

**Thumbnail Image:**



Jan 31, 2024 by **Yokie Rahmad Isjchwansyah**

## **Indonesia's New Cameroon Embassy and Public Diplomacy Opportunities in the Region** <sup>[1]</sup>

In her 2024 annual statement to the press, Indonesia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Retno L.P. Marsudi, announced that Indonesia will expand its mission in Africa by establishing a new Embassy in the Republic of Cameroon. According to Presidential Regulation Number 69 of 2020, the new embassy will be located in Yaounde and will begin operations in 2024. The Indonesian Embassy in Yaounde will cover the Republic of Chad, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Gabon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

Indonesia currently reports 17 representatives in the African region. During the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011, Indonesia previously established the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia to Mozambique in Maputo.

Discussions about the establishment of Indonesian missions in Africa began as early as 2019. The Indonesian Institute of Sciences (*Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia/LIPi*), now better known as the National Research and Innovation Agency (*Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional/BRIN*), proposed that the Indonesian government establish new embassies in African countries to strengthen Indonesia's economic diplomacy in the region. The establishment of diplomatic relations is designed to strengthen relations and cooperation, as well as improve the welfare of the people in both countries.

Indonesia has fewer missions in Africa than in Europe (32 missions with 28 Embassies and four Consulates General), Asia (49 missions with 33 Embassies and 16 Consulates General), and the Americas (20 missions with 13 Embassies and 7 Consulates General). The addition of Indonesian missions in Africa is expected to ease the workload of existing missions, especially the Indonesian Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria, currently responsible for 10 countries and one international organization.

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The establishment of a mission in a country where 17 🇮🇩 Indonesian citizens reside can be interpreted as an implementation of Indonesia's foreign policy priorities laid out by President Joko Widodo's administration, namely "Priority 4+1", which calls for economic diplomacy by penetrating non-traditional markets, such as the African region.

Studies also indicate that diplomatic representation can stimulate international trade, encourage exports, and expand trade cooperation between countries. Indonesia's total trade with Cameroon in the last five years has consistently expanded, especially from 2022 to November 2023, where the total trade between the two countries increased significantly by 128.9 million USD from 78.1 million USD to 207 million USD.

The relations between Indonesia and Cameroon have become increasingly stronger, as Cameroon was recently excluded from the list of countries subject to Indonesia's calling visa. The exclusion of Cameroon is based on many considerations, such as the potential for economic cooperation and the low level of vulnerability or risk to Indonesia. In addition to economic potential, there is also a significant downward trend of immigration administrative actions against Cameroonian citizens in Indonesia, according to a statement from the Director General of Immigration of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, Silmy Karim, at the end of 2023.

With the historical background and political closeness between Indonesia and African countries, as well as the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement that has existed since the Asian-African Conference in 1955, the establishment of the Indonesian Embassy in Cameroon is expected to strengthen Indonesia's presence in the region as a partner for African countries in

various aspects.

In addition to market expansion, Indonesia can strengthen its presence in the African region through public diplomacy. Indonesia now has the opportunity to strengthen cultural diplomacy by expanding promotion of Indonesian cultures. One potential avenue is to offer cultural classes or centers in the mission. Another cultural diplomacy initiative — so-called “gastrodiplomacy” — might involve the introduction of Indonesian culinary delights to the African community.

As the African community becomes more aware of Indonesian culture, the expectation is that more Africans will come to Indonesia for leisure and investment, or to continue their studies. Africa in particular is facing a challenge in this regard, with a low rate of participation in higher education (around 9%). This offers a potential opportunity for Indonesia to fulfill its national interest and constitutional mandate to support world development, tackle social inequality and reduce poverty. By offering scholarships to African communities, two objectives could be achieved: improving the long-term welfare of African communities and improving the accreditation of Indonesian universities.

Indonesia still has far fewer missions in the African region than more established countries such as China, with missions in 53 African countries, and India, with missions in 42. However, the establishment of the Indonesian Embassy in Cameroon is a promising step in improving Indonesia's relations in Africa going forward.

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