



Minutes of Meeting : Power Breakfast at EBO Residence (March 20, 2013 – 8:30 to 10:00 a.m.)

On March 20, a high level invitation-only meeting better known as the POWER BREAKFAST took place among AmCham leaders and U.S. Ambassador Robert P. Jackson. Discussions centered on protecting and promoting AmCham business interests in Cameroon. Even though UN statistics show the United States as the leading investor in Cameroon (based on money invested), AmCham members still face multiple challenges such as widespread corruption and regulatory issues in doing business here. This breakfast was intended as the first of many to address these challenges head-on. The breakfast was organized by AmCham and hosted by the US Consul in Douala, Ed Gallagher, at his residence. It was well represented by the following member companies:

- COTCO
- Beneficial Insurance Company
- AES-Sonel
- Citibank
- Standard Chartered Bank

- American School Douala
- Tidewater Marine
- Jing & Partners
- Colgate Palmolive
- Imperial Foods
- Dee-Lite
- Blessing Petroleum
- Abeng Law Firm
- Carrieres du Mongo
- Nareser-KCSL

Chairman of the Board, Eddie Ford Brown welcomed the attendees and introduced Ambassador Jackson. After his brief remarks, he opened the floor for discussion.

SECURITY

On most every attendee's mind was the recent kidnapping of the French family in the Far North. Ambassador Jackson noted that he and his spouse had just returned from region. He expressed his belief that the Cameroonian military is exerting all efforts to reinforce security. He advised businesses that if they need to send representatives there, they can coordinate with the military or gendarmes for security escort services from point-to-point. Additionally, the U.S. Embassy is helping by keeping us apprised of security issues through warden messages.

CORRUPTION

Turning to corruption, the Ambassador pointed out that the Doing Business Report recently described reforms underway by other countries in the sub-region but calls Cameroon a very difficult place to do business despite its enormous potential. Breakfast attendees agreed it is ironic that Cameroon, the breadbasket for its CEMAC neighbours, remains in 161st place out of 185 economies. On the other hand, Rwanda—a top reformer in corruption—rose from the 100th position in 2005 to 45th in 2012. Despite this, members noted a bright spot in the local business community: the arrival of the Ford Motors brand name to Tracafrique (who will hopefully join AmCham as a result).

From the attendees' perspective, internal theft and corruption continue to pervade the business climate in Cameroon. One member noted that up to 35% of losses occur where cash payments for service are standard procedure. The Ambassador also reminded the audience that unless salaries meet minimum needs, corruption will continue. There was a short discussion about new services that allow customers to pay via mobile phone which are proving to be effective in curbing graft.

Corruption in tax collection (another DBR indicator) is also a major problem. Attendees believe that tax and customs authorities have incentives to swell the tax base, increasing the potential for fraud and extortion. There are hopeful signs, though; two weeks ago, a tax inspector was

suspended by MINFI for corruption.

The group concluded with a discussion of the upcoming Senate campaign as a chance for the Government of Cameroon to put its best foot forward with a transparent election and subsequent choice of additional Senators. Attendees supported a more proactive AmCham role in the fight against corruption including stricter airport controls and centralizing voter registration.

WAY FORWARD

The US Embassy and AmCham working together can encourage GRC to make the business climate more attractive by laying out what the challenges and expectations are. The Ambassador reiterated that AmCham and members should play a larger role and stand firm on one issue at the same time. Actions to take include:

- Requiring members adhere to an AmCham Code of Conduct
- Seek a seat on Cameroon Business Forum
- Strengthen mutually beneficial ties with Business Council for Africa
- Lobby for reforms

Rather than subscribe to the adage, the grass is greener on the other side, Ambassador Jackson prefers, “the grass is greener where you water it.” Chairman Brown concluded the meeting in appreciation to all present and looks forward to future power events

Charmian Penda

Executive Director

AmCham Cameroon

Email : www.amchamcam.us

Tel :(+237) 77 11 52 72.