

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 WORLD BRAILLE DAY

4 January 2023

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 that the World Braille Day is celebrated every year on 4 January, marking the birth date of the teacher and musician Louis BRAILLE, born in 1809, who became blind at the age of three and invented Braille in 1829, thus improving the writing system set up by Charles BARBIER, known as sonography, which was restricted to sounds only and did not include spelling, punctuation and mathematical signs¹,

Recalling that Braille is a true alphabetic code constructed solely from two rows and three dots and enables the composition of sixty-four combinations including the alphabet, accents, punctuation, and musical characters²,

Recalling that the World Blind Union declared 4 January as World Braille Day, to commemorate the birth of Louis BRAILLE and mobilise people into action for more equality and autonomy for people with visual impairments³,

Noting that the UN General Assembly, by Resolution A/RES/73/161 of 17 December 2018, proclaimed 4 January as World Braille Day "*celebrated since 2019, is observed to raise awareness of the importance of Braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for blind and partially sighted people*"⁴,

¹ <https://www.journee-mondiale.com/165/journee-mondiale-du-braille.html>, accessed on 23 December 2022.

² *Idem*.

³ <https://worldblindunion.org/fr/international-statements/>, accessed on 23 December 2022.

⁴ Article 1 of Resolution A/RES/73/161 of 17 December 2018 on World Braille Day.

Recalling that, in this same Resolution, the word "Braille" refers to "*a tactile representation of alphabetic and numerical symbols using a series of six dots that can represent letters, numbers, scientific, mathematical and even musical symbols*",

Noting that, in the 11th International Classification of Diseases, the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁵, distinguishes five categories of visual disability, in descending order presented thus:

- Category 5.- Absolute blindness: no light perception, including no eye.
- Category 4.- Binocular corrected visual acuity of 1/50th but preserved light perception or field of vision less than 5°.
- Category 3.- Binocular corrected visual acuity less than 1/20th and greater than or equal to 1/50th.
- Category 2.- Binocular corrected visual acuity less than 1/10th and greater than or equal to 1/20th.
- Category 1.- Binocular corrected visual acuity of less than 3/10th and greater than or equal to 1/10th with a visual field of at least 20°.

Noting therefore that the persons concerned with Braille writing are those suffering from absolute blindness whose visual impairment leads to an inability to perform reading or writing activities,

Considering that Braille is one method of compensating for blindness and alleviates certain communication difficulties through sensory channels - such as touch - in the same way as the white cane, alongside other means of compensation through hearing, perception of mass, smell, memorization and human assistance,

Considering that Braille allows the blind and vision-impaired to access the same books and magazines as those intended for visual reading, as defined in resolution A/RES/73/161 of 17 December 2018 and in Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008,

Mindful that this Convention, ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, specifically sets out, in Articles 9, 21 and 24, the rules concerning accessibility, education, freedom of expression and opinion, access to information and written communication, as well as social inclusion as measures necessary for the protection and promotion of persons with visual disabilities,

Bearing in mind the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print-disabled, adopted on 27 June 2013, entered into force on 30 September 2016, and ratified by Cameroon on 27 April 2021, obliges ratifying States to ensure that published works and books are produced in accessible formats, such as Braille,

⁵ <https://www.who.int/fr/news-rooms/fact-sheets/detail/blindness-and-visual-impairment>, accessed on 27 December 2022.

Bearing in mind that these African human rights instruments calls upon States to take positive measures, including exempting visually impaired persons from certain taxes and fees, to enable them to access the same books and magazines as those intended for visual reading;

Noting that there is no specific national policy for the protection and promotion of blind and vision-impaired persons, but rather a general national policy for persons with disabilities,

Recalling that the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 states that "*the nation shall protect [...] disabled persons*" and that the blind and partially sighted are classified as physically incapacitated persons within the meaning of Section 3 of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities,

Noting that, Articles 25 and 26 of the same Act, states, "*special education consists in introducing physically, visually, mentally and multiply handicapped persons to appropriate methods of communication to enable them to access normal schooling and, later on, vocational training*" and that "*the State and the Decentralised Communities, civil society and, where appropriate, international organisations shall set up inclusive education structures and training institutions for trainers per type of disability*".

Recalling that Articles 4⁶, 20⁷ and 22⁸ of Decree No. 2018/6233/PM of 26 July 2018, which fixes the procedures for the application of the above-mentioned law of 13 April 2010, require public and private structures to adopt specific measures to facilitate access to information for blind and visually impaired persons in the fields of education, vocational training, roads, built-up areas, and consumer affairs;

Recalling that through Resolution ACHPR/Res. 305 (EXT.OS/XVIII) of 7 August 2015 on Accessibility of Persons with Disabilities, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) urges States Parties, the African Union and its Organs, to ensure that all information for people, and particularly persons with disabilities, is disseminated in accessible formats and using disability-friendly technologies,

The Commission, furtherance to the important measures taken by the State to strengthen the legal-institutional framework for the rights of persons with disabilities in 2021, **commend additional efforts** made in 2022, such as:

- the insertion in the new range of CEMAC banknotes, put into circulation on 15 December 2022, security and written communication signs, particularly curved lines printed in raised relief for recognition by the visually impaired and the blind

⁶ See the second indent of Section 4 of Decree No. 2018/8233/PM of 26 July 2018, which states that "*The State promotes inclusive education and vocational training for people with disabilities through the development of standards in school, university and vocational training programs for teachers to learn sign language and braille.*"

⁷ See the 8th indent of Article 20 (2) of the same Decree which provides that "the transport assistance referred to in paragraph 1 includes the provision of Braille information for persons with visual impairment."

⁸ See the first indent of Article 22(2) of the same Decree, according to which access to communication and information, through audiovisual processes, is provided particularly through "*labeling in Braille and large print on consumer products*".

- the holding of the 2022 session of the National Committee for the Rehabilitation and Socio-Economic Reintegration of People with Disabilities (CONRHA) on 13 September 2022, to assess the level of mobilisation of stakeholders, inclusive actions and multi-sector perspectives for implementing the government policy in favour of persons with disabilities⁹
- the undertaking on 21 July 2022 by the Minister of Public Health, the Minister of Social Affairs and the World Health Organisation representative to upgrade the technical facilities of the Cardinal Paul Émile LÉGER National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (hereinafter: "CNRPH")¹⁰
- the signing of Order No. 040/PM of 19 May 2022 establishing the terms and conditions for granting age exemptions to persons with disabilities in administrative competitive entrance exams and civil service recruitment
- the inclusion, in the General Tax Code updated to 1 January 2022, of Decision No. 00000340/MINFI/DGI/LRI/L of 7 May 2019 setting the list of specialised materials and equipment for persons with disabilities benefiting from the exemption from value-added tax, under the provisions of Article 128 (21) of the same General Tax Code, including the list of specific educational materials for visually impaired children¹¹.

The Commission, likewise, encourages the multi-sector efforts of development partners and civil society organizations that work tirelessly to protect and promote the rights of blind and visually impaired people in Cameroon, particularly through:

- the advocacy of the *Club des jeunes aveugles réhabilitation du Cameroun* (CJARC) for the inclusion of Braille transcription in schools, under the Launch Ceremony, to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities organized by the CHRC at the CNRPH of Yaoundé, on 29 November 2022
- the organization, at the Hilton Hotel from 21 to 22 September 2022, of the seminar on the appropriation of legal instruments for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities by the National Association of the Blind of Cameroon; this was followed by a workshop on building the capacity of vulnerable group of persons on the legal framework for the promotion and protection of their Rights at the Meumi Palace Hotel.

⁹ <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/51042/fr.html/promotion-droits-personnes-handicapees-le-cameroun>, accessed on 23 November 2022.

¹⁰ <https://www.minsante.cm/site/?q=fr/content/centre-de-r%C3%A9habilitation-des-handicap>, accessed on 23 November 2022

¹¹ This concerns a list of 22 materials published in the General Tax Code, revised edition as of January 1, 2022, on page 635 which includes: reams of Braille papers (Canson), thermoform papers (Brailion papers), talking scientific calculator, Talking Watch, Digital Tape Recorder, Braille Embosser (Braille Printer), Braille Rulers (School Supplies), Braille Embosser Meters (Braille Printer), Specialized or Adapted Keyboard (Hand Keyboard), virtual keyboards, voice telephones, embossed rules, fluorescent low voltage lamp, ordinary white canes, electronic white canes, algebraic cubes, Perkins machines, braille dolls, velcro/thread board, of the board of wool and pencils.

The Commission positively notes:

- the registration, on 31 December 2022, of 19 CSOs in the file of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) affiliated to the CHRC, including seven organizations and five structures specialized in the promotion and protection of the blind and visually impaired, as follows:
 - *the Association nationale des aveugles du Cameroun (ANAC)*
 - *the Association pour la formation et l'intégration sociale des aveugles (ACFISA)*
 - *the Centre d'intégration scolaire et professionnelle pour aveugles et malvoyants (CISPAM)*
 - *the Centre des jeunes aveugles (CJAD)*
 - *the Centre de réhabilitation des déficients visuels (CRDV)*
 - *the Centre privé de formation des aveugles (CPAM)*
 - *the Christadelphian School for the Blind and Handicapped (CSBH)*
 - *the Club des jeunes aveugles réhabilités du Cameroun (CJARC)*
 - *the Dynamique des aveugles et malvoyants intellectuels du Cameroun (DAMIC)*
 - *the Integrated School for the Blind (ISFB)*
 - *the Rehabilitation Institute for the Blind (Bulu Blind Centre)*
 - *the Saint Joseph's Children and Adult Home (SAJOCAM).*

The Commission equally applauds the contributions of technologies to the social integration process of visually impaired persons, as well as the efforts of promoters of private social works, particularly, the Centres for the Guidance of Visually Impaired People, contribute very usefully to perpetuating Braille.

The Commission nevertheless is concerned about:

- the low recruitment rates for blind and partially sighted persons in the public service or private sector
- the difficulty in accessing health care facilities and services due to their vulnerable situation
- the low level of interest in the inclusion of modules on Braille specialisation in teacher training programmes
- the absence of signage in Braille and in formats that are easy to read and understand in built-up spaces and/or open to the public, and on consumer products.

Determined that the Rights of persons with visual impairments be promoted, protected and guaranteed to enable them to excel and be performant in society,

The Commission recommends that public authorities equip support structures for persons with visual impairments with teaching materials such as braille tablets, punches, braille paper, etc.,

The Commission recommends that the Ministries of Basic Education, Secondary and Higher Education equip schools and universities with Braille transcription materials and train teachers in Braille and other related skills,

The Commission strongly recommends to the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development, as well as to all regional and local authorities to ensure that disability persons are absorbed and cater for at the different levels of governance; and have access to governance structure, information, services and employment at the regional and local level,

The Commission, for its part, ***will spare no effort*** to further promote and protect the rights of the blind and visually impaired through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, visits to detention facilities, investigations, handling complaints and conducting self-initiated investigations,

The Commission urges any victim or witness of a Human Rights violation – and particularly of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – to report, including through the **toll-free number 1523**.

Yaoundé, on 03 January 2023



James MOUANGUE KOBILA