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Subject: Cameroonians Have No Sympathy for Deportees from U.S.

1. (SBU) **Summary:** The recent U.S. deportation of a planned 80 Cameroonian migrants was a lightning rod for public attention. Government media portrayed the return of its citizens as a normal aspect of international cooperation and promoted its deployment of resources to welcome the deportees. Private coverage was mostly factual, with little attention paid to claims that the deportees could face human rights abuses. On social media, the public largely considered the deportees economic migrants and discounted their claims to asylum. **End Summary.**

Repatriation Goes Viral, Government Emphasizes Collaboration with U.S. Authorities

2. (U) Cameroonian media started reporting on the pending deportation of Cameroonians one day prior to the flight's departure from the United States. The story garnered widespread attention in traditional and social media, but there was no consensus on the number of deportees. The difference between the total number of Cameroonians involved and the number of people on the plane departing the United States added to the confusion, and numbers used ranged from 57 to 126 (the number on the DHS manifest that we shared with the government in advance of the flight was 80). On the eve of the deportation, state-owned CRTV radio's prime time newscast explained that Cameroon accepted the repatriation of these illegal immigrants as part of fulfilling its duties to collaborate with partners regarding international agreements. On its website, CRTV emphasized the action as "a collaboration between the Cameroonian and the U.S. immigration authorities" that "led to the successful repatriation of 57 illegal Cameroonian immigrants from the United States" facilitated by President Biya. State-owned newspaper *Cameroon Tribune* on October 14 quoted a Ministry of External Relations official validating the repatriation saying, "it is a regular procedure on immigration issues in the U.S. and also on the exchanges between the United States and the rest of the world."

Jilted Asylum Seekers or Unlucky Fortune Hunters?

3. (U) Contrary to U.S. coverage of the deportation, Cameroonian media were less sympathetic to asylum claims. CRTV mentioned in its various newscasts that the deportees were from various parts of the country, not just the crisis-hit Northwest and Southwest Regions, and have no link to that situation by which to claim asylum. Private media outlets carried a mostly similar line. In its October 15 issue, private English daily *The Guardian Post* reported that "a majority of the Cameroonians repatriated by the U.S. government are reportedly escapee civil servants among them teachers, medical doctors, and even soldiers who had defected from the army." The article also mentioned some "supporters of the Ambazonia separatist movement."

4. (SBU) State media highlighted special measures the government took to welcome the

“prodigal sons” who failed to respect U.S. immigration law, noting actions by the Ministries of External Relations and Social Affairs to welcome these compatriots and to help them reunite with their families and mentioning “human and material” resources mobilized to ensure a befitting and well supervised welcome home. Similarly, in private coverage, French daily *Le Messenger* reported that both ministries took necessary measures to welcome the returnees, adding that security forces were also present at the airport. The story was still attracting attention by October 20, with an alleged list of deportees published and contradictory claims in different newspapers about them being majority Francophone. The private English-language weekly *Horizon* claimed that French-speaking Cameroonians are taking advantage of the conflict to justify an asylum claim.

Fellow Citizens Reject Asylum Story

5. (SBU) The story likewise went viral on social media with speculation about the deportees largely rejecting the idea that they had a legitimate claim for asylum, albeit with a minority view aligned with the pro-separatist narrative claiming deportees were Anglophones and at risk from the Biya regime. The widespread consensus appeared to be that the deportees were not only economic migrants seeking greener pastures but that they were also to a certain degree elites who had the means to pursue illegal immigration in the first place, thus being among those who should least need to do so. For example, on Facebook, comments on a CRTV article included this representative statement, “Many are dying back here because they don’t even have the means to adventure like these ones. Thousands are having their stay in the U.S. These are just the unfortunate ones.” Many others showed a lack of sympathy for the deportees’ situation, with jokes about keeping up their courage after their attempts to play the system did not work out.

6. (SBU) Public consensus appears to believe that the majority of the deportees are indeed government employees who abandoned their positions to seek new opportunities in America while still drawing their public salaries, as thousands of Cameroonian government workers are believed to be doing this from various locations abroad. The two Cameroonian soldiers among the deportees, presumed to have absconded while likely on official orders in the United States, were the most remarked upon aspect of the situation. Information circulated saying they were arrested upon arrival and would face court martial, and public consensus seemed to agree they deserved their punishment.

7. (SBU) A video went viral of two Americans, reportedly a journalist and a lawyer for one of the asylum seekers, decrying the decision to deny asylum. The lawyer commented that her client was a victim of “the genocide being perpetrated against the Anglophones by the government in Cameroon,” referencing arrest, shootings, imprisonment, and torture, and claiming that the U.S. government has acknowledged the genocide in Cameroon. Cameroonian social media users appeared to largely reject these claims, acknowledging Cameroon had problems but objecting to the extreme word choice. One wrote, “Bare face liars!! These are stories they’ve been fed with by these asylum seekers, and these lawyers believe these lies. I’m an English-speaking Cameroonian, and was in Cameroon in the month of August this year, and in Yaoundé precisely, why was I not killed? ... Thank God the American immigration never believed such lies.”

8. (SBU) **Comment:** Contrary to our expectation and perhaps even feedback hinted to us from government contacts, it appears the Cameroonian government did not take a hit with the local public for accepting the ICE flight. The public’s assessment of their fellow citizens’ motivations and lack of scruples for seeking a new life in the United States is a sobering

reminder for our visa adjudicators. Resentment of public corruption—exemplified by well-paid government workers shirking their duties by abandoning their posts for better lives in the United States while continuing to be paid—is evidently a more salient concern for the public than is the potential for blanket anti-Anglophone abuse by the government. **End Comment.**

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