

Acting Assistant Secretary Don Yamamoto's Testimony
before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Human Rights, and International Organizations
Hearing on The Roots of the Anglophone Crisis in the Cameroons
Wednesday, June 27, 2018, 2:30 p.m.

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Let me begin by saying that we regard Cameroon as a friend and a valuable partner in the Central African region.

Anglophone Cameroonians represent approximately 20 percent of the nation's population. Some have done well, rising to senior levels of government and industry. However, many Anglophones have long expressed concerns about what they consider marginalization, neglect, and discrimination by the central government and the Francophone majority.

The frustrations of Anglophone teachers and lawyers surfaced at the end of 2016 in the form of peaceful protests. Unfortunately, the Government of Cameroon responded to this dissent by shutting down the internet for over three months, conducting arbitrary arrests, shooting unarmed protestors, and arresting, detaining, and imposing harsh sentences on the participants. This repression of peaceful dissent and lack of accountability combined with a sense that the Government of Cameroon's reforms were insufficient to address their concerns led to an outbreak of support for secession – by violence if necessary – of the Northwest and Southwest Regions.

Stakeholders on both sides of the conflict consistently use sensationalism and outright disinformation to advance their agendas. Obtaining accurate information is difficult for security reasons as well. The Embassy has prohibited all but mission-essential travel to the Southwest and Northwest Regions, and the State Department discourages private American citizens from traveling to these regions out of concern for their safety.

Violence continues to get worse. According to analysis using figures from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project database, assailants – including secessionists, government forces, and armed bandits – killed 108 people from December 31 through April 30, 2018 an average of 6.35 per week. However, ACLED reported 16 separate incidents of violence in April 2018 in contrast to an average of just 11 for each of the first three months of 2018. While noting the

small sample size, this amounts to a 45 percent increase in reported attacks. We understand May to be even worse.

The U.S. government has consistently condemned the use of violence on all sides and has called for national dialogue without pre-conditions. Each act of violence renders dialogue more difficult, but all the more necessary. We have offered to join with others in the international community to facilitate the start of a dialogue.

We welcomed the government's public statement on May 15, 2018 that it would investigate the filmed abuse of a secessionist commander by Cameroonian forces and punish the perpetrators. This is a sign of the government's willingness to confront the problem of human rights abuses. We also note favorably the government's granting of visas to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch researchers to meet with senior level officials in Cameroon.

It is clear that the continuing violence has created a humanitarian crisis. On May 28, the UN, in coordination with the Cameroonian government, released an Emergency Response Plan that requests \$15 million to address the humanitarian needs of 160,000 IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. The majority of these IDPs are sheltering in the forest with no access to health facilities, clean water, or sufficient food. The UN also reported that more than 21,000 Cameroonians have been registered as refugees in Cross River, Benue, and Akwa Ibom States in Nigeria.

Most humanitarian actors and donors agree that the number of IDPs presented in the Emergency Response Plan for the Anglophone regions is underestimated, and humanitarian needs are likely to increase as displaced populations miss a full agricultural season and economic reserves are depleted. We are actively considering ways in which we can support this humanitarian response.

We will continue to press for an end to violence, for broad-based dialogue without pre-condition, respect for human rights, and accountability. I thank the committee for its interest in the ongoing crisis in the Anglophone regions in Cameroon.