

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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CAMEROON HUMAN
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK
THE 29TH WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

10 October 2021

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: "the Commission"), established by Law No. 2019 / 014 of 19 July 2019 and entered into operation on 29 April 2021,

Bearing in mind that World Mental Health Day was launched in 1992 by the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) and is recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to educate about mental health, raise awareness and advocate against discrimination and social stigmatisation of people with mental disorders, and stimulate large-scale investment in this health area,

Bearing in mind that mental health, according to WHO, is a state of well-being in which a person can fulfil his or her potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, do productive work and contribute to his or her community¹,

Noting that, according to WHO, *nearly one billion people suffer from a mental disorder, three million people die every year from the consequences of harmful use of alcohol and one person commits suicide every 40 seconds*²,

Affirming that the rights of persons with mental illnesses are specifically recognised and protected at national, regional and international levels, especially because of their vulnerability and difficulties in social integration,

Bearing in mind that people with mental illness may be exposed to a range of human rights violations in specialised institutions and in traditional treatment centres, such as inadequate care and treatment, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment,

¹ WHO: Mental health, strengthening our action. <https://www.who.int/fr/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response> accessed on 30 September 2021

² *idem*

Considering the theme of this year's celebration, set by the World Federation for Mental Health, which is "**Mental Health in an Unequal World**"

Bearing in mind that this theme highlights the fact that access to mental health services remains unequal, with between 75 per cent and 95 per cent of people in low- and middle-income countries unable to access mental health services³,

Noting that the Preamble of the Cameroon Constitution of 18 January 1996 reaffirms that "*all persons shall have equal rights and obligations. The State shall provide all its citizens with the conditions necessary for their development*",

Further recalling that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), ratified by the State of Cameroon on 20 June 1989, states in Article 16 that "*every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health*" (1) and that "*State Parties to the present Charter shall take the necessary measures to protect the health of their people and to ensure that they receive medical attention when they are sick*",

Considering that, according to Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), which entered into force on 22 June 2006, was signed by the State of Cameroon on 15 December 2009 and is in the process of being ratified, psychiatric institutions are places of deprivation of liberty,

Recalling Law No. 2019 / 014 of 19 July 2019 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission which, in its section 8, paragraph 1, provides that: "*as a Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, the Commission shall carry out regular visits to all places of detention (...)*"; paragraph 2 of this section states that "*within the meaning of this law, places of detention shall include, inter alia (...) psychiatric centres and hospitals (...)*";

Noting that mental health is one of the most neglected areas in public health⁴,

Mindful of the new challenges related to the care of persons with mental illnesses in the context of the security situation in the Far North, North West and South West Regions, and the Covid-19 pandemic with which the States of the world and particularly Cameroon are confronted with,

The Commission regrets to note that in Cameroon, few people, including members of the Defence and Security Forces who face the barbarity of terrorists in the Far North, North West and South West regions, benefit from good quality mental health services due to the insufficient number of health personnel and specialized health facilities,

³ WHO (30 March 2018). Mental Health, Strengthening our response on <http://www.who.int...>detail> consulted on 27 September 2021

⁴ <https://www.who.int/fr/news/item/27-08-2020-world-mental-health-day-an-opportunity-to-kick-start-a-massive-scale-up-in-investment-in-mental-health>, (accessed on 24 / 09 / 2021).

The Commission is concerned about the acts of discrimination and stigmatization perpetrated by the population against persons with mental illnesses and their families,

The Commission welcomes Government action adopted to assist people with mental illnesses, including:

- the operation "zero wandering mental patients in the streets of Yaoundé", launched on 6 May 2021 by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Yaoundé City Council, which aims to bring these vulnerable persons, often abandoned by their families, to specialised health facilities to receive appropriate medical and psychological treatment, and assistance for social reintegration
- the introduction of courses in medical psychology, psychiatric semiology and psychiatric pathology in Cameroon's medical faculties by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Higher Education⁵
- the creation by the Institute of Psychotraumatology and Mediation of Cameroon (IPM), of a centre of psychotraumatology and mediation of Cameroon (CPM) on 14 December 2019, with its main activities being the reception, listening and psychological and psychiatric follow-up of victims of abuse, rape, physical violence, trauma and natural disasters⁶.

The Commission encourages the Government, development partners and some civil society organisations who are working tirelessly to promote and protect the right to physical and mental health of the people

The Commission, having visited the Jamot Hospital in Yaounde on 17 August 2021, **recommends:**

- the upscaling of the operation "zero mental patients wandering the streets of Yaoundé" to all the other municipalities in the country
- the creation of Cameroon Psychotraumatology and Mediation Centres (CPM) in the other cities of the country
- greater attention to mental health as an essential component of primary health care in the National Health Programme
- the construction of a new centre entirely dedicated to mental health care, in addition to the existing structures that no longer respect the standard of care
- improving the living conditions of patients in psychiatric hospitals, including the specific conditions of women, children and the disabled
- adequate provision of equipment and medication to encourage families to bring mental health cases to such facilities;
- the provision of food rations for destitute mental patients
- improving the working conditions of staff in psychiatric hospitals

⁵<https://www.allodocteurs.africa/cameroun-les-autorites-s-activent-pour-une-meilleure-prise-en-charge-des-malades-mentales-5989.html> (accessed on 24 / 09 / 2021).

⁶ <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/29845/fr.html/sante-mentale-un-institut-specialise>, (accessed on 24 / 09 / 2021).

- training and recruitment of doctors and nurses in the field of psychiatry
- strengthening community health actions by training actors capable of contributing to the care of such patients within their communities of origin.

The Commission recommends that the myths and beliefs about mental health that prevent families from seeking medical care and that lead communities to stigmatise and discriminate against persons with mental disorders and their families, be challenged and broken down through awareness-raising for behavioural change

The Commission, in celebrating the 29th World Mental Health Day, ***strongly emphasizes*** the need to unite at the national, regional and global levels, to give special attention to mental health as a determinant in the human development process

The Commission, for its part, ***will spare no effort*** to continue to promote and protect the rights of persons with mental illnesses, through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, regular visits to all detention facilities, fact-finding missions, and through handling complaints and conducting self-initiated investigations.

Yaounde, on - 8 OCT 2021

**President of the Sub-commission
in charge of Human Rights Promotion**



Mrs BOUBA HAWA HAMMAN