

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS
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**STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
ON THE THEME "ONE EARTH"**

5 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,

Bearing in mind that on 15 December 1972, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/2994 (XXVII) declaring 5 June as World Environment Day and urging Governments and the United Nations system to undertake annually on this day global activities to reaffirm their commitment to protecting and improving the environment and to raise awareness on environmental issues¹,

Considering that the environment refers to: "all-natural or artificial elements and the biogeochemical balances in which they participate, as well as the economic, social and cultural factors that promote the existence, transformation and development of the environment, living organisms and human activities"²,

Bearing in mind that 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference, which led to the declaration of 5 June as World Environment Day³,

Recalling that this Day is an opportunity to underline the need to live sustainably in harmony with nature by making transformative changes, through policies and our choices, towards cleaner and greener lifestyles,

Considering the theme of this year's celebration which is: "One Earth", which emphasizes sustainable living in harmony with nature⁴,

Bearing in mind that "One Earth" was the theme of the 1972 Stockholm Conference and 50 years later, this theme is still relevant,

¹Unesco, "World Environment Day",

<https://fr.unesco.org/commemorations/environmentday#:~:text=Quelques%20mois%20plus%20tard%2C%20le,1%C3%A0%20des%20activit%C3%A9s%20de%20caract%C3%A8>, consulted on 10/5/2022.

² Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 on Environmental Management Law.

³ <https://www.unep.org/fr/actualites-et-recits/communiqu%C3%A9-de-presse/la-suede-sera-le-pays-hote-la-journee-mondiale-de#:~:text=La%20Journ%C3%A9e%20mondiale%20de%20l'environnement%202022%20aura%20pour%20th%C3%A8me,plus%20propres%20et%20plus%20%C3%A9cologiques>, consulted on 7/5/2022.

⁴ Ibid.

Bearing in mind that the overall concept of sustainable development which is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁵, appeared in the early 1980s and has enabled people to gradually reconnect with the Earth and themselves⁶,

Noting that according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report "*Making Peace with Nature*", published earlier this year, such transformation of social and economic systems must involve a better relationship with nature, an understanding of its value, and putting that value at the heart of decision-making⁷,

Bearing in mind that the climate crisis, which is affecting the entire planet, disproportionately affects poor countries, the majority of which are located in the southern hemisphere and are more naturally prone to the vagaries of extreme weather events⁸,

Taking into account, however, that rich countries, mostly in the northern hemisphere, have been responsible for about 92% of the world's excess carbon emissions since the advent of the industrial revolution, while they are the least affected by the consequences of climate change⁹,

Bearing in mind the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 of Cameroon which states that "*every person shall have a right to a healthy environment. The protection of the environment shall be the duty of every citizen. The State shall ensure the protection and improvement of the environment*",

Recalling also the Statement by Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Ministers in charge of Forestry, Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainable Development on the development and promotion of green economy in Central Africa, adopted in 2012 in Brazzaville, during the ECCAS Conference of Ministers on Green Economy,

Noting that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which was adopted on 27 June 1981 in Kenya, entered into force on 21 October 1986 and was ratified by Cameroon on 20 June 1989, provides in its Article 24 that: "[a]ll peoples shall have the right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development",

Also noting that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which was adopted during the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, entered into force on 21 March 1994 and ratified by Cameroon on 19 October 1992 has as ultimate objective, the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations "*at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system*",

Bearing in mind the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD) which was opened for signature on 5 June 1992 during the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, entered into force on 29 December 1993 and ratified by Cameroon on 14 June 1992, which aims at developing national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity,

⁵ Quote from Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway (1987)

⁶ Report of the UN Secretary-General on Sustainable Development: Harmony with Nature presented to the 65th session of the General Assembly in August 2010

⁷ op. cit. supra, note 3.

⁸ Euronews, « *Les pertes et dommages climatiques divisent le Nord et le Sud* », <https://fr.euronews.com/my-europe/amp/2022/06/01/les-pertes-et-dommages-climatiques-divisent-le-nord-et-le-sud>, consulté le 1/6/2022.

⁹ Ibid.

Considering the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) concluded in Rio de Janeiro on 5 June 1992, which entered into force on 17 January 1995 and ratified by Cameroon on 19 October 1994,

Recalling that the Paris Climate Agreement is the first universal agreement on climate and global warming adopted on 12 December 2015, entered into force on 4 November 2016 and ratified by Cameroon on 12 July 2016 and includes an action plan whose objective is to keep the increase in global temperature "well below" 2 °C and to continue the action undertaken to limit such increase to 1.5 °C,

Further referring to the Declaration of the Ministers of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) on the development and promotion of the green economy in Central Africa, adopted in 2012 in Brazzaville by the ECCAS Ministers in charge of forests, the environment, natural resources and sustainable development, during the ECCAS Ministers' Conference on the Green Economy,

Bearing in mind that the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development recognizes the right of every country to social and economic progress and entrusts States with the responsibility of adopting a sustainable development model,

Considering Goal 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which calls on all actors to preserve and restore terrestrial ecosystems, ensure their sustainable use, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt the loss of biodiversity,

Considering that a strategic objective of the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 is to scale up climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and environmental management to ensure economic growth and sustainable and inclusive development,

Noting that the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment in any form is based primarily on a safe climate, access to water and sanitation, clean air, safe and sustainably produced food, non-toxic environments, healthy ecosystems and respect for biodiversity¹⁰,

Bearing in mind that environmental degradation is an obstacle to the fulfillment of certain specific rights including the right to life, the right to health, to food, to water, to housing, to culture, to development, to property as well as to respect private family life¹¹,

Bearing in mind that in 2014 already, it was noted that:

- 40 per cent of conflicts within States in the last 60 previous years were related to access, use, control and/or management of natural resources¹²
- in 2008, more than 60 food riots occurred in 30 countries around the world, 10 of which resulted in many deaths¹³
- some 135 million persons were likely to be displaced by 2045 due to desertification¹⁴,

¹⁰ *Droits humains, environnement et Covid-19*,

<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/33510/HREFR.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y#:~:text=Les%20d%C3%A9fenseurs%20des%20droits%20humains,environment%20et%20des%20d%C3%A9fenseurs>.

¹¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, http://digitallibrary.un.org/files/A_73_188-fr.

¹² Land in numbers, livelihoods at tipping points, https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/Land_in_%20Numbers_FR.pdf, accessed on 15/4/2022.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The Commission notes with regard to biodiversity loss that:

- between 1970 and 2016, the average decline in vertebrate populations was 68 per cent¹⁵
- agricultural production accounts for 80 percent of global deforestation, 70 per cent of freshwater use and 70 percent of terrestrial biodiversity loss¹⁶
- up to 30 million hectares of arable land are lost each year due to environmental deterioration, industrialisation and urbanisation¹⁷
- nature's decline has a cost: the economic impacts could amount to more than \$479 billion per year¹⁸;

The Commission notes that concerning climate change and pollution, according to the developers of the ecological application now-you-know¹⁹:

- electricity generated accounts for 41 per cent of global CO₂ emissions
- residential installations (heating, etc.) account for 6 per cent of global CO₂ emissions
- industry and construction are responsible for 18 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions
- transport accounts for 25 per cent of global CO₂ emissions
- other sectors, including the tertiary sector, account for 4 per cent of CO₂ emissions;

The Commission notes that:

- Cameroon's "Environmental Health" according to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranks 178th out of 180 countries²⁰
- that the percentage of the population with access to safe water sources is quite low, especially in the North (56.5%), Far North (63.7%), South West (66.6%) and Eastern Regions (67.9%) regions of Cameroon (UNICEF 2018)²¹
- about 34 percent of Cameroon's total forest emissions are due to forest degradation
- in 2017 Cameroon had 12 million hectares of degraded land²²;

The Commission regrets that environmental damage disproportionately affects people, groups and communities that are already in vulnerable situations. This is especially the case for women, children, the poor, minorities, migrants, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities;

The Commission is aware that the effects of climate change have severely affected the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in society, mainly small-scale female farmers in Cameroon²³;

The Commission notes that ensuing crises triggered by the new Corona Virus pandemic further compound problems associated with adequate and equal access to food and land, water and sanitation, housing, livelihoods, decent work, health and other basic needs²⁴;

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, note no. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ <https://nowyouknowproject.com/rechauffement-climatique/chiffres-cles-statistiques/#:~:text=de%20%2D19%25.-,L'Objectif%20de%20r%C3%A9duction%20des%20%C3%A9missions%20de%20gaz%20%C3%A0%20effet,loi%20de%20finances%20en%202021>, accessed on 7/5/2022.

²⁰ *GreeningEUcooperation, profil environnemental du Cameroun-Actualisation 2021*, consulted on 7/5/2022.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Cameroon country gender profile 2022, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Considering that Cameroon in this global village, is facing the triple global crisis of climate change, loss of nature and pollution²⁵,

Aware of the challenges linked to environmental protection, the Commission welcomes Government's efforts to ensure a healthy environment centred on the sustainable management of biodiversity, the fight against climate change and pollution control, especially:

- the promulgation of several laws, the most important of which are Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to lay down the forest, Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 to lay down the law on environmental management, wildlife and fisheries regulations and Law No. 2016/017 of 14 December 2016 to lay down the mining code of Cameroon
- the signing of Decree No. 2011/2582/PM of 23 August 2011 to lay down the modalities for the protection of the atmosphere
- the accession in 2015 to the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (NDT PDC) which consists of restoring 12 million hectares of degraded land by 2030,
- the signature in March 2020, of a partnership agreement for the implementation of the Readiness project on *Capacity building for an increase in the potential for resilience and attenuation of climate change through agroforestry in the North and Far North regions of Cameroon*
- the development of forest plantations to attain the AFR100²⁶ objective of Cameroon to restore 12.06 hectares of mangrove in the coastal region and the three northern Sahel regions by 2030
- twenty legal proceedings pending in the various national courts against poachers in 2020²⁷
- administrative and pecuniary sanctions including the payment of fines by 104 logging companies found to be in breach by the administration in 2022²⁸
- the temporary suspension of about twenty wood processing units in the Littoral Region²⁹
- temporary suspension of logging titles in 2022³⁰
- the implementation of the "Green Campus" project which consists of planting trees in some primary and secondary schools as well as in universities
- the establishment of training institutions in the environment, namely the wildlife school, the water and forestry school in Mbalmayo, and an agronomy faculty at the University of Dschang
- updating Cameroon's first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which sets an unconditional target of 12 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a conditional target of 32 per cent reduction by 2035
- the organisation of capacity-building workshops on climate change adaptation for rural communities, including women, such as the *practical workshop on weather, climate and agriculture* organised in August 2021 by the Ministry of Transport and its partners for farmers in Meri, Diamaré Division, Northern Region
- the calculation of weather forecasts by the National Observatory of Climate Change³¹;

²⁵ According to the Executive Director of UNEP, Inger Andersen, <http://emb.iisd.org/fr/unea5-ocpr5-unep50-summary> consulted on 10/5/2022

²⁶ The African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative is a country-led effort to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030.

²⁷ Report of the Ministry of Justice on the state of human rights in Cameroon in 2020, p. 205

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Two decrees were signed on 4 September 2020 by the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife.

³⁰ Decision No. 0070 of 14 February 2022 of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife.

³¹ 11th edition of the seasonal climate report for June, July and August 2020.

The Commission deplors the fact that despite all the measures taken by the State and development partners and the presence of a very rich legislative framework on environmental management, environmental problems such as anarchic urbanization of marginal areas, progressive development of sensitive areas, abusive use of fertilizers and phytosanitary products, soil erosion and impoverishment, reduction of biodiversity, etc. are still present and sometimes even acute³²;

The Commission notes that the environment in Cameroon is more and more threatened by³³:

- air pollution especially exhaust fumes, industrial and construction sectors
- soil pollution by uncontrolled use of pesticides, fertilizers, the burning of non-biodegradable refuse especially plastics
- water pollution due to poor management of used water from homes and industries as well as the pouring of dirt into rivers
- deforestation for wood for woodwork, heating, construction as well as for agriculture, which degrades the country side, contributes to global warming and consequently to climate change;

The Commission encourages the efforts of development partners and civil society organizations which are working tirelessly to promote environmental conservation in Cameroon;

The Commission warmly congratulates the Cameroonian Céline NJABET, Founder of CAMEROON ECOLOGY organisation and winner of the 2022 Wangari Maathai Prize, awarded on 5 May in Seoul, South Korea, for her commitment to promoting women in forest management;

The Commission invites the Local Authorities to exercise their prerogatives provided for in the field of environment in general and in matters of hygiene and sanitation in particular by the General Code of the Local Authorities of 24 December 2019;

The Commission urges the entire population to increasingly contribute to the protection of our planet through actions to protect the environment for the interest of all;

The Commission recalls Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which calls on governments to develop and implement education and public awareness programmes, train scientific, technical and management personnel, encourage access to information on climate change and its effects, and promote public participation in addressing these issues;

The Commission recalls that the right to a healthy environment is enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon and invites national courts to protect it when citizens bring cases before them;

³²Article published on Wednesday 30 June, 2021 by Céline Guilleux, <https://calenda.org/891824>, consulted on 12/5/2022.

³³Cameroon towards a pollution free planet, <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/21238/Cameroon%20-%20ministerial%20outcome.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y#:~:text=Environmental%20pollution%20is%20increasingly%20a,land%20pollution%20and%20water%20pollution>, consulted on 16/5/2022.

The Commission also recommends that the State support civil society organizations, universities, traditional chieftaincies and all other social components involved in ecological research and innovation;

The Commission recommends the control of the use of pesticides and the sale of non-biodegradable plastic should be reinforced to better protect the soil;

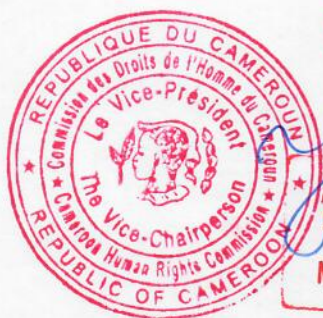
The Commission recommends environmental protection through the setting up of efficient recycling systems and programmes for the sustainable management of waste;

The Commission endorses the twofold plea of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, including Cameroon, calling on the richest countries, which bear the historical responsibility for global warming

- to respect the commitments made to them under the Paris Agreement, particularly in terms of financial contribution and technology transfer for the purpose of mitigation and adaptation to climate change and
- to provide additional financial assistance to vulnerable countries as compensation for the loss and damage suffered as a result of this responsibility.

The Commission will on its part, do everything in its power to further promote and protect human rights in general and especially the right to a healthy environment, through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, and the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations.

Yaoundé, 2 JUIN 2022



Pour le Président
et par Ordre

Dr Galega Gana Raphaël
Ministre Plénipotentiaire Hors Echelle