

Statement of Christopher J. Lamora
Nominee to be Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of
Cameroon
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, June 9, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Committee, it is a privilege and an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon. I thank the President and the Secretary of State for their confidence in me. I am equally grateful for this distinguished Committee's consideration.

While the virtual nature of this hearing precludes my family from joining us in person, I nonetheless want to recognize my husband Eric, my sister Michelle, and my nephews Jack and Patrick, who have all supported and encouraged me over many years and who are watching today from home. I also want to pay homage to my late parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Lamora, without whose love and support I would not be here today.

I'm grateful as well to my Africa Bureau family, whose collegiality, confidence, friendship, and mentoring have sustained me and fostered my personal and professional growth for nearly three decades -- from my first assignment at the U.S. Consulate in Douala, Cameroon from 1992-1993 to my past three years as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Accra, Ghana.

The United States was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Cameroon in 1960. Since then, nearly 4,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Cameroon. It is a country with great cultural and geographic diversity, a capsule of the entire continent: active volcanoes, rainforest jungles teeming with wildlife, broad savannahs, and a beautiful coastline. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience much of this personally when I served in Cameroon previously.

Unfortunately, this beautiful, warm, and welcoming country that launched my love of Africa nearly 30 years ago also faces significant challenges, as you well know.

The United States is deeply concerned by the continued violence in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. What began as peaceful protests in late 2016 has tragically escalated into a protracted violent crisis with more than 3,000 persons killed and

more than one million internally displaced. Children have been threatened, and in some cases killed, for attending school. Schools, hospitals, and religious sites have been attacked. Humanitarian actors continue to face numerous obstacles in carrying out their work.

We condemn violence in all its forms, regardless of who is perpetrating it, and call for an end to the suffering of the civilian population regardless of their location or affiliation. No one undermining peace in Cameroon has our support or tolerance, whether members of the security forces or of armed separatist groups.

We are acting vigorously to help resolve the crisis. This week, the Secretary of State established a policy imposing visa restrictions on those undermining efforts to peacefully resolve the crisis. We continue to have discussions about Cameroon with the Cameroonian government and other Cameroonians, as well as with key international partners to foster greater, stronger, and more unified engagement. Working to resolve this crisis is, and will continue to be, the single highest priority in our Cameroon policy.

Cameroon also faces a number of other challenges that are all too common in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including health, security, and governance. The Cameroonian people have enormous potential; I've seen it first-hand. If I am confirmed, our Embassy team and I will do everything we can to help the people and government of Cameroon to make that potential a reality.

The coronavirus pandemic has added a layer of difficulty to reaching that day. As a Global Health Security Agenda Phase I country, Cameroon partners with the United States to strengthen its ability to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious diseases with pandemic potential. Cameroon also benefits from U.S. assistance through PEPFAR and the Presidential Malaria Initiative, such that it has reduced its HIV prevalence and is working to achieve epidemic control within the next two years.

On security, the United States continues to support Cameroon and its Lake Chad Basin neighbors in their joint effort to defeat Boko Haram and its offshoot, ISIS-West Africa. This is a key element of the fight against global terrorism. Our support, however, is neither limitless nor without conditions. Cameroonian security forces must abide by accepted human rights norms, and those who violate these norms must be held appropriately accountable.

In that same vein, there is still substantial work to be done to promote democracy, and human rights, combat corruption, and ensure accountability of those who violate Cameroonian laws or the citizens' trust. We must continue to press on all these important issues while helping the Cameroonian government and people, including civil society find a path to peace.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you once again for this opportunity to appear before you. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and others in Congress to advance U.S. interests in Cameroon. I would be happy to answer any questions.