

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

Numéro Vert : 1523



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 : chrc.cdhc2019@yahoo.com
Web : www.cdhc.cm

Toll-Free Number: 1523

STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE INTERNATIONAL DAY TO PROTECT EDUCATION FROM ATTACK

9 September 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 Commissioners before the Supreme Court sitting in chambers,

Bearing in mind the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/275, adopted on 28 May 2020, which proclaimed 9 September as the *International Day for the Protection of Education against Attack*,

Recalling that this resolution "reaffirms the right to education for all and the importance, in humanitarian emergencies, of ensuring the safety of educational facilities, the creation of conditions conducive to learning and provision of quality education at all levels, including girls, [...] through adequate funding and investment in infrastructure for the well-being of all, in this regard, it recognizes that access to quality education can contribute to the achievement of long-term development goals, it reaffirms the need to protect and respect educational institutions, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, strongly condemns all attacks on schools and the use of schools for military purposes in disregard of those provisions, and encourages efforts to promote the safety and protection of educational institutions in humanitarian emergencies,"¹,

Bearing in mind that the United Nations, through this Day, advocates the preservation of schools as places of protection and safety for students and teachers, and the need to maintain education as a public policy priority,

Recalling that the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 provides that "the State shall guarantee the child's right to education. Primary education shall be compulsory. The organization and supervision of education at all levels shall be the bounden duty of the State",

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/74/275 of 28 May 2020, accessed at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/132/43/PDF/N2013243.pdf?OpenElement>, on 31/08/2022.

Considering that the State of Cameroon is a party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which it ratified on 5 September 1997 and which entered into force on 29 November 1999, Articles 11(1) and 22(1) of which stipulate respectively that 'every child shall have the right to education' and that "States Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to respect, and ensure respect for, the rules of International Humanitarian Law applicable in situations of armed conflict which particularly affect children",

Recalling that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Cameroon on 11 January 1993, provides in Article 19 (1) that "*States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child*",

Recalling further that the same Convention states in Article 20 (3) that "*Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah² of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background*,"

Considering that "[t]he general purpose of education is the training of the child for his or her intellectual, physical and moral development and for his or her harmonious [integration] into society, taking into account the economic, socio-cultural, political and moral factors".³, as stated in Section 4 of Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down the guidelines for education in Cameroon,

Recalling that the Declaration on Safe Schools (DSS) is an intergovernmental policy commitment by States to better protect schools and universities, their students and staff during armed conflict,

Noting that since its adoption in May 2015, the Declaration has been endorsed by 111 States,⁴ including Cameroon⁵ and that four related international conferences were held in May 2015 in Oslo, Norway, in March 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in May 2019 in Palma de Mallorca, Spain and in October 2021 in Abuja, Nigeria,

Bearing in mind that during the fourth international conference held from 25 to 27 October 2021 in Abuja, Nigeria, on the theme Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice, States Parties placed special emphasis on protecting education during armed conflict by taking stock of progress in endorsing and implementing the SDGs, sharing

² "kafalah" is an Arabic language word that refers to the adoption procedure specific to Muslim law that corresponds to a guardianship without filiation for the benefit of a child from an economically disadvantaged background or born out of wedlock, etc. See <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafala>, accessed on 10 August 2022.

³ Section 4, Law No 98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down guidelines on education in Cameroon.

⁴ Plan International, *Protecting Education: Securing Girls' School Learning in Conflict Zones*, p. 7, downloaded and accessed on 18 August 2022.

⁵ On 10 September 2018, the World Coalition for the Protection of Education against Attacks announced that Cameroon was the 81st country and the 22nd member of the African Union to approve the ESD, press release available at: <https://protectingeducation.org/news/cameroon-is-81st-country-to-endorse-safe-schools-declaration/>, accessed on 31/08/2022.

best practices to advance commitments made, and encouraging greater cross-border collaboration to ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach safely,

Whereas the Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a Communiqué on 11 May 2021 condemning attacks on schools and their use for military purposes by non-state armed groups, as well as the abduction of children from schools,

Noting that the principles of the DSE are furthermore included in the African Union Doctrine on Peace Support Operations, adopted in January 2021, with a core commitment to "ensure that schools are not attacked and used for military purposes",

Bearing in mind the UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2601 (2021) on the Protection of Schools from Armed Conflict, which reaffirms the right to education and its fundamental contribution to the achievement of peace and security,

Noting that in the past six years, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) has documented more than 15,000 attacks on education worldwide – including the use of school as military bases – i.e. 11,000 between 2015 and 2019⁶ and 5,000 between 2020 and 2021⁷,

Noting with concern that 9,000 pupils, students, teachers and education personnel worldwide were deliberately killed or injured in armed conflicts between 2020 and 2021. Adding that in the majority of the countries concerned, girls and women were directly targeted because of their gender⁸,

Stressing that in armed conflicts, girls and women are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence in and around schools⁹,

Noting with concern that in the GCPEA's Education Under Attack 2022 report, which covers the period 2020-2021, Cameroon is still among the 28 countries where attacks on education have been the most recurrent worldwide, specifically among the three countries said to be 'heavily affected', with 124 recorded occurrences (all forms combined), resulting in 239 direct victims (injured or dead) among pupils, students and teaching staff¹⁰,

Bearing in mind that there are several forms of attacks on education, school infrastructure and those who embody them, such as the use of schools, secondary schools and universities by armed gangs as operating bases, and the recruitment of young people into armed groups and sexual violence against them on the way to or in schools and universities, in addition to attacks against:

- nursery, primary and secondary schools, mainly targeting infrastructure, as well as recreational facilities and non-formal education sites
- pupils, teachers and other staff in this sector, including off-site incidents

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁷ GCPEA, *L'éducation prise pour cible 2022*, Résumé analytique, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_execsum_fr.pdf, accessed on 8 août 2022.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁰ GCPEA, *Education Under Attack 2022*, « Cameroon Country Profile », <https://eua2022.protectingeducation.org/#end>, accessed on 31/08/2022.

- higher educational institutions such as universities, technical and vocational training institutes, other higher education institutions, and attacks on students, teachers and other higher education personnel, etc.,

Bearing in mind that the GCPEA, in the Executive Summary of its Education for 2022 Report, states that:

- Non-state armed groups kept imposing the boycott of education in the North-West and South-West Regions through violence, affecting more than 700,000 school-age children and forcing more than two-thirds of schools in these two Regions to shut down
- Administrative authorities shut down over 60 schools in October 2020 due to insecurity in the Far North Region
- More than 65 schools were attacked in Cameroon and at least 58 incidents were reported of attacks on students, teachers and other education personnel, most of which occurred between August and December 2021,

Noting that these armed gangs have deliberately burned, looted or damaged schools, secondary schools or universities because they are opposed to an education system or consider these institutions, and their students and teachers, to be agents or symbols of a state system to which they do not belong,

Noting that as at 31 December 2021, the CHRC deplores the fact that about 4,797 nursery, primary and secondary schools are still closed in the regions affected by insecurity in Cameroon¹¹,

Bearing in mind the data communicated by the Presidents of the Regional Councils of the North-West and South-West Regions on 4 August 2022 during the 4th session of the Follow-up Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of the Major National Dialogue, which state that:

- the number of Secondary School teachers prevented from practising their profession due to security unrest in the North West Region is down from 8 500 (2018/2019) to less than 5000 (2021/2022)
- the number of non-functioning secondary schools in the North West Region, although still high, is reduced to 366 (2021/2022) from 489 (2019/2020), while in the South West Region, 564 schools under the Basic Education umbrella remained shut down for the 2021/2022 School Year
- six Secondary School students were abducted during the 2021/2022 School Year in the North West Region, and 346 in total since the 2018/2019 School Year, while a total of five Secondary School students have lost their lives since 2020 due to the armed conflict in the North West Region, including two in the 2021/2022 School Year
- 51 Secondary School teachers and administrative staff in the North West Region were victims of kidnapping in the 2021/2022 academic year, and 308 in total since 2018/2019, while 22 lost their lives in 2021/2022, and 120 in total since 2018/2019
- five secondary schools were attacked, vandalised or occupied by armed gangs during the 2021/2022 School Year, down drastically from 428 in 2018/2019, for the North

¹¹ OCHA Statistics, accessed on January 25, 2022.

West Region, for a total of 489 secondary schools that have been attacked in this Region since 2018. In the South-West Region, since the beginning of the security unrest, 97 primary schools have been burnt down and 100 others vandalised by secessionist terrorists

- there are still three Sub-Divisions in the Bui, Momo and Ngoketunjia Divisions in the North-West Region where no secondary schools are yet functional,

Considering that education is a basic right constituting just, inclusive and peaceful societies and that children, as a vulnerable group in society, should be given special protection,

Noting that it has been observed that the reopening of schools, in communities where this has been made possible in the North West Region, has contributed to the achievement of sustainable peace¹²,

Noting that without access to education, a whole generation of children living in conflict situations will grow up without the skills and ethics necessary to contribute to the economic development of their countries, thus worsening the already precarious situation of millions of children and their families¹³,

Aware of the challenges that pupils, students and learners and their families face as a result of armed conflict, Covid-19 and the effects on their living conditions,

Determined to ensure that the right to education is promoted, protected and guaranteed so that learners can flourish in society,

The Commission welcomes the progress made in the reconstruction of the North-West and South-West Regions – often with the assistance of development partners such as the United Nations Development Programme – as announced by the Steering Committee of the Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the said Regions at its 4th session on 8 July 2022, including the restoration of 30 schools accommodating about 7,000 pupils and the reconstitution of more than 800 lost official records¹⁴, as well as the efforts of the regional executives of these Regions – and their partners – in terms of providing incentives for the continuation of education and the resumption of teaching, including the provision of inclusive education grants and scholarships for the needy and the donation of benches to functional schools in the seven Divisions of the North West Region¹⁵;

The Commission commends the combined efforts of the Government, the military, local authorities (especially the Regional Councils), some NGOs/CSOs and local communities, which

¹² Speech by Prof. Fru F. ANGWAFO III, President of the North-West Regional Council on the occasion of the 4th session of the Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the recommendations of the Major National Dialogue, on 4 August 2022.

¹³ <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/protect-education-day>, accessed on 14 August 2022.

¹⁴ « Reconstruction du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest : des progrès appréciables », *Cameroon Tribune* of 11 July 2022, <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/49573/fr.html/reconstruction-du-nord-ouest-du-sud-ouest-progres-appreciables>, accessed on 5/9/22.

¹⁵ Excerpts from the speech by Prof. Fru F. ANGWAFO III, Chairman of the North West Regional Council, and speech by Mr BAKUMA ELANGO Zacheus, Chairman of the South West Regional Council, on the occasion of the 4th session of the Follow-up Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of the Great National Dialogue, 4 August 2022.

have so far helped to gradually reverse the impact of attacks on education in the North West and South West Regions, as follows¹⁶:

- the number of operational secondary schools increased from 70 (2019/2020 school year) to 204 (2021/2022 school year) - out of 570 in total - in the North West Region, and from 189 out of 425 (2020/2021 school year) to 233 out of 427 (2021/2022 school year) in the South West Region,
- the number of secondary school students enrolled increased from 11 per cent of the expected number (2019/2020) to 30 per cent (2021/2022) in the North West Region, and by 35.54 per cent over the previous year in the South West Region, where the number of students enrolled for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations also increased by 4,324 for the 2022 session,
- an increase of 17 896 in absolute terms, or 6. 16 per cent in relative terms, in the number of primary school pupils enrolled for the 2021-2022 school year compared to the previous year, and an increase in the number of pupils enrolled for official examinations in Basic Education from 37 447 in 2021 to 45 316 in 2022, in the South West Region;

The Commission commends the efforts and bravery of the defence and security forces, which not only work to protect educational institutions in insecure areas and help promote and guarantee education, often by providing lessons themselves to pupils who no longer have civilian teachers, but also actively repel aggressors and gradually restore a climate of security. This has also led to the return of 518,853 previously IDPs as of 21 December 2021, including 135,257 in the Far North, 251,647 in the North West and 131,949 in the South West, with the support of state and non-state actors¹⁷;

The Commission especially condemns in the strongest terms the attack on 6 September 2022 on an intercity bus from Douala to Kumba carrying passengers, the majority of whom were parents who had travelled to the economic capital to begin the new school year for their children. The attack occurred on the Kumba - Buea highway around Ekona town, in Muyuka Sub-Division, Fako Division, South-West Region, resulting in at least six deaths (a woman and five men) and eight injured (six women and two men, including a teacher);

The Commission also strongly condemns all other attacks perpetrated by armed terrorist and secessionist gangs who continue to sow a climate of fear among the public by carrying out acts of terror, particularly targeting education, as in the following cases, for example:

- the burning of the Molyko Government Primary School in Buea and the Queen of Rosary Catholic College in Mamfe, in the South-West Region, on 8 and 11 February 2022 respectively
- the attack of 24 November 2021, which caused the death of four pupils and a teacher at the Ekondo-Titi Bilingual High School in the South West Region
- the explosion of an improvised exploding device in a lecture theatre on 10 November 2021, which left 11 students of the University of Buea, in the South-West Region, seriously injured;

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ UNHCR statistics, December 2021, file:///C:/Users/asus-M/Downloads/CMR-Stats_January_2022.pdf, accessed on 31/08/2022.

The Commission strongly condemns Boko Haram's sporadic attacks - the latest of which was on 24 August in the Katikime village in the Darak commune of the Logone-et-Chari Division - which, since 2014, have been undermining Government and private efforts to promote education, especially for girls, in parts of the Far North Region. Boko Haram is attacking education head-on by recruiting young boys as fighters and reducing young girls to sexual slavery or using them as human bombs, while attacking buildings dedicated to education;

The Commission vehemently decries the abuse and use of Internally-Displaced Children (IDPs) due to the prevailing security situation in the Far North, North West and South West Regions;

The Commission urges the members of the armed secessionist terrorist bands, and those of Boko Haram, to immediately and irrevocably cease all forms of attack against education;

The Commission urges the Government to continue and intensify its efforts to prevent attacks on education, to ensure peace and security, in consonance with the Head of State who declared, in his speech to the Nation on 31 December 2021, that "[i]n spite of the difficulties facing our country, we have not ceased to be held in high esteem at the international level. The confidence Cameroon enjoys among our partners is the fruit of the efforts we make every day to ensure that Cameroon remains the haven of peace and stability it has always been. To achieve this, we have increased our efforts to ensure that peace and security reign throughout the national territory";

The Commission recommends, therefore, that the Ministry of Defence, according to the State's commitments under the DSE, should ensure that no schools or educational establishments are used by Defence Forces in these Regions for any military purpose whatsoever, at the risk of armed terrorist groups using schools as a pretext to target, attack or destroy them;

The Commission recommends that the reconstruction of the North-West and South-West Regions, together with that of the Far-North Region, be speeded up by prioritising road and education infrastructure, and organising peace crusades in secure public places such as schools, universities, markets, businesses, etc.;

The Commission urges more partners to invest alongside the State in this direction, reiterating the relevant terms of the above-mentioned UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/275 of 28 May 2020, which calls for "adequate funding and investment in infrastructure";

The Commission encourages the Government, at the start of the new school and university year, to enshrine in writing its stated intention to ensure "*free and priority access to schools for children from displaced families*".¹⁸, and to ensure that it is systematically applied by all school heads throughout the country, so that all IDP children (with their families or living with host families) can effectively benefit from it without hindrance¹⁹;

¹⁸ The Minister of Territorial Administration made this announcement during his tour of the West Region on 27 and 28 August 2019, to monitor and evaluate progress in the implementation of the Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Plan offered by the Head of State to IDPs.

¹⁹ Vincent Fouodji, « Les frais de scolarité sont-ils gratuits pour les élèves déplacés ? », *Echo des Droits humains*, <https://echodesdroitshumains.com/frais-de-scolarite-gratuits-pour-les-eleves-deplaces/>, accessed on 5/9/22.

The Commission urges IDP families or families hosting IDP children to make the necessary efforts to ensure their access to education, efforts such as registering them with the Social Action Department of the Regional Delegation of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Region where they are located, so that they can benefit, in the same way as children of parents with disabilities or who are destitute, from measures to exempt them from paying school fees;

The Commission recommends once again that the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development extend the national birth certificate campaign, launched on 1 April 2022 with the cooperation of the regional councils and local authorities, to include actions specifically aimed at IDPs, particularly children who have lost their birth certificates during armed attacks or during their flight;

The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Justice should make it easier for IDP children to obtain birth certificates, by reducing or even waiving the costs of the relevant procedures (supplementary judgement, judgement recognising a child or rectifying birth certificates), so that they can continue to enjoy the benefits of education;

The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Public Health take appropriate measures to implement a strategy for the systematic physical and psychological care of survivors and relatives of survivors of armed attacks and particularly attacks on education;

The Commission recommends that the Ministries of Basic Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education ensure that education and teaching policies do not exacerbate conflicts, but are conducive to the physical and psychosocial protection of learners, their teachers and ultimately to the return of peace;

The Commission further recommends that those involved in the *judicial system* should continue to hunt down the perpetrators and sponsors of acts of attack against education, wherever they may be hiding, and to punish them to the full extent of the law²⁰ ;

Finally, **the Commission encourages** international humanitarian organisations, Civil Society Organisations, religious groups and other philanthropic organisations, and all people of goodwill, to provide educational assistance to all child survivors of the attacks on education.

The Commission, for its part, **will spare no effort** to continue promoting and protecting human rights and especially the right to education, through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, handling of complaints, self-initiated investigations, and prevention of torture through visits to all detention facilities, including through its toll-free number **1523**.

Pour le Président
et par Ordre

Yaoundé, 08 SEPT 2022



²⁰ Speech of the Head of State to the Nation, 31 December 2021, p.5.