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Subject: Presidency Shares Views on Regional Unrest, Human Rights, and Investment

1. (C) **Summary:** On January 11, Ambassador Jackson and Pol/Econ Chief met with Minister Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, the Secretary General at the Presidency, for almost two hours, to discuss at length the political situation in Central African Republic and Mali; Boko Haram and national security; illegal wildlife trafficking; U.S. investments; corruption; and human rights. The Ambassador also requested that Cameroon once more consider recognizing Kosovo's statehood, particularly in advance of the African Union summit. Ngoh Ngoh was open and unguarded in his remarks. He expressed some concern that turbulence in Mali and CAR, terrorist activity in Nigeria, and poaching by Sudanese militants could have a destabilizing influence on Cameroon.

End summary.

#### Central African Republic and Mali

2. (C) Ngoh Ngoh provided an assessment of the discussions on CAR in Libreville, which corresponded closely to USG reporting. Ngoh Ngoh reported that he understood that President Bozize had agreed that the South African troops would withdraw; the opposition would name the new Prime Minister; and the Seleka Alliance would name the Minister of Defense. In his view the CAR rebels approached the Libreville talks from a position of strength and "with the upper hand." Although he expressed some optimism about the prospects for peace, he conveyed serious concern about clearly defining the terms of the rebel withdrawal. In conflicts between countries, he explained, invading forces withdraw to their original political boundaries. In CAR context, where the rebels are a domestic force, contending armies may withdraw from conflict, but will remain within national borders, possibly even within close proximity; this, he projected, makes it more difficult to both achieve and sustain a ceasefire.

3. (C) The Secretary General acknowledged the presence of Cameroonian troops in CAR — something he

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confessed the Government of the Republic of Cameroon (GRC) was at first loath to do. Recognizing the negative implications of Cameroon's non-participation in a regional effort, however, the GRC had agreed to send approximately 120 additional troops. Ngoh Ngoh suggested that it would be essential for the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in CAR (MICOPAX) to be "very careful not to protect personalities." Citing Rwanda as an example, he further explained that MICOPAX should not be seen as a force to sustain a regime, including that of Bozize. He also suggested that "we might need to remind Bozize of the example of Gbagbo."

4. (C) On his own initiative, Ngoh Ngoh referred to the situation in Mali, noting that many in the region are looking to Europe to halt the southward advance of Islamic rebels. Perhaps drawing a comparison to Cameroon's own demography, with a similar North-South divide between the Sahel and the rest of the country, the Secretary General noted that the GRC is "really, really concerned." His later comments on national security (see paragraph 8), reveal that although the GRC may not view Islamic radicalism as an active threat, the GRC considers northern Cameroon to be vulnerable to Boko Haram influence and does not rule out the possibility of becoming a Boko Haram target in the future.

#### Poaching

5. (C) Referring to armed Sudanese poachers who nearly decimated Cameroon's elephant population in early 2012 and who once more target Cameroonian parks, Ngoh Ngoh described illegal wildlife trafficking as a national security threat with broad implications. He said the GRC had deployed troops to the borders with Chad and CAR and is ready to confront the poachers if they enter Cameroonian territory. The Secretary General also underscored the importance of international cooperation in order to prevent the transportation of ivory and curb demand. "If there is nowhere to sell, they will not continue to massacre (the elephants)." In particular, he underscored the need for better controls at airports.

6. (C) Ngoh Ngoh expressed appreciation for the enforcement activities of the Last Great Ape Association (LAGA), an NGO led by Israeli national Ofir Drori. Given LAGA's instrumental role in arresting, prosecuting, and sentencing wildlife traffickers, the Secretary General opined that the organization has enemies in Cameroon and the sub-region and that "some are not happy with it." Ngoh Ngoh suggested, however, that these enemies "know that (Drori) has the support of the Presidency and maybe that helps." By every indication, the Secretary General denoted his government's intention to improve its enforcement efforts and enhance its cooperation with LAGA.

#### Counterterrorism

7. (C) In response to Ambassador Jackson's recommendation that the GRC also consider improving its vigilance at Cameroonian ports in order to stop the flow of poached ivory, the Secretary General agreed unreservedly and expressed his support for joint efforts to improve port security. He characterized Cameroon as situated in a "volatile region," vulnerable to smuggling and narcotics trafficking. Ambassador Jackson highlighted U.S. assistance through the U.S. Coast Guard's efforts to help Cameroon meet the standards of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) code. He also noted U.S. assistance to eliminate maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea through AFRICOM security cooperation; donation of radiation detection equipment from the U.S. Department of Energy; and possible provision of software and hardware at ports of entry by the Department of State.

#### Boko Haram

8. (C) Ambassador Jackson inquired into the veracity of recent press reports that Cameroonian authorities had deported 31 Boko Haram activists, consisting of two Nigeriens and 29 Nigerians. The Secretary General deflected the question, calling the stories as "irresponsible" journalism designed to incite Boko Haram sympathizers and to create a target of the Cameroonian Government. He said the information may have been planted in the media by former Minister of State Hamidou Yaya Marafa, who was given a 25-year prison sentence in September 2012 in a highly politicized corruption case. (Comment: Ngoh Ngoh implied — but did not say directly — that it is in Marafa's interest to destabilize the country in order to pave the way for his release from prison and ascendancy to

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power. He also said that law enforcement representatives had detained Guibai Gaitama, the publisher of the newspaper L'Oeil du Sahel, which had led with the story, and that during the questioning Gaitama had conceded that the story was unfounded. However, according to mission contacts, Gaitama had refused to reveal his sources and has subsequently published the names of all 31 deportees. The Mission also notes that the State-owned daily Cameroon Tribune ran a story on January 9, confirming the deportation and acknowledging the GRC's "hyper sensitivity" on the matter. **End Comment.**

#### **U.S. Investments**

9. (SBU) Changing subjects, the Ambassador followed up on his December 29 conversation with President Biya (Ref A), requesting GRC support for U.S. investments, including:

- ☐ Taylor Guitars, which has an export license for ebony that was reduced by one-third in December 2012;
- ☐ Marriott, which will open a hotel in Douala as soon as the GRC approves the land title;
- ☐ Hydromine, which signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the GRC to build a hydroelectric dam in connection with its bauxite mining plans (however, the GRC subsequently signed a conflicting agreement with another party);
- ☐ Intercon, which failed to receive a license to operate a security company in Cameroon after over one year; and
- ☐ SAIB, a Cameroonian association in the North Region, which is prepared to conduct industrial-scale rice production, thanks to some assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (through the Food for Progress program).

10. (C) The Secretary General promised to follow up on these cases. He then referred to the investment of another American company, Herakles Farms/SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SGSOC), which seeks to cultivate 70,000 hectares of land for palm oil production. The highly publicized investment has captured the attention of many local and international NGOs, due to the environmental and socio-economic implications. Ngoh Ngoh explained that the GRC recognizes the need to attract investors but must ensure that development takes place equitably: "We will explore solutions, but we cannot ignore the social issues." Aware of allegations that SGSOC representatives may have violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (Septel), the Ambassador acknowledged the complexity of the situation, but did not say more.

#### **Human Rights**

11. 

12. (C) Ambassador Jackson recommended that the GRC consider passing the revised penal code, which outlaws female circumcision, breast ironing, and child marriage and which sets maximum periods for pre-trial detention. He strongly urged removing reference to homosexuality in the new code. The Secretary General confided that although the Presidency does not want to interfere with Cameroon's judiciary, saying the Presidency instead aims to send a clear signal to magistrates that they should avoid prosecuting people for the sexual preference. He noted that Biya's ability to act is restrained by his sensitivity to widespread rumors of pervasive homosexuality at the

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Presidency.

13. (C) The Ambassador also encouraged Ngoh Ngoh to press his government to amend Cameroon's Trafficking in Persons law to bring it in conformity with the Palermo Convention. He provided a copy of the draft language, produced in collaboration between the Ministry of Justice, J/TIP, and Vital Voices. Ngoh Ngoh agreed to look into this and to consider ways to make progress in several other areas, including fighting corruption, improving the judiciary, and reducing instances of security force abuse.

#### Kosovo

14. (C) Lastly, the Ambassador encouraged Cameroon to consider recognizing Kosovo's statehood in advance of the African Union summit (Ref C). The Secretary General promised to convey this request to President Biya.

#### Comment

15. (C) The Secretary General appears to benefit from a close relationship with President Biya and spoke openly and frankly. Ngoh Ngoh's comments clarified several important points: (a) Biya does not take peace in Cameroon for granted and sees regional instability and a destabilizing force; (b) the GRC welcomes security cooperation in principle; (c) the Presidency may be favorable to U.S. investment, but does not seem to have or want to wield the authority needed to create a more competitive and investor-friendly business environment; and (d) [REDACTED] Building off the last point, the Department should consider whether there are some programs that we could direct at civil society in order to promote broader public tolerance. **End Comment.**

Signature: JACKSON

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