

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 9, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Katherine Tai  
United States Trade Representative  
600 17<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear President Biden and Ambassador Tai:

We write to share our concern regarding human rights developments in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the country's status as a beneficiary of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade preference program.

The Central African Republic's eligibility for the AGOA was terminated in 2004 due to its failure to make sufficient progress on mandatory criteria but was reinstated in 2017. The program requires countries to make progress in the following areas: market economy reforms; the rule of law; poverty reduction; human rights and labor standards, among others. The government's record has only gotten worse, and its rhetoric does not match the reality on the ground for its citizens. Given these realities, we urge the United States Trade Representative to conduct an out-of-cycle review of the CAR's compliance with AGOA's criteria and terminate its eligibility.

Both government forces and non-state actors in the CAR violate the human rights of civilians. The country has suffered ongoing armed conflict, inter-communal violence, political instability, and acute humanitarian need. Clashes between rebel factions, government forces, and foreign mercenaries have left the civilian population vulnerable to human rights atrocities from all armed groups. Freedom House gave the CAR a 7 out of 100 rating in its Freedom in the World 2022 report due to "pervasive insecurity," the "absence of state authority in much of the country" and scant political rights, civil liberties, or the rule of law.<sup>1</sup> In the first half of 2022 alone, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) in the CAR documented at least 451 human rights violations involving 1,462 victims.<sup>2</sup> Over 1.3 million people have been displaced—forced to flee as

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022: Central African Republic*, Freedom House (Jan. 23, 2023), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/central-african-republic/freedom-world/2022>.

<sup>2</sup> Rep. of the Independent Expert of the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic, Yao Agbetse, ¶ 52, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/51/59 (Aug. 22, 2022), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/466/33/PDF/G2246633.pdf?OpenElement>.

refugees or live in Internally Displaced Persons' camps without access to basic services.<sup>3</sup> An estimated 3.1 million people require humanitarian assistance.<sup>4</sup>


Women and girls have been among the worst affected, suffering from pervasive sexual violence. The UN mission has documented hundreds of cases of rape. Between February 17 and June 15, 2022 alone, the mission recorded 59 incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence against 52 women, 23 against girls, and one unidentified person.<sup>5</sup> Recently, Human Rights Watch called for Government Minister of Livestock and Animal Health, Hassan Bouba to be prosecuted for alleged war crimes and declared that the CAR's handling of him represents "the embodiment of impunity in the country."<sup>6</sup>

Political instability and violence have been exacerbated by the CAR's decision to invite and empower foreign mercenaries, namely the Russian government-affiliated Wagner group, which employs brutal tactics without due regard for the civilian population.<sup>7</sup> Some observers refer to the CAR as a "vassal state" of the Kremlin.<sup>8</sup> The Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control recently imposed sanctions on the Wagner Group, labeling it a "transnational criminal organization."<sup>9</sup>

The United States should not extend trade preferences to a government that fails to uphold the rule of law and continually commits gross human rights violations.<sup>10</sup> We strongly encourage the Administration to hold the CAR accountable for its duties and obligations under AGOA and terminate its eligibility.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2023: Events of 2022*, 135- 136, Human Rights Watch (Jan. 12, 2023), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2023/01/World\\_Report\\_2023\\_WEBSPREADS\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/World_Report_2023_WEBSPREADS_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> U.N. Doc. A/HRC/51/59, *supra* note 2 at ¶ 35.

<sup>5</sup> U.N. Doc. A/HRC/51/59, *supra* note 2 at ¶ 56.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis Mudge, *The Epitome of Impunity in Central African Republic*, Human Rights Watch, (Jan. 31, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/epitome-impunity-central-african-republic>.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, *supra* note 3 at 132- 133.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Cohen, *Putin Wants Fealty, and He's Found It in Africa*, N.Y. Times (Dec. 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/24/world/africa/central-african-republic-russia-wagner.html>.

<sup>9</sup> US Department of Treasury, Press Release: Treasury Sanctions Russian Proxy Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organization, US Department of Treasury, (Jan. 26, 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1220>.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*



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