



STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE 21ST INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

"UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women"

25 November 2021

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: "the Commission"), established by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 and set up on 29 April 2021, subsequent to the swearing-in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in Assembled Chambers,

Considering that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 18 December 1979,

Bearing in mind that on 17 December 1999, the United Nations General Assembly officially proclaimed 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women,

Considering that the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign launched in 2008 has the theme *UNiTE to End Violence against Women by 2030 and that the theme for this day in 2021 is Orange the World, End Violence against Women Now¹*,

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 states in Article 5 that "*no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*",

Considering that in the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996, the Cameroonian people affirm that "*the Nation shall protect and promote the family which is the natural foundation of human society. It shall protect women, the young, the elderly and the disabled*",

¹ Concept note for the campaign on www.unwomen.org, >take - action, accessed on 23 November 2021

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Recalling that Cameroon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 23 August 1994, as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) on 12 September 2012,

Noting that women are still encountering difficulties in achieving legal, social, political and economic equality with men in society, also due to the persistence and endemic nature of discrimination and violence,

Noting that, since the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), new data and recent reports from front-line workers indicate that all types of violence against women and girls have escalated in the countries affected by the pandemic²,

Noting that according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), confinement has locked women up with their abusers³, and that confinement has resulted in a sharp increase in online violence in several forms, such as the following:

- sharing intimate photos without consent
- cyberstalking
- online trafficking
- sexual exploitation and harassment
- hate speech, etc.,

The Commission notes that violence against women is one of the most widespread and devastating human rights violations in the world. However, this type of violation remains among the most underreported due to impunity, silence, stigmatization and shame;

The Commission notes that in Cameroon, there are 3,403 cases of women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence (sexual assault, early marriage, psychological violence, neglect, etc.) brought before the courts in the Far North and North Regions⁴;

The Commission sadly observes that violence against women encompasses forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence, such as:

- intimate partner violence (physical abuse, psychological abuse)
- sexual assault and harassment (sexual abuse of minors, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyberstalking)
- human trafficking and smuggling (slavery, sexual exploitation)
- female genital mutilation
- early marriage.

²https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39878-doc-final-final-policy_paper-_gbv_in_africa_during_covid-19_pandemic-fr.pdf org, accessed on 28 / 09 / 2021.

³ <https://www.unfpa.org/fr/events/international-day-elimination-violence-against-women-2021>, accessed on 11 / 11 / 2021

⁴ OCHA, 6 July 2021, Regional Delegation of MINAS

The Commission notes that according to UN-Women statistics⁵, some 35 per cent of the world's women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once by an intimate partner or sexual violence by another person. Every day 137 women are killed by a family member. Some 49 per cent of the world's adult women are victims of human trafficking. At least 200 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone female genital mutilation;

The Commission notes that in Cameroon in 2018, 54.54 per cent of women are victims of psychological abuse, 50.24 per cent of economic violence, 24 per cent of adolescent girls have undergone breast ironing, and 1.4 per cent have undergone female genital mutilation⁶;

The Commission notes that in 2019, statistics collected from courts in six regions in Cameroon (Adamaoua, East, Far North, West, Centre and South)⁷ show that 224 investigation reports were drawn up for acts qualified as rape, resulting in 163 decisions and 105 convictions for 78 victims recorded, while 533 reports were drawn up and 280 persons convicted for 328 victims of acts of indecency to minors under 16 years of age;

The Commission regrets to equally note that between February and December 2020, 4,300 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence were recorded in the North-West and South-West Regions and that between January and March 2021, there were 500 cases of rape and sexual abuse in those Regions⁸;

The Commission is shocked to note that, concerning violence against women in Cameroon, statistics from studies by the *Association de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes* (ALVF) show that:

- 55 per cent of women (aged 15-50) have been subjected to various forms of violence since at least the age of 15
- 20 per cent of women were forced to have their first sexual intercourse
- 14 per cent of women reported having been abused while they were pregnant
- 29 per cent of women report having experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives
- 45 per cent of women in a couple have been physically abused, while 20 per cent have been sexually abused and 42 per cent have been emotionally abused.

It is also reported that:

- 51.4 per cent of violent acts were committed by husbands and/or partners;
- 48 per cent of the victims stated that they had never sought help

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/fr/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>, accessed on 27 / 10 / 2021.

⁶ Emile Ngono Assongo (2018), « *Violence à l'égard des femmes : cas du Cameroun* », sur www.fundacionrecover.org>blog accessed on 23 septembre 2021.

⁷ Minjustice, *Report of the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2019*, Yaounde, June 2021, p. 287

⁸ Jean Craig, « Sexual violence pervasive in Cameroon's anglophones regions », on www.aljazeera.com

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- 39 per cent of the victims have never told anyone about the violence they are experiencing or have experienced;

The Commission regrets that the fact that 39 per cent of Cameroon's population lives below the poverty line increases the risk of violence against women;

Among the most prominent cases in recent times, *the Commission especially regrets*:

- the death, on 6 September 2021, of Mirabelle Christelle LINGOM, a young woman aged 25, a victim of defamation, slander and rape in Douala⁹
- the spread on social media of a video containing acts of violence against a certain Germaine, perpetrated by her partner in Douala on 1 September 2021¹⁰
- the dissemination, in June 2021, of pornographic pictures of the young Malika BAYEMI, aged 24, thus violating her dignity and privacy
- the assassination of Christelle Carole, aged 35, in Douala, on 20 May 2021¹¹
- the death of Claire Charlotte NGONO, after a dispute with her husband, in Yaoundé, on 14 May 2021
- the death of the 23-year-old pregnant Lislore NGOUENI, after a beating from her husband, in Mbouda, on 9 March 2021;

The Commission, aware of the challenges related to the total eradication of violations against women throughout the world and especially in Cameroon, has taken part in several promotion and protection activities for women's rights, such as the following:

- The workshop to improve the document on the status of implementing legal instruments on women's rights, organized by the GETOG women's rights promotion network in Mbalmayo from 1 to 2 March 2021
- The workshop to evaluate the national strategy to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) 2017-2020, organized by MINPROFF with funding from UNFPA in Ebolowa on 5 May 2021;

The Commission commends Government efforts to end violence against women, such as the following:

- ratifying regional and international treaties that protect Women's Rights

⁹ Actu Cameroun, « Décès de Mirabelle Lingom : le témoignage émouvant de Paul Chouta », <https://www.google.com/amp/s/actucameroun.com/2021/09/06/deces-de-mirabelle-lingom-le-temoignage-émouvant-de-paul-chouta/amp/>, consulté le 7 / 9 / 2021.

¹⁰ camerounweb.com, « Les images d'un homme battant violemment une femme à Douala suscitent l'indignation », 2 septembre 2021, <https://mobile.camerounweb.com/Les-images-un-homme-battant-violemment-une-femme-à-Douala-suscitent-indignation>, consulté le 3 / 9 / 2021.

¹¹ Denunciation in June 2021 of violence against women by their spouses/partners by Mrs ABENA ONDOA OBAMA Marie Thérèse, Minister of Women's empowerment and the Family.

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- enacting laws, like the Penal Code, that protect women from discrimination and other harmful practices (rape, incest, genital mutilation, excessive dowry etc.) and criminalizing certain forms of violence and discriminatory practices perpetrated against women
- the ongoing review and evaluation of the National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2017-2020), and the development of a new Strategy for the period 2020-2030
- organizing 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and violence against women and girls every year from 25 November to 10 December, in collaboration with UN-WOMEN and other partners
- producing 300 radio programs in local languages, French and English, in collaboration with local, traditional authorities and with civil society, to fight against violence against women and raise awareness on human rights, and particularly women's rights¹²
- providing a green line since 2018 in the medical-social centres of the state universities to receive cases and reports on sexual abuse
- Setting up Call Centres and Gender Desks at police stations in the Adamaoua, East and Far North Regions, which received 1,150 women in 2019¹³
- celebrating regional and international days on Women's Rights such as Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation Day on 6 February or International Women's Day on 8 March;

The Commission also commends the efforts of United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and women's organizations that continue to raise public awareness on the question of violence against women, through raising awareness and providing multifaceted assistance to surviving victims;

The Commission also commends the efforts of development partners and civil society organizations that work tirelessly to protect women's rights;

The Commission recommends that the government speed up the development and adoption of a new National Strategy to combat gender-based violence for the period 2020-2030;

The Commission strongly recommends that investigations on violence against women, committed by state and non-state actors, lead to the sentencing of perpetrators to penalties commensurate with the crime, including reparations to victims;

¹² MINPROFF official website: www.minproff.cm accessed on 3/9/2021.

¹³ Minjustice, *Report of the Ministry of Justice on Human Rights in Cameroon in 2019*, Yaounde, June 2021, p. 296.

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The Commission recommends that the government invest in collecting and publishing disaggregated data to better inform policy and to evaluate the measures already taken to effectively address violence. The government could also support civil society organizations, universities, and other social actors engaged in data collection;

The Commission recommends that the role of men and local communities in preventing and combating violence against women be further explored and strengthened;

The Commission recommends that existing social structures such as Call Centres, women's social cohesion spaces and Gender Desks that take care of victims be generalised and that their human, financial and material resources be increased, and that an inter-agency unit (one-stop-shop) be created with hotlines to provide information, support and advice to victims/survivors of violence;

The Commission recommends gender-sensitive training for actors addressing violence against women, such as law enforcement officers, immigration officers, medical personnel, social workers, prosecutors and judges;

The Commission recommends that traditional leaders amend customary practices that support and condone violence against women, such as abuses on widows, female genital mutilation, and eliminate stereotypes that legitimize violence against women;

The Commission recommends that women be made aware of the various forms of protection and recourse available to them and urges women, regardless of their age, social status and religion, to report all forms of violence against them at an early stage.

For its part, ***the Commission will spare no effort*** to keep promoting and protecting human rights and especially the gender approach, through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, and as part of the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations.

Yaounde, 23 NOV 2021



**Pour le Président
et par Délégation**

ASUAGBOR née AYUK Lucy