

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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DE L'HOMME

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CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

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**STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 60TH AFRICAN WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION**

Under the theme: 'Towards the African Women's Decade: Realizing Women's Human Capital through accelerated social and economic development, addressing the scourge of violence, food insecurity and good nutrition on the African continent'

31 July 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 Commissioners before the Supreme Court sitting in chambers,

Bearing in mind that on 31 July 1962¹, women from all over Africa gathered to create the Pan-African Women's Organisation, to work in synergy for better living conditions and the emancipation of the African woman,

Bearing in mind that 31 July is the date the Organisation of the African Union (OAU) chose for the celebration of the African Women's Day and the Day is of particular importance as a starting point for strengthening the acquired human rights and the fight against sexist discrimination, racism, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), etc.

Considering that the theme of the celebration of the said Day, adopted this year by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), namely: *Realizing Women's Human Capital through accelerated social and economic development, addressing the scourge of violence, food insecurity and good nutrition on the African continent*, places special emphasis on building the human potential of African women, to enable them to fight poverty through financial and economic inclusion, elimination of violence against women and the girl child, strengthening food security for all and improving good nutrition in Africa,

¹ 31 July: African Women's Day, <http://portail-eip.org/web2/?q=fr/content/31-juillet-journee-internationale-de-la-femme-africaine>, accessed on 27 June 2022.

Considering the theme proposed this year by the Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO) namely *African Women, Key Actors of Nutrition and Food Security*,

Bearing in mind that the choice of this year's theme is based on recognizing the contribution of African women in building a more sustainable future for all people, and African society,

Referring to the Preamble of the Constitution of 18 January 1996 which provides that "*the human person [including women], without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights*" and that "*the nation shall protect and encourage the family [...] it shall protect women*", and particularly the girl, the elderly woman and the woman with a disability,

Observing that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was adopted on 27 June 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya, and entered into force on 21 October 1986, and Cameroon ratified it on 20 June 1989, provides in its Articles 18 (3) and 22 (1) that: "*The State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions*",

Further observing that the Protocol to the said Charter on the Rights of Women, the Maputo Protocol, adopted on 11 July 2003 by the African Union in Maputo in Mozambique entered into force in November 2005 and the State of Cameroon ratified it on 13 September 2012, promotes the rights of women, including the right to participate in public affairs management, social and political equality with men, enhanced empowerment in their health decisions, and an end to female genital mutilation,

Considering that the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on Older Persons, adopted on 31 January 2016, which Cameroon ratified on 28 December 2021, states in Article 9 (1) that "*the States parties undertake to ensure the protection of older women against all forms of violence, sexual abuse and gender-based discrimination*",

Bearing in mind the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 29 January 2018 in Addis-Ababa and ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, in its Article 27 (a) which provides that "*States parties shall ensure that women and girls with disabilities have full enjoyment of human and peoples' rights on an equal basis with other persons, including ensuring that : (a) Women and girls with disabilities participate in social, economic and political decision-making and activities*",

Considering that the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted on January 30, 2007, which Cameroon ratified on 9 August 2011 and entered into force on the same date, states in its Article 29 (2) that "*States Parties shall create the necessary conditions to ensure the full participation of*

women in decision-making processes and structures at all levels, as an essential element in the promotion and practice of a democratic culture",

Bearing in mind the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union Member States in July 2004, in Addis Ababa, whereby Member States agreed to ensure women's full participation and representation in the peace process, including conflict prevention, management and resolution, and reconstruction in Africa, as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000),

Considering that the First African Women's Decade 2010-2020 (AWD) was adopted by the African Union on 15 October 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme *Community Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE)* and the new Decade 2020-2030, based on Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion, has a special emphasis on women's right to work, and their participation in the economy of their country,

Observing that throughout the first decade, considerable progress² was made in translating the commitment of African states into measurable actions, such as:

- An increase in women's participation in political decision-making processes has seen four AU member states, including Rwanda (1st), Namibia (7th), South Africa (10th) and Senegal (11th), rank among the top 11 countries in the world with the greatest number of women in parliament³, while 16 other member states have passed the threshold of 30 per cent of women represented in their Chambers⁴ including Cameroon (43rd)⁵
- Women's occupation of strategic ministries, previously reserved for men, such as *defence, economy, finance and foreign affairs*
- Increased women's access to technology, infrastructure and modern services⁶
- Increasing the school enrolment rate of the girl child and improving women's access to technical and vocational training⁷
- The signing on 27 April 2020 by the African Union, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) of a three-year regional program document for Africa under the *Spotlight Initiative*, a landmark \$40 million regional program focused on strengthening member states' laws

² End of African Women's Decade. Progress record on commitments

<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/fr/derni%C3%A8re-heure/la-fin-de-la-d%C3%A9cennie-de-la-femme-africaine-l%C3%A9tat-des-progr%C3%A8s-r%C3%A9alis%C3%A9s-par-rapport-:-text=Les%20femmes%20occupent%20d%C3%A9normables%20des,technologies%2C%20infrastructures%20et%20services%20modernes>, access on 4 June 2022

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Women in National Parliaments, Status as of February 1, 2019, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-f/classif.htm>, accessed July 28, 2022.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gender equality and women empowerment (ESAF) AU, CEA et UN-Women, Briefing Note of October 2020, Issue 1, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39560-doc-final_final_gewe_newsletter_fr-1sted.pdf, accessed on 27 June 2022

and policies in specified areas, generating reliable data, supporting women's movements and relevant civil society organizations (CSOs)⁸.

Equally observing that despite encouraging progress of domestic laws and regional and international instruments adopted for promoting the rights of African women, they are still under-represented in governments and parliaments in Africa, as they are still subject to numerous discriminations linked to socio-cultural factors and to certain domestic laws,

Bearing in mind that gender inequalities prevent women from adapting to changes in modern African society and mitigating the effects because few women have effective access to administrative responsibilities and women are generally marginalised in the management of resources, and under-represented in decision-making for their development, despite their large numbers, which should rather have been an asset,

Whereas violence against women takes many forms, such as *domestic violence, rape, trafficking in women and girls, forced prostitution, violence in armed conflicts, including systematic rape as a weapon of war, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, honour killings, dowry-related violence, female infanticide, prenatal sex selection in favour of boys, female genital mutilation and other practices and traditions harmful to women*⁹,

Bearing in mind these statistics from the Report of the State of Cameroon on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action published in 2019, *"concerning violence against women and girls, statistics show that 54.6 per cent of women have been victims of some form of violence from the age of 15, as against 9.8 per cent of men. Domestic violence affects 52.6 per cent of women, 1.4 per cent of women have undergone genital mutilation, with proportions reaching 20 per cent in the Far North and South West regions (focus areas)."*

Bearing in mind that in 2012, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated that rural Cameroonian women provided about 90 per cent of the food needed to sustain the population,

Considering that a 2011 World Food Programme (WFP) study *highlights that 90 per cent of food production in Cameroon is undertaken by family farms and that women contribute 80 per cent of such production*¹⁰,

Further observing that the National Institute of Statistics (INS) reveals that, despite the high participation of women in agriculture, *the rate of loss of crops is 30 per cent due to lack of equipment packaging, storage, drying or processing*¹¹,

⁸ Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) AU, ECA and UN Women, October 2020 Newsletter, Issue 1, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39560-doc-final_final_gewe_newsletter_fr-1sted.pdf, accessed on 27 June 2022

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Les femmes: motrices de la sécurité alimentaire au Cameroun, Mireille Tchiako, Production: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, March 2014 edition

¹¹ *Ibid*

- socio-economic and cultural constraints, sexual and gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, lack of access to reproductive health care due to their prohibitive costs, difficulty to enjoy inheritance rights, especially land ownership, etc.
- the negative socio-economic repercussions of Covid-19 on African women, particularly in the informal sector, resulting in 10.3 per cent of women becoming unemployed in Cameroon¹³
- A low percentage of women, 15 per cent on average, are involved in technological development in all African countries, specialising in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- The fact that only 1 per cent of the world's wealth belongs to women, although women do 60 per cent of the world's work¹⁴
- an increase in the risk of violence against women and girls because, between 2009 and 2018, 39.9 per cent of Cameroon's population lived below the poverty line, set at 738 CFA/day per adult
- 1,249 cases of gender-based violence were recorded in emergency humanitarian areas in Cameroon until 15 December 2021¹⁵.

The Commission applauds Government efforts to promote and protect women's rights in Cameroon by:

- ratifying several international and regional treaties supporting women's rights
- the penalization in the Penal Code of odious practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage and rape, abortion, indecent exposure of minors, child abuse, abusive demand of dowry and serious injury
- passing the law on medically assisted procreation, adopted by the National Assembly on 29 June 2022
- creating local committees to combat female genital mutilation (FGM) through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, since 2015
- enacting Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code, which punishes crimes and offences against individuals, including women, particularly Sections 277 (1) on genital mutilation, 296 on rape, 337 on abortion, 356 on forced marriage, 357 on the abusive demand for a dowry, 360 on incest
- providing a green line since 2018 in the medical-social centres of the universities to handle cases and reports on sexual abuse
- inaugurating the *Maison de la jeune fille Chantal Biya* in Douala 2e on 4 March 2022, which offers young girls training courses in various fields

¹³ Impact de la pandémie du Covid-19 sur l'emploi au Cameroun (IPEC), Regard sur la situation de la femme et l'action syndicale, Rapport d'analyse du Pr Viviane ONDOUA BIWOLE, July 2020, P.21

¹⁴ According to the African Economic Commission (ECA), http://apf.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/2014_06_femmes_rapmedias.pdf accessed 7 July 2022

¹⁵ OCHA statistics, accessed 27 June 2022.

- revising and evaluating the National Strategy to combat gender-based violence (2017-2020) and validating the new strategy for the period 2020-2030 on 2 September 2021.

The Commission recognizes the efforts of the government to promote and protect the rights of women in Cameroon, such as:

- the ratification of several regional and international treaties concerning women's rights
- the adoption at the National Assembly of the law on medically-assisted procreation, on 29 June 2022;
- the creation of local committees to fight against female genital mutilation (FGM) by the MINRPOFF, since 2015
- the promulgation of Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code which punishes crimes and misdemeanours committed against women, particularly Section 277 (1) on genital mutilation, 296 on rape, 337 on abortion, 356 on forced marriage, 357 on the abusive demand of a dowry, etc.
- the provision 2018 of a toll-free line in the medical and social centres of universities to file cases and reports on sexual abuse
- the inauguration of the Maison de la jeune fille Chantal Biya in Douala 2, on 4 March 2022, which offers training to young girls in various domains
- review and assessment of the National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2017-2020) and validation on 2 September 2021 of the new strategy for the period 2020-2030.

The Commission encourages the UN agency efforts, such agencies as UN-WOMEN, UNDP, FNUAP, and national partners such as MINPROFF, MINAS, MINSANTÉ, MINDDEVEL, MINADER, MINESEC, MINEDUB, and organizations such as Action locale pour un développement participatif et autogéré (ALDEPA), l'Association de Lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes (ALVF), Plan International, International Medical Corps (IMC), le Réseau des animateurs pour l'éducation des communautés (RESAEC), Care Cameroon, WILP-Cameroon, etc. that work tirelessly for women's empowerment in Cameroon and Africa,

The Commission is nevertheless concerned about the situation of women and the negative effects on them caused by issues such as HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, poverty, harmful traditional practices, sexual violence, under-representation in politics and decision-making, illiteracy and limited access to education for the girl child,

The Commission is deeply concerned about the inflation of food prices on the markets, due to the war in Ukraine, which negatively impacts households whose income is left to the difficult and daily management of women, and has remained static,

The Commission recommends that the government invest in the collection and publication of disaggregated data on the conditions of women, to better guide public policies in this regard,

The Commission equally recommends that the State set up units to process agro-pastoral and forestry products and rehabilitate rural evacuation routes, to increase the productivity of Cameroonian women and improve the food security of the population,

The Commission also recommends that the government encourage female entrepreneurship by providing grants to women, to facilitate their empowerment and enable them to cope with the rising prices of necessities in the country,

The Commission further recommends that the State should do more to support Civil Society Organisations, universities and other social components committed to eliminating discrimination, disease and violence against women,

The Commission once again urges the government to speed up the process of implementing the new national strategy to combat gender-based violence for the period 2020-2030,

The Commission strongly encourages traditional leaders, religious leaders, media professionals, parents, families and communities to contribute more to the fight against discrimination, violence and intolerance, and to eliminate the stereotypes that legitimise them,

The Commission recommends that women be made aware of the various forms of protection and remedies available to them and encourages them, whatever their age, social status, religion or origin, to denounce at an early stage all forms of discrimination or violence they suffer,

The Commission encourages education and the continuous promotion of the rights of girls and women within family units,

The Commission urges men and boys to work hard, in partnership with women and girls, against genital mutilation, all forms of discrimination, and all kinds of violence against them, throughout the country,

The Commission, for its part, will spare no effort to further promote and protect human rights and especially African women's rights through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, and handling complaints and self-initiated investigations.

Yaoundé, 28 JUL 2022



James MOUANGUE KOBILA

Créée par la loi n° 2019/014 du 19 juillet 2019, la CDHD est une institution indépendante de consultation, d'observation, d'évaluation, de dialogue, de conciliation et de concertation en matière de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme. La Commission fait également office de Mécanisme National de Prévention de la torture du Cameroun

Created by law n° 2019/014 of 19 July 2019, the CHRC is an independent institution for consultation, monitoring, evaluation, dialogue, conciliation and deliberation in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission shall also serve as the Cameroon National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture