

COMMISSION DES DROITS  
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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

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CAMEROON HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Toll-Free Number.- 1523

STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
TO MARK THE 32<sup>ND</sup> INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS  
1 October 2022

Theme: *THE RESILIENCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF OLDER WOMEN*

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 joint chambers,

*Bearing in mind* the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 45/106 which, on 14 December 1990, proclaimed 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons

*Welcoming the fact* that the 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the International Day for the Rights of Older Persons in 2022 is being celebrated under the theme: The resilience and contributions of older women,

*Recalling* that the overall objective of the Day is to "facilitate access and social integration of older women in the process of sustainable development" in a context where "older women continue to make significant contributions to the political, civil, economic, social and cultural life<sup>1</sup> and where "their experiences remain largely invisible and ignored, limited by gender-based disadvantages"<sup>2</sup>,

*Recalling further* that under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons adopted on 31 January 2016, and ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, older persons are defined as "persons aged 60 years or over [...]", and "the terms 'old', 'elderly' shall be interpreted in the same manner",

*Bearing in mind* that, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), old age is defined as "a progressive and irreversible process that involves changes in body tissues and functions over time"<sup>3</sup>,

*Mindful of the Constitution* of 18 January 1996 which provides in its Preamble that "the nation shall protect [...] the elderly",

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Terms of reference of the Ministry of Social Affairs to mark the 32nd International Day for the Rights of Older Persons as prepared in February 2022.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.minas.cm/fr/component/k2/item/2-personnes-agees.html>, accessed on 17 September 2022.



**Considering also** that on 20 June 1989, Cameroon ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which was adopted on 27 June 1981, entered into force on 21 October 1989, and whose Article 18(4) states that "The aged and the disabled shall also have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs",

**Noting that** the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006 and ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, expressly refers to older persons in its Articles 25 and 28, relating respectively to health, an adequate standard of living and social protection,

**Bearing in mind** that General Recommendation No. 18 (1991) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), deals with "the double discrimination suffered by women with disabilities (as women and as persons with disabilities)"<sup>4</sup> calls upon States Parties to ensure that women "*have equal access to education and employment, health services and social security, and can participate in all aspects of cultural life*"<sup>5</sup>,

**Recalling that** Cameroon took part in the launch, in 2020, of the "*Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)*", initiated by Mr Antonio GUTERRES, the United Nations Secretary-General,

**Recalling further** that the Decade aims to mobilize States and Communities to take collective action "*in four areas: changing the way we think, feel and act about age and ageism; strengthening communities to empower older persons; providing integrated person-centred care and age-friendly primary health services; and providing access to quality long-term care for older persons who need it*"<sup>6</sup>,

**Observing** that these different areas are in line with the five guiding principles set out in the United Nations Resolution No. 46/91 of 16 December 1991 on the advancement of older persons, namely independence, participation, care, personal development and dignity,

**Noting further** that, according to statistics published on the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs in November 2018, Cameroon is estimated to have approximately 1,200,000 elderly persons living mostly in rural areas, with a relative majority of women<sup>7</sup>,

**Observing** that, according to the United Nations, the percentage of the global population aged 60 and over will almost double between 2015 and 2050, from 12 per cent to 22 per cent<sup>8</sup>,

**Observing** that the life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa is much lower than in developed countries, but that in reality, many Africans are living longer today. According to WHO forecasts, the population of elderly people in sub-Saharan Africa, which was 43 million in 2010, is expected to reach 67 million by 2025 and 163 million by 2050<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>4</sup> Guide de formation Convention relative aux droits des personnes handicapées, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommandations/recomm-fr.htm>, accessed on 17 September 2022.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/2021-unidop-digital-equity-for-all-ages.html>, accessed on 6/9/2022.

<sup>7</sup> [Minas.gov.cm/index](https://minas.gov.cm/index)., accessed on 6 September 2022.

<sup>8</sup> [UN.org/fr/observances/older-persons-day](https://un.org/fr/observances/older-persons-day) accessed on 6 September 2022.

<sup>9</sup> WHO, Promoting healthy ageing in the African Region, <https://www.afro.who.int/fr/news/promotion-du-vieillessement-en-bon-etat-de-sante-dans-la-region-africaine>, 2013, accessed on 6 September 2022.



**Recalling** that poverty and malnutrition contribute significantly to the prevalence of disease and disability among most elderly people in Africa. This is partly due to the low priority given to the elderly in the nutrition policies of sub-Saharan African countries<sup>10</sup>,

**Recalling further** that during epidemics or emergencies such as natural disasters and armed conflicts, special attention is not given to elderly refugees or Internally Displaced Persons, who are particularly vulnerable<sup>11</sup>,

**Considering** that older people are often not given the same level of care as other vulnerable groups in society. This makes their daily living conditions difficult,

**The Commission**, together with the Association of Human Rights Defenders of Cameroon (ADHAC) and the Rural Youth Futures Initiative Association, **observes** that some elderly people, especially women in some regions of the country, no longer have the strength to carry on with their farm work and as a result, they fall into begging or are expelled from society because they are accused of witchcraft practices,

**Determined** to ensure that the rights of older persons are promoted, protected and guaranteed to enable them to develop harmoniously in society,

**The Commission reiterates** its appreciation of the efforts of the United Nations Working Group on Ageing, which since 2010 has brought together all the contributions of States, National Human Rights Institutions, and national, regional and international human rights organizations to develop an international convention specific to older persons that will strengthen the rights of this vulnerable group,

**The Commission specifically takes note** of the signing of Decree No. 2021/752 of 28 December 2021 to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of the Elderly, adopted on 31 January 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the provisions of Article 9 of which specifically address the "protection of older women",

**The Commission, therefore, recalls** that the Protocol calls on States Parties to:

- *ensure the protection of the rights of older women from violence, sexual abuse and discrimination based on gender*
- *put in place legislation and other measures that guarantee the protection of Older Women against abuses related to property and land rights*
- *adopt appropriate legislation to protect the right of inheritance of Older Women",*

**The Commission further recalls** that, like the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted on 11 July 2003 and ratified on 13 September 2012, particularly protects older women against sexual violence and discrimination, and guarantees the right to employment of this vulnerable group in its Article 22, dedicated to the "*Special Protection of Older Women*".

While welcoming the inclusion of the needs and expectations of older persons in the State's public policies for protecting and promoting their rights, through the establishment of practices by relevant areas or principle<sup>12</sup> concerning:

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>12</sup> Responses of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cameroon to the questionnaire of the Independent Expert in charge of promoting the exercise by older persons of all human rights on the best practices contained in laws intended to promote and protect the Rights of the elderly in Cameroon, February 2016.



- the practice of "*aid and assistance to socially vulnerable people, including the elderly*" in the area of social protection, independence and autonomy
- the official launch on 1 October 2014 of a "*Senior Citizens Competence File*" in the domain of education, training, lifelong learning and retraining, to mark the 24th International Day of Older Persons
- the development in 2011 of a "*Guide to Healthy and Active Ageing*", Volume 1, in the area of independence and self-reliance in line with the "*ageing well*" strategy
- the development of the "*Project for the realisation of 'The Great Encyclopaedia of the Past and Future / Transmission of Heritage Knowledge of Cameroon' LGEPP/TSPC*", in the domain of participation,

**The Commission remains concerned** about the many pitfalls in implementing the measures to protect and promote the rights of older persons in these public policies. These include:

- the lack of monitoring/evaluation of the practice of "*Assistance and relief for the socially vulnerable including the elderly*"
- the development of the "*Senior Citizens Competence File*", which is still in progress
- the "*ageing well*" strategy, through the development of volume 1 of the "*Guide to Healthy and Active Ageing*", which does not have a real evaluation tool
- the "*Project for the realisation of the 'Great Encyclopaedia of the Past and Future'*", whose implementation is still awaited,

**The Commission is still concerned** about the increase in cases of sexual violence against elderly women in rural areas over the past 12 months

**The Commission recommends** that the Government takes resolute measures to disseminate the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of the Elderly, and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women, which provides for special protection for the elderly women.

**The Commission recommends** that the Government puts in place a genuine policy for the training and recruitment of volunteers, to integrate them into national programmes for the care of the elderly

**The Commission recommends** that the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family increase the number of discussion platforms for sharing the experiences of older women in various socio-economic and cultural fields

**The Commission recommends** that the Ministry of Public Health sets up strategies to take the elderly on board by subsidising the treatment of degenerative and neurodegenerative diseases and the care of elderly women who are victims of sexual violence, and those who are victims of all other forms of violence that affect their physical and moral integrity

**The Commission recommends** that the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education initiates, including in conjunction with the Civil Society Organisations that are partners of that ministry, training to promote intergenerational dialogue, so that older people can contribute effectively to the construction of an active and informed youth

**The Commission recommends** that the Ministry of Social Affairs involve Civil Society Organisations working for the care of the elderly in the search for external funding and in the implementation of projects for the promotion and protection of their rights



On the occasion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the International Day of Older Persons, the Commission insists on the need to redouble efforts to protect older women against sexual abuse and all gender-based discrimination

*The Commission*, for its part, *will spare no effort* to continue to promote and protect human rights and especially the rights of older persons through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, handling of complaints, self-initiated investigations, and in the context of the prevention of torture, through visits to all detention facilities and the use of its **toll-free number: 1523**.

29 SEPT 2022

Yaounde,.....



James MOUANGUE KOBILA