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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN**

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**CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION**

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**STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
OF CAMEROON TO CELEBRATE THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

**UNDER THE THEME: "ELIMINATING HARMFUL PRACTICES AFFECTING  
CHILDREN: PROGRESS ON POLICY & PRACTICE SINCE 2013".**

**16 June 2022**

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 following the swearing-in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in assembled chambers,

*Considering* Resolution CMRes-1290 (XL) of July 1990 adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), declaring 16 June as the "Day of the African Child",

*Bearing in mind* that this day commemorates the 23 people killed, including 21 black schoolchildren, in Soweto, South Africa, on 16 June 1976, during a protest against the adoption of Afrikaans - the language of the oppressor - as a second official language of instruction on an equal footing with English, excluding indigenous languages, when they demanded the same treatment as that accorded to white schoolchildren, who were allowed to learn in their mother tongue (Afrikaans) alongside English,

*Considering* the theme of this year's commemoration: "Eliminating harmful practices affecting children: progress on policy and practice since 2013<sup>1</sup>",

*Recognising* that the commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2022 is an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved in terms of adoption of policy and practice and reflect on what still needs to be done to effectively eliminate harmful practices affecting children in Africa,

*Bearing in mind* that this day also provides an opportunity to examine the state of harmful practices affecting children in Africa, by focusing on the problems that African children face in their daily lives due to these harmful practices and evaluate where we stand in protecting and assisting children who are at risk as well as victims of harmful practices in Africa,

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<sup>1</sup> Concept Note of the Day of the African Child, [acerw.africa/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Concept-Note-of-DAC-2022-English.pdf](https://acerw.africa/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Concept-Note-of-DAC-2022-English.pdf)



**Recalling** that the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) organised a day of general discussion on discrimination and violence against girls in Africa on 5 November 2013. The event resulted in the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child in Africa,

**Underlining** that according to Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the child is defined as *every human being below the age of 18 years*<sup>2</sup>,

**Noting** that in Cameroon and in Africa in particular, countless girls and boys are victims of these harmful practices:

- female genital mutilation or cutting or excision,
- early and forced marriage,
- degrading initiation rites,
- breast ironing,
- preference for sons,
- acid attacks,
- stoning,
- so-called "honour killings",
- forced feeding,
- witchcraft rituals,
- female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, and virginity testing, as well as many other lesser-known forms of violence such as uvulectomy (removal of the uvula, the flesh of the palate at the back of the mouth), extraction of baby teeth<sup>3</sup>,

**Aware** that such practices, often violent in nature, jeopardise a child's development and education, leaving deep and lasting damage to the child's psychology and health and may result in disability or death<sup>4</sup>;

**Recalling** the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which states that "[e]very person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment",

**Considering** that the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which was adopted on 1 July 1990, entered into force on 29 November 1999 and ratified by Cameroon on 5 September 1997, states in Article 6 that "[t]he States Parties to this Charter shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and in particular all forms of physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment, including sexual abuse, while in the care of a parent, legal guardian, educational authority or any other person having charge of the child",

**Noting also** that the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), adopted on 11 July 2003, entered into

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Protéger les enfants contre les pratiques néfastes dans les systèmes juridiques pluriels, avec un accent particulier sur l'Afrique, <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/fr/protecting-children-harmful-practices-plural-legal-systems-special-emphasis-africa-0>, consulted on 23/5/2022.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.





force on 25 November 2005 and ratified by Cameroon on 28 May 2009, invites States Parties to take all measures to prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices,

**Recalling** Agenda 2063, whose Aspiration 6, calls for an end to all forms of gender-based violence, including harmful practices,

**Recalling also** that the elimination of all forms of harmful practices is also clearly reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (target 5.3) which calls for the "*elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation*",

**Bearing in mind** the Addis Ababa Declaration of 16 January 2013<sup>5</sup> in which the Member States of the African Union committed themselves to:

- develop, monitor and evaluate the efficacy of measures to achieve a zero-tolerance policy on violence against women and the girl child
- strengthen existing positive cultural practices of respect and non-violent relationships within families, schools, communities and public institutions
- ensure that the elimination of violence against women and the girl child is a priority aspect of the post-2015 agenda, with clear targets and indicators
- enact and enforce laws and policies on violence against women and the girl child,

**The Commission notes** that the situation of children in Cameroon and in Africa remains preoccupying because:

- cases of violence between students and against teachers are recurrent in schools; the most recent took place in less than 24 hours (from May 11 to 12, 2022) in 3 secondary education schools, in particular Ékité high school in Edea, the bilingual high school in Bafoussam Ndjengdam and Leclerc high school in Yaounde;
- the consumption of drugs and other psychotropic substances is on the rise among young people, as demonstrated by the 2021 statistics of the national Committee for the fight against drugs (NCFD) which indicate that 15 % of young cameroonians are drug users
- the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF) recorded 856 cases of rape and 257 cases of early marriage in 2020<sup>6</sup> ;
- In the first quarter of 2020, nearly 66 girls were subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), 36 of them under the age of 7 and the other 30 between 7 and 17 years old<sup>7</sup>
- In 2019, around 441 street children in the urban centres of Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, Buea, Maroua and Ngaoundéré were exposed to various forms of abuse
- there is widespread neglect of children in Africa, with the highest median neglect rates in the world (41.8% for girls and 39.1% for boys), has contributed to some forms of violence against children
- in some African countries, 30-40 per cent of adolescent girls are sexually abused before the age of 15;

**The Commission commends** the progress made by the government to eliminate harmful practices affecting children, such as:

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<sup>5</sup> Statement following the African ministerial preparatory meeting for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Ministry of Justice on the state of human rights in Cameroon in 2020, p. 291.

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Ministry of Justice on the state of human rights in Cameroon in 2020, p. 270.





- the ratification of several international and regional instruments on the Rights of the Child
- the signature of decree n° 92/456/PM of 24 November 1992, of the national Committee to fight against hard drugs
- the penalisation in the Penal Code of odious practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage and rape, abortion, contempt for minors, violence against children, the excessive demand for a dowry and serious injuries
- the holding of the first session of the National Commission to Protect Children at Risk, Juvenile Delinquents and Abandoned Children<sup>8</sup> on 9 May 2018 to look at the legal framework for the protection of the child against violence, abuse and exploitation
- psychosocial, economic, legal, medical and judicial support for cases of violence by specialized public departments;
- the creation by the Ministry of basic education of a healthy and friendly learning environment where children can feel safe. Schools are also equipped with the departments of guidance and counseling where children can feel safe to express their worries
- awareness raising activities by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family among parents and the educational community to educate children at a tender level on the dangers of violence
- the setting up of an intersectorial child protection focal team by the Ministry of Social Affairs
- the establishment of care platforms with referring cases to other institutional and civil society players
- the organisation of awareness-raising campaigns on the harmful effects of violence and abuse within families and through the Mobile Rural and Urban Animation Teams (EMAPUR) of the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education
- Advocacy against violence on children especially the girl child by the 180 children parliamentarians who took part in the 22nd session of the children's Parliament at the National Assembly this Saturday June 26 2021;

***The Commission acknowledges*** the efforts made by United Nations Agencies, International Organisations, NGOs, CSOs and other stakeholders for the protection and assistance of child victims of harmful practices, by organising specific activities and programmes to prevent, protect and assist this vulnerable group in Cameroon;

***The Commission notes*** the ongoing challenges in eradicating violence against children in Africa, including:

- weak or non-disclosure of violence, deeply rooted cultural values and practices
- the severe lack of human and financial resources in child protection systems
- the low participation of children in the development and implementation of measures that are unfortunately more focused on response than on prevention<sup>9</sup>.

***The Commission observes and strongly condemns*** the resurgence of violence against children in our society, especially rape and abuse committed within the family and friends, and reiterates its calls to the authorities to ensure that the perpetrators are sought, arrested and brought to justice;

<sup>8</sup> The Commission was set up by presidential decree No.90/524 of 23 March 1990.

<sup>9</sup>[https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence\\_against\\_children\\_in\\_africa\\_a\\_report\\_on\\_progress\\_and\\_challenges\\_-\\_french.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence_against_children_in_africa_a_report_on_progress_and_challenges_-_french.pdf), consulted on 22/5/2022.



***The Commission further encourages*** stakeholders working in the field of children's rights on the continent to strengthen their efforts in the fight against obstacles related to harmful practices affecting children in Africa;

***The Commission recommends*** the strict enforcement of legislation on violence against children to encourage the abandonment of harmful practices;

***The Commission recommends*** that education and awareness-raising initiatives be intensified on the adverse effects of harmful practices, beginning with children themselves, informing them on their rights and making them the primary advocates for the prevention of harmful practices;

***The Commission recommends*** that social norms be changed by mobilising various actors who play an influential role in communities at different levels so that the collective effort can galvanise action against harmful practices at the local level;

***The Commission recommends*** that we strengthen our civic responsibility to protect children by becoming more informed about child abuse and neglect and what we can do to help as well as by engaging families and communities to protect children;

***The Commission encourages*** Government in its campaign to issue birth certificates. This document provides an official record of the child's existence, enables access to basic social services to which the child is entitled, and provides the child with effective protection from harmful practices.

***The Commission, for its part, will spare no effort*** to continue to promote and protect human rights and particularly the rights of the child, through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, handling complaints, self-initiated investigations and torture prevention.

15 JUN 2022

Yaounde,.....



James MOUANGUE KOBILA