

# Memo: Deportation of Black immigrants to Cameroon and DRC

## Overview

On October 13, 2020 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported approximately 60 Cameroonian and 28 Congolese immigrants, most of whom fled persecution and violence in their native countries, on a secretive charter flight operated by Omni Air.

These deportations followed a mass expulsion involving nationals of Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and Sri Lanka in September, as well as others to West Africa and Jamaica over the summer. Deportations to Haiti have been continuing all throughout the pandemic. Currently, a deportation flight to Ethiopia is rumored to be in the works.

Cameroonians in ICE custody have been organizing for years to protest their mistreatment and the inhumane conditions in ICE prisons like the Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center, a remote, privately-operated prison in Louisiana, to stifle their organizing and silence the protesters, ICE retaliates with solitary confinement, physical abuse, the splitting up and transferring of organizers, and deportation.

Pauline Binan, a victim of forced sterilization at Irwin Detention Center, was nearly exiled to Cameroon after the story broke about her medical abuse by ICE. She was spared from deportation at the very last second, due to public outcry and congressional intervention.

The administration's aggressive focus on deporting Black immigrants, some of whom have lived in the United States for decades or have fled certain death in other countries, is steeped in racism and the imperialistic silencing of people who dare to report abuses.

What's more, President Trump used the deportation of Somali immigrants as a talking point in a campaign rally this September. This inhumanity is calculated and political.

Below is more background on that latest deportation flight to Cameroon. To speak with family members and immigrants in deportation, as well as members of the legal team, contact Rebekah Entralgo at [rentralgo@freedomforimmigrants.org](mailto:rentralgo@freedomforimmigrants.org) or Jeff Migliozi at [jeff.migliozi@splcenter.org](mailto:jeff.migliozi@splcenter.org).

## What We Know

- On October 8, Freedom for Immigrants, Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Cameroon American Council (CAC), Detention Watch Network (DWN), Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention, Natchez Network, Haitian Bridge Alliance, and Families for Freedom filed a multi-individual complaint with the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) and DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG), condemning the agency for deploying excessive force to coerce eight Cameroonian asylum seekers into signing their own deportation papers.
  - The complaint describes the coercive tactics, including threats of violence and direct physical abuse to obtain submission, forced taking of fingerprints while individuals are in restraint, and the use of pepper spray against those who declined to sign their deportation papers.
  - The CRCL complaint resulted in two men being removed from the deportation list (B.J. and C.A.). They remain detained at the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas. Five men named in the CRCL complaint were deported. One man (E.O.) remains at the Adams County Correctional Center in Natchez, Mississippi, where the abuse took place .
  
- According to congressional sources, the number of people on the flight totaled approximately 88 – 60 Cameroonian immigrants and 28 Congolese immigrants.
  - Ahead of the deportation flight, leaders within the Congressional Black Caucus released a letter to ICE demanding a halt to the flight to Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon, citing the concerns raised in the CRCL complaint.
  - Reps. Joaquin Castro, Ilhan Omar, and Cedric Richmond also sent a letter to ICE condemning the treatment of Cameroonian migrants and asylum seekers and requesting data on the Cameroonians who have been denied asylum or are in ICE custody.
  
- The U.S government has itself acknowledged that the situation in Cameroon is dangerous. In September, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a bipartisan resolution condemning the violence against Anglophones in Cameroon.
  
- Black immigrants have been a leading voice of opposition within ICE detention and as a result, have faced repeated retaliation by ICE in the form of solitary confinement and physical abuse.
  - In August, Cameroon American Council (CAC), Freedom for Immigrants, Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy (ISLA), and Southern Poverty

Law Center (SPLC) filed a separate complaint with the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL). According to the complaint, Cameroonian asylum seekers at Pine Prairie staged a hunger strike to protest their indefinite detention, racist treatment from prison staff, and inhumane conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, prison officials used unnecessary lethal force to place them in choke holds, pointed a gun at them and told the men they were going to be placed in solitary confinement.

- Two of the women scheduled for deportation were outspoken about the forced medical trauma at the Irwin County Detention Center they experienced by doctor Dr. Mahendra Amin without their consent.
- Despite adverse decisions from the Trump administration's rigged immigration court, these men and women do face torture and death if deported:
  - "We ran from our countries to be protected here. Now, when they are deporting us, our lives will be at risk," said Giscard Nkenglefac, a 34-year-old person from Cameroon.
  - Josephine Kinana said "It is so scary to think what is waiting for me back in Cameroon."
  - Just before he was deported, Clouvis Seh Chebegwen said: "The stress is too much. This is breaking me down."
  - Speaking about a Cameroonian client, Attorney Ruth Hargrove said that if he is deported: "He'll be tortured, and he'll die, and the court could grant his motion [to reopen], but he'll be dead."
- Some of the men and women who were deported on this most recent flight have open immigration cases; others have family members and sponsors in the United States that they could have been released to. Because of the systemic racism within the U.S immigration system, however, they remain behind bars, for months and even years. The reasons include:
  - Unreasonably high bond amounts;
  - Unfair denials of asylum by immigration judges who are uneducated in country conditions and even racist; for example one judge in Louisiana, Agnelis Reese, has a 100% denial rate in asylum cases;
  - ICE's non-compliance with the 2009 DHS Parole Directive, most notably observed from the New Orleans ICE Field Office, even when parole applicants have sponsors in the U.S. and are not a flight risk.
  - The challenge of fighting an immigration case from ICE detention and without a lawyer;

- Aggressive government attorneys that appeal grants of asylum no matter how much trauma the individual has already been with; and
  - Extreme ICE agents and field office directors who refuse to use their ample discretion to release immigrants from jail so they can continue their cases from the outside.
- There are serious questions about the validity of the “travel documents” that supposedly allowed ICE to transport these men and women internationally. A retired Methodist minister who is not a citizen or national of Cameroon, nor an official within the Cameroonian government, has reportedly been issuing travel documents for ICE so that people can be removed to this nation.

### **Lines of Inquiry and Investigation**

- **What happened on the deportation flight?** How long was the trip? Did anyone refuse to board the plane and if so, were they forced on? Were individuals shackled the entire time? Based on previous flights, we expect the answers to these last two questions are yes and yes, but we would like more information on what transpired.
- **Where is everyone who was deported?** Are they free and safe? Have any been detained in Cameroon or Congo? We believe some have been detained in Cameroon. We also know that their travel and other documents were confiscated at the airport in Cameroon, as another way to control them by limiting their mobility and agency inside the U.S.
- **What will happen to the people who were not deported, this time?** Are they going to be put on another flight? When?

### **Resources**

- First-hand experiences
  - “The Hunger Strikers of Pine Prairie Protesting Indefinite Detention by ICE” (The New York Review, Joe Penney)
  - “‘An Experience I Wouldn’t Wish My Worst Enemy to Undergo’ - In ICE detention for more than two years, a man from Cameroon pens a plea for mercy” (The Nation, John Washington)
  - “As An African Asylum Seeker In Solitary Confinement, Oppression From ICE Grows Each Day” (Blavity, Tikum Divine)

- “Protests grow over pending deportations to Cameroon, amid abuse allegations” (*Dallas Morning News*, Dianne Solis)
- “US Ice [sic] officers 'used torture to make Africans sign own deportation orders” (*The Guardian*, Julian Borger)
- Amnesty International: “The U.S. Must Not Deport People to Cameroon”
- ICE Air charter flights: “Hidden in Plain Sight” (Center for Human Rights, University of Washington); “The sole airline willing to operate ‘high risk deportation flights’ is price-gouging ICE” (Quartz); \$67m CARES Act bonus for Omni Air; “Florida Companies are Cashing in on Deportation Flights (Miami Herald); “ICE Air #DeathFlights a Record Week, Week of October 12” (Witness at the Border, Thomas Cartwright)
- CRCL Complaints
  - Cameroon American Council, Freedom for Immigrants, Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy, and Southern Poverty Law Center (8/26/20)
  - Freedom for Immigrants, Southern Poverty Law Center, Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention, Natchez Network, Detention Watch Network, Cameroon American Council, Haitian Bridge Alliance, and Families for Freedom (10/7/20)
- Congressional Actions
  - Senate Foreign Relations Committee bipartisan resolution condemning violence in Cameroon (9/8/20)
  - Letter from Reps. Thompson and Bass, Congressional Black Caucus leaders (10/11/20)
  - Letter from Reps. Castro, Omar, and Richmond (10/13/20)
- More background from Cameroon American Council