

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

SOUS-COMMISSION CHARGÉE DE LA
PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

Secrétariat Permanent

Division de la Protection et de la
Promotion des Droits de l'Homme

B.P./ P.O. Box 20317, Yaoundé
Fax : (237) 222-22-60-82



CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE OF
HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION

Permanent Secretariat

Human Rights Protection
and Promotion Division

Tel.: (237) 222-22-61-17 / 691 12 86 70
e-mail : cdnhlcndhl@yahoo.com
Web : www.cndhl.cm

STATEMENT OF THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE WORLD BRAILLE DAY

4 January 2022

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (herein referred to as “the Commission”), created by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019, and set up on 29 April 2021, further to the swearing-in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in assembled Chambers,

Bearing in mind that the International World Braille Day is celebrated on January 4 yearly in recognition of the birth of Louis Braille, born on 4 January 1809,

Considering that in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly officially declared World Braille Day through resolution A/RES/73/161 as a day to raise awareness of the importance of the Braille as a means of communication for the full achievement of human rights for blind and partially sighted people,

Recalling that the Braille is a tactile representation of alphabetic and numerical symbols using six dots to represent each letter and number, and even musical, mathematical and scientific symbols¹, a code that uses bumps and indentation on a surface to represent letters, which can be recognized by touch²,

Considering that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the blind and the visually impaired face a higher risk of contamination due to their limited access to information in Braille on guidelines and precautions to be taken to self-protect and curb the spread of the pandemic,

Bearing in mind that the World Health Organization estimates that 1.2 per cent of the entire population of Africa (i.e. about 16.7 million people³) is blind and cataract causes 36 per cent of this blindness⁴,

Noting that there are about 600,000 people in Cameroon who have a visual impairment and about 150,000 of whom cannot read with their eyes whereas of these, not up to 2,000 can read the braille⁵,

¹ United Nations World Braille Day at <https://www.un.org/en/observances/braille-day> consulted on 23/12/2021.

² Cameroon blind ask for more braille awareness at https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-blind-ask-more-braille-awareness/6200340.html, consulted on 26/12/2021.

³ According to *Worldometre* of 2 January 2022, consulted on 2/1/2022, the population stands at 1,388,714,933 people, at <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/>

⁴ Cameroon Baptist Convention. Cataract leading cause of blindness in the world at <https://cbchealthservices.org/cataract-leading-cause-of-blindness-in-the-world/> consulted on 26/12/2021.

⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

Recognizing that more than 90 per cent of all published material is not accessible to the blind or partially sighted and that in developing countries less than 7 per cent of published materials are available in accessible formats such as Braille⁶,

Noting that there are certain activities which the blind and visually impaired cannot undertake which leads to prejudice, intolerance and discrimination by sighted people,

Welcoming the advances in technology, and recognizing that those persons living with visual impairment having the opportunity to fully acquire Braille reading and writing skills attain better literacy, better education and employment outcomes than those whose learning has been primarily supported by spoken word technology⁷,

Bearing in mind that persons with disabilities are entitled to special protection measures and specific actions to prevent their disability from leading to a breach of human equality,

Recalling resolution ACHPR/Res.305 (EXT.OS/XVIII)2015 of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights which urges State parties, the African Union and its organs to ensure that the information intended for the general public is disseminated in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities,

Bearing in mind article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted on 13 December 2006, signed by Cameroon on 1 October 2008 and ratified by presidential decree of 28 December 2021, which brings out the importance of the Braille as being essential in the context of education, freedom of expression and opinion, as well as social inclusion,

Bearing in mind article 24(c) of that Convention which calls on states to ensure that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deaf and blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages, and modes and means of communication for the individual, and environments which maximize their academic and social development,

Considering the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities ratified by Cameroon on 5 October 2021 whereby ratifying countries and their citizens can benefit from the increase in accessible materials through cross-border sharing and the increased production of books under the Treaty's provisions,

Bearing in mind Decree No 2018/6233 of 26 July 2018 fixing the procedures for the application of law n° 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities in Cameroon including by:

- developing standards in school, university and vocational training programs for teachers to learn sign language and braille (Article 4).
- providing transportation assistance to persons with disabilities in public or private transport companies (Article 20 (1 and 2))

⁶ Marrakech Treaty ratification and implementation campaign at <https://worldblindunion.org/programs/marrakesh-treaty/> consulted on 23/12/2021.

⁷ World Blind Union statement for World Braille Day – 4 January 2021 at <https://blindsa.org.za/2021/01/04/wbu-statement-for-world-braille-day-4-january-2021> consulted on 23/12/2021.

- facilitating access of persons with disabilities to communication and information means, particularly through [...] labelling in Braille and large print on consumer products (article 22 (1 and 2)),

Recalling Sustainable Development Goal 4 which focuses on inclusive and equitable quality of education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all,

The Commission notes that persons with disabilities in general and the visually impaired in particular, have been facing discrimination at all levels in life, and that majority find it very impossible to cope in school since they can't have access to the necessary materials that would enable them to develop their intellects;

The Commission notes that the lack of braille books and teachers are to blame for the low levels of education and the struggle to be independent by blind and visually impaired people;

The Commission notes that there is a need to be able to produce these materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, large print or audio editions,

The Commission acknowledges State action towards promoting the use of the braille by:

- authorizing the creation of integrated primary schools and inclusive teacher training colleges⁸
- ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty on 5 October 2021 whose entry into force on 5 January 2022, in the wake of the World Braille Day, will facilitate access to publish works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled
- the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa respectively by Presidential Decrees No. 2021/751 and No. 2021/753 of 28 December 2021
- setting up an inclusive multimedia Centre through the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, equipped with modern equipment and offering services including Braille editing and transcription⁹
- providing disability cards for persons with disability to enable them to enjoy special treatment wherever they go in the country;

The Commission lauds the action of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and individuals who are doing a lot to improve upon the lives of the blind and visually impaired through the creation of specialized and inclusive schools for children with special educative needs, the training of teachers, the setting up of centres for the production and transcription of books in braille and offering humanitarian assistance to the blind;

The Commission recommends the promotion of a disability-inclusive response to Covid-19 through the production and dissemination of information in Braille;

⁸ Louis Braille primary school and teacher training school by the NGO Club for the Young Blind Rehabilitated of Cameroon (CJARC).

⁹ Centre set up for CJARC was inaugurated by MINPOSTEL on 2 December 2020.

The Commission recommends that children should be introduced to the braille code to make them aware of other's differences, and gain an awareness of varying needs and requirements of the blind and visually impaired;

The Commission recommends that the State should facilitate the access by disabled people to communication and information means, particularly through the creation of more braille production units for transcribing information to be disseminated and other educational material into Braille and large print at cheaper rates;

The Commission recommends that modalities of application of the provisions of Decree No. 2018/6233 of 26 July 2018 through special texts should be fixed by the various ministerial departments concerned so that the blind and visually impaired will have maximum protection of their rights afforded by the legal provisions in force;

The Commission recommends that the Local Authorities and their dependent entities should come up with innovative solutions to the problems of the blind and visually impaired especially in the area of education including facilitating transportation to school and affording textbooks in braille;

The Commission urges families to make every effort to provide their blind or partially-sighted children with the same education as their sighted children;

The Commission encourages private investment initiatives towards the creation of affordable inclusive schools to educate the blind and visually impaired as well as for the training of teachers in the use of the braille;

Reaffirming that *knowledge is power* and that power should be shared in a democratic society through making works available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, to ensure that no one will be left behind¹⁰,

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission will continue to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable persons including the rights of the blind and visually impaired through sensitization, human rights education, observation, investigation and alert.

Yabounde,

James MOUANGUE KOBILA

¹⁰ ACHPR. Statement of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and access to information for persons who are blind or otherwise print disabled, 10 Dec. 2018 on www.achpr.org consulted on 26/12/2021.