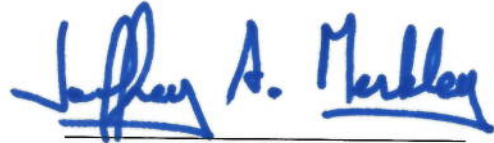
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



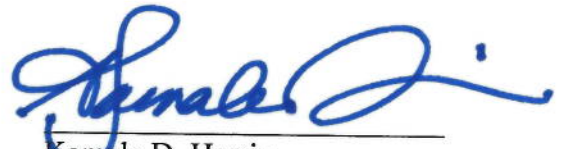
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator