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 Subject: Cameroon Scen setter for the Visit of AF DAS Cynthia Akuetteh

1. (SBU) **Summary:** On behalf of the entire mission, I am pleased to extend to you a warm welcome to Cameroon. Your visit allows us to deliver several important messages to the Government of the Republic of Cameroon (GRC) on democracy, human rights, and governance; security cooperation; and economic growth. Your visit comes on the heels of the establishment of the Senate and in advance of parliamentary and municipal elections later this year. Although Cameroon is rich in natural resources and boasts the largest and most stable economy in Central Africa, Cameroon's socio-economic development remains slow. Increased Boko Haram activity in Cameroon calls for more urgent action on the part of the Cameroonian Government to increase opportunities to under-employed youth and to prevent the spread of Islamic radicalism. Despite human rights-related differences, our engagement is positive in many areas, including military cooperation, maritime security, HIV/AIDS prevention, counterterrorism, wildlife protection, education, agriculture, and refugee assistance. **End Summary.**

Themes

2. (SBU) Your visit will consist primarily of political meetings in Yaounde and private sector and security cooperation meetings in Douala and Limbe. We have requested appointments with President Paul Biya, Prime Minister Philemon Yang, and Minister of External Relations Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo. Unfortunately, President Biya is likely to be out of the country. Following a visit to the Rapid Intervention Battalion base to discuss U.S. support to Cameroonian anti-piracy efforts, you will also have the opportunity to visit the historic slave-trading site in Bimbia, which the Mission is helping restore through a cultural preservation grant. Roughly speaking, your meetings will cover three thematic areas: democracy, human rights, and governance; security cooperation; and economic growth. You can greatly bolster our efforts by delivering key messages as follows:

Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance:

Although Cameroon has made significant strides since the introduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s — with a relatively free media, a proliferation of political parties, and the establishment of the long-awaited Senate — Cameroon should not slacken the pace of its reform. It also should not set sub-regional

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norms as its performance benchmark. In particular, the GRC should refrain from actions that restrict the political space of opposition parties. The GRC should guarantee freedom of assembly with equal measure that it allows freedom of expression. Absent open political dialogue, the country weakens public confidence in democratic processes as vehicles of change. The GRC also must curb corruption, which has seeped into every aspect of society and which is an enormous deterrent to economic growth and the emergence of trusted political institutions. Targeted prosecutions under the guise of an anti-corruption crusade will be insufficient if the GRC does not institute judicial strengthening, implement a constitutionally-mandated requirement of asset declaration, take firmer criminal action against "petty" corruption, and improve its fiscal transparency.

Security Cooperation

Bilateral security cooperation to combat maritime piracy has been excellent. As a result, piracy incidents in Cameroonian coastal waters have dropped to zero over the last two years. The GRC should consider approaching other threats to regional security with the same urgency, including terrorism, poaching and wildlife trafficking, transnational crime, and instability in the Central African Republic. Additionally, Cameroon should increase its participation in international peacekeeping efforts; enhance intelligence cooperation with its neighbors, particularly Nigeria; and exert greater leadership at the United Nations by taking firm positions on UN votes that have a bearing on regional and international peace and security. We have offered the GRC several counterterrorism programs, including TIP/PISCES, but these have been slow to gain traction or support above the working level.

Economic Growth

The GRC has expressed a strong interest in promoting bilateral trade, including Cameroonian exports to the United States under AGOA. However, its ability to do so rests to a large extent on the government's ability to improve its business climate. Presently, some U.S. investments in Cameroon have stalled due to GRC inertia. This happens primarily at registration process or because of the difficulty in obtaining land permits. In fact, Herakles Farms is considering invoking the Bilateral Investment Treaty because of a stop-work order from the Minister of Forests and Wildlife. At the same time, Cameroon is currently considering the purchase of two Boeing 787 Dreamliners and is examining a \$650 million water project that General Electric and ECC would implement. The GRC's heavy-handed bureaucracy, which is due in part to corruption, must be eliminated in order for Cameroon to attract the types of companies that will add the greatest value locally. Although the GRC has liberalized its economy in principle, the large number of parastatals means in practice that the private sector is largely steered by Cabinet Ministers and the President. In addition to underscoring these points on the business climate, it is also worth conveying the importance of sub-regional economic integration to Cameroon's economic development. Broadening local trade will expand markets for Cameroonian and Cameroon-based companies and boost local production, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Background

3. (SBU) Abounding in agricultural potential, mineral resources, oil, gas and timber, Cameroon has one of the largest economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite this rich endowment, and notwithstanding 53 years of relative political and economic stability, the country struggles to attain food security and to combat disease and malnutrition. Although bilateral relations are sometimes strained by human rights-related differences and the GRC's weak governance, our engagement is positive in maritime security, HIV/AIDS, counterterrorism, education, agriculture, and refugee assistance. The lackluster pace of political reform, pervasive corruption, and inadequate energy and transport infrastructure present serious obstacles to meaningful economic growth and development. Nevertheless, the GRC is embarking on an ambitious growth strategy, entitled Vision 2035, which entails capital intensive investments in Cameroon's water, electricity, and road infrastructure in order to transform its economy and become a middle income country. Indeed, the construction of two major dams and several road projects have started in the last year, and a new natural gas-fired power plant has recently added 216 megawatts to the power grid.

4. (SBU) Maintaining peace and stability in a country that is comprised of more than 275 ethnic groups also

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presents a challenge to Cameroon's leadership. For that reason, President Biya has made significant efforts to fill Cabinet and senior government and military posts with representatives from all ten regions and as many ethnic groups as possible. Although this contributes to government inertia (the Cabinet consists of 66 ministers, ministers-delegate, and secretaries of state spread across three dozen ministries), many Cameroonians consider it a necessary drawback in order to maintain national harmony and regional balance. As best we can determine, Biya's detractors cannot demonstrate that the GRC's investment budget advantages any region. There is, however, a widening socio-economic divide between the northern regions and other parts of the country, and some allege that GRC spending favors constituencies that strongly support the ruling CPDM. Fortunately, religious differences between Christians and Muslims have not played into the North-South divide.

U.S. Interests

5. (SBU) **Trade and Investment:** In spite of the challenges posed by a difficult business climate, U.S. interests in Cameroon are manifold. U.S. investments are the largest foreign outlays in the country, including the Exxon/Mobil-Chevron \$4.5 billion Chad-Cameroon pipeline and the \$1 billion investment by AES Corporation in Cameroon's power sector. Geovic of Denver, Colorado, is in the final stages of selling its interest in what appears to be one of the world's largest cobalt reserves. Benefiting from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Cameroon exported over \$300 million in oil, textiles, agricultural products and other goods to the United States in 2012. U.S. companies sold approximately \$250 million in goods to Cameroon in 2012 – a level that is almost 90% higher than 2010 levels. Cameroon's Ministry of Defense recently purchased tractors and other machinery, valued at approximately \$45 million, from a U.S. company, Hoffman International. In 2011, Citibank led the syndicate of banks offering Cameroon's first sovereign bonds and Camair-Co, Cameroon's resurrected state-owned airline, owns and leases Boeing aircraft. Many of our efforts, therefore, are directed toward improving the prospects for U.S. companies, promoting potential markets for U.S. products, and protecting the interests of U.S. investors.

6. (SBU) **Maritime Security:** U.S. priorities also include military-to-military cooperation in order to improve Cameroon's capacity to defend its maritime domain from piracy, which threatens U.S. energy interests in the Gulf of Guinea. A successful U.S. Navy-led African Partnership Station (APS) program in August 2012 featured a wide array of workshops, training, and included a ship visit from HSV SWIFT. Representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard have made multiple trips to Cameroon over the past years and hosted two Cameroonian delegations in the United States in order to improve port security under the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code. There are also persistent training partnerships between Special Operations Command, Africa and the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) at a seaside Cameroonian military base north of Douala and in Maroua, the capital of the Far North Region, where the U.S. military is providing counterterrorism, and soon anti-poaching, training.

7. (SBU) **Peacekeeping and Regional Security:** Despite being an ACOTA partner and having benefited from training in the past, Cameroon is only minimally involved in peacekeeping operations. It roughly doubled its troops in the Central African Republic in late December and early January, following the outbreak of violence there; but this was done under significant regional pressure and should not be seen as a bell-weather of change. Aside from the assignment of military representatives to Cameroon's diplomatic missions at the United Nations, African Union, and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), we have seen no clear indications that Cameroon is moving towards any increased participation in peacekeeping operations.

8. (SBU) **Environment and Climate Change:** Efforts to combat deforestation of the Congo Basin, which constitutes the world's second largest rain forest and extends into southeast Cameroon, are critical to protecting a vital carbon sink and offsetting global warming. Our efforts in this area, coordinated through USAID's Central African Regional Program on the Environment (CARPE), have multiple side benefits, including improving the economic prospects of populations, combating poaching, protecting endangered species and biodiversity, reducing the spread of contagious diseases, and developing the capacity of law enforcement and border protection authorities. Additionally, these environmental activities contribute to regional cooperation and integration, inasmuch as they have provided a platform for regional discussion between working-level officials and heads of state. Cameroon has begun devoting more resources to this and is also in the throes of developing a policy to benefit from carbon trading mechanisms, such as REDD+.

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9. (SBU) **Humanitarian Assistance:** Because of its relative political stability and its openness to receiving refugees, Cameroon serves as a haven for displaced groups and, therefore, provides a steadying force in an often politically insecure region. The United States provided over \$2 million in refugee-related humanitarian assistance in 2012, making us a significant partner in this domain. It is in our continued interest to find ways to develop the food security of both the foreign as well as indigenous populations in areas that have absorbed refugees, in order to ensure the continued peaceful co-habitation of the two groups and to support Cameroon's positive role in sustaining regional stability. Although Cameroon has not engaged significantly in African peacekeeping operations, its stance on refugees shows leadership that is valuable to sub-regional security.

10. (U) **Health:** Hunting and sanitary practices in eastern Cameroon give rise to a multitude of infectious diseases and occasion their transmission from animals to humans. In light of the threat these emerging diseases pose to global health security, the U.S. Department of Defense and USAID support surveillance programs that allow researchers to identify and prevent the spread of new strains of contagious diseases. At over \$29 million in FY 2013, PEPFAR spending dominates U.S. foreign assistance to Cameroon; the Mission's HIV/AIDS focus rests primarily on preventing mother-to-child transmission; strengthening the health system, particularly laboratories; enhancing blood safety; and assisting the most-at-risk populations. Other forms of USG health diplomacy include grants to help communities fight cholera by securing clean water supplies and improving sanitation levels and the first-rate community health and disease-awareness programs run by our 180+ Peace Corps Volunteers.

11. (U) **Poaching and Wildlife Trafficking:** Poaching and international wildlife trafficking has taken on epidemic proportions in Central Africa. In 2012, large bands of heavily armed Sudanese poachers entered Cameroon and slaughtered as many as 400 elephants in order to steal the ivory. Driven by rising demand in Asia, this poaching and wildlife trafficking on massive scale is likely to continue. The GRC has responded to this national security and criminal threat by sending the BIR to its national parks to defend wildlife, and by launching improved efforts to share information better with neighboring governments and the environmental NGO community. The heads of state of the ECCAS region intend to address poaching at their upcoming summit, and we are encouraging continued, sustained leadership from them. Earlier this year, Cameroon hosted a ministerial meeting for sub-regional partners to enhance cooperation. The Cameroonian Government also has devoted greater resources to combating poaching, for example with a commitment to patrol the Bouba Ndjida National Park with BIR forces during this and future dry seasons. USG assistance from Africa Command and AF/RSA will be crucial to bolstering political will.

Human Rights

12. (SBU) The pace of democratization in Cameroon is slow and much remains to be done: the GRC frequently prevents public gatherings; corruption is endemic; prisons are grossly over-crowded; brutality by security officials is a persistent problem; access to a speedy and fair trial is rare; and government authority to detain individuals for 48-hours (extendable) lends itself to abuse and intimidation. Since April 2012, the GRC has accelerated its anticorruption crusade by prosecuting a number of high-ranking former government officials with a rigor that is by all appearances politically-motivated. Although for the most part, the GRC has managed the cases within the country's legal parameters, the courts' handling of the cases suggests that the GRC has predetermined the outcomes and points to the lack of an independent judiciary.

13. (SBU) The GRC justifies its performance on the rationale that its human rights record outshines that of its neighbors in the sub-region. It also contents itself with the degree of progress it has made over the past 23 years, including the transition to a multiparty political system in the early 1990s and the expansion of personal freedoms. Cameroon's greatest obstacle to more rapid progress, however, lies with the entrenchment of the ruling party and its attempts to maintain power by preserving the status quo. Even so, the GRC has made strides over the past year: Cameroon created a Senate with 20 women and 18 members of opposition parties; Cameroon's standing improved on the African Media Barometer's analysis of press freedom; Cameroon ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG); Cameroon joined the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme; and it is seeking membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Public Diplomacy

14. (SBU) Generally speaking, Cameroonians view the United States and its policies favorably, in contrast to lingering levels of Cameroonian distrust of the French, who administered the territory with the British following the First World War by League of Nation mandate (and later as a United Nations Trust Territory). To reach disenfranchised youth who lack economic opportunities, a major focus of our Public Diplomacy (PD) strategy aims at developing respect for human rights, democratic practices, and economic principles among future Cameroonian leaders through seminars on civic education and entrepreneurship. Given pervasive levels of corruption, however, finding reliable institutional partners for PD programming is a challenge.

15. (U) Our PD focus is primarily on investing in people. Annually, over 60 Cameroonians participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) and the Fulbright, Humphrey, and other academic programs. There are six IVLP alumni in the current cabinet, including the Ministers of Finance and Communications. Four locally partnered Access English Language programs offer two-year courses to disadvantaged youth. Our Educational Advising Center provides detailed guidance on the U.S. college admissions process. Cameroon has the fifth highest number (1,530 in 2011-12) among African countries of students attending U.S. colleges and universities. The Information Resource Center library has over 1,000 mostly young adult members. We also work closely with representatives of civil society, media, women's groups, rural populations, and the Muslim community — providing grants for initiatives on interfaith dialogue, health, environmental stewardship, and education. Our speaker and performing arts programs empower a wide range of Cameroonians to contribute to Cameroon's development.

Media

16. (SBU) Although the Government shuttered a Bamenda radio station on April 22, the Cameroonian press is generally open and free with numerous private papers, radio stations, and TV channels. Most publications and broadcast programs are in French with some in English. Government programming clearly dominates and self-censorship exists — the Government is also the largest advertiser. Although government harassment of journalists has declined in recent years, it does still occur. Reporters are poorly paid and the quality of journalism is inconsistent and often unreliable. News is frequently sensationalized, with accuracy and fairness given low priority. In an effort to build capacity, our Press Office organizes well attended workshops with expert speakers on topics ranging from health reporting to election coverage and media ethics.

17. (SBU) As the primary source of information for 75 percent of the population, radio has the widest reach. Although there are over 50 radio stations and a dozen TV stations, only a few have licenses (due to their high cost), leaving the bulk in a vulnerable legal limbo operating under "administrative tolerance." An additional 25 or so low-power municipal, religious, and donor-funded community radio stations broadcast apolitical social awareness programs in pidgin and local dialects in rural areas. There are about 250 — but only five daily — private newspapers. Most are shoestring operations with limited circulation and it is estimated they may collectively reach one percent of the population. About a half dozen papers post their content on websites, but internet penetration is less than five percent and growing only incrementally. Of the Mission's approximately 3,895 Facebook fans, less than one-half are in Cameroon. Similarly, only about one-third of the 130,000 monthly hits on our website are from Cameroon. The next largest source of both followings is from the United States — presumably from members of the Cameroonian diaspora.

USG Concerns

18. (SBU) Our efforts to broaden the bilateral partnership require adaptation by both sides. On our part, it requires diversifying our engagement across a range of interests (which we have done) and building a dialogue that extends beyond the governance and human rights-related issues that have overshadowed and defined our relations for most of the last 23 years. We have not pulled back on our agenda, but merely supplemented it with a dialogue that is more reflective of the breadth of USG interests (as outlined above). At the same time, we have accelerated our support to civil society in order to empower it to play a more constructive and effective role in governance reform, accountability, democratization, and the fight against trafficking-in-persons.

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19. (SBU) The GRC must also adapt to the new level of partnership we seek. It must extend a greater degree of facilitation so that the Mission can operate effectively; this means clearing USG shipments through customs more rapidly, upholding tax-free status for the Mission and for the American schools in Yaounde and Douala, and approving legal status for U.S. NGOs and faith-based organizations, which are valuable USG assistance partners. It also requires the GRC to accelerate its efforts to improve its human rights record, reduce rampant corruption, facilitate foreign investment, and strengthen democratic institutions. Simply put, a meaningful partnership necessitates a stronger sense of accountability, shared values, and democratic reform on the part of the Cameroonian Government.

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