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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace – Work – Fatherland

**CAMEROON HUMAN
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**STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 16TH INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

6 FEBRUARY 2023

**Theme.- *Partnership with Men and Boys to Transform Social and Gender Norms
to End Female Genital Mutilation***

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 United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. A/RES/67/146 of 20 December 2012, which commits States and all relevant actors to observe 6 February each year as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, to "intensify awareness-raising campaigns and take concrete action against female genital mutilation",

Noting that, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is defined as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons"¹,

¹ WHO, "Female genital mutilation", last update: 31 January 2023", <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>, accessed on 31 January 2023.

Noting also that the WHO distinguishes between four categories of female genital mutilation² :

- Type 1.- clitoridectomy³
- Type 2.- female circumcision⁴
- Type 3.- infibulations⁵ ;
- Type 4.- the non-classified⁶,

Considering that the above-mentioned Resolution of 20 December 2012 calls on all stakeholders – including government officials, Civil Society, the media, local leaders, religious and traditional leaders, educational institutions, parents and families - to rally around the elimination of all forms of female genital mutilation, especially through the scaling up of activities to promote and protect the rights of women and the girl child, and prevent such practices, which have devastating and irreversible impacts on the victims,

Considering that the promotion actions recommended in the above-mentioned Resolution target:

- the direct participation of girls, boys, women and men in activities aimed at eliminating harmful behaviours and practices, especially all forms of FGM, which adversely affect girls
- education free of gender stereotypes in the choice of specialisations and conducive to girls' empowerment
- the providing of greater financial support for initiatives at all levels to end such practices
- the designing of campaigns and information and awareness-raising programmes for the general public,

Considering further that the preventive and protective actions prescribed in that Resolution are aimed at:

- all necessary proactive measures to protect girls and women from such practices

² *Ibid.*

³ This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals), and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans).

⁴ This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).

⁵ This is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans.

⁶ The non-classified include all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g., pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

- the punishing of the perpetrators of FGM, accompanied by informative and educational activities, especially by systematically applying the legal instruments that prohibit that form of violence
- reparation for surviving victims by providing assistance to women and girls who have undergone or are at risk of undergoing FGM and by setting up social, psychological and care services to help them
- taking measures to improve their health, including sexual and reproductive health,

Emphasizing that the theme of the 2023 edition, *Partnering with men and boys to transform social and gender norms, to end female genital mutilation*, was decided by the UN Population Fund/UN Children's Fund Joint Programme (also known as the UNFPA-UNICEF Programme)⁷ to eliminate female genital mutilation⁸,

Further emphasising that this theme challenges us to strengthen actions to promote the eradication of FGM through the direct participation of girls, boys, women and men,

Recognizing that, although the current global situation of FGM shows some progress in recent decades with 1/3 of girls less likely to undergo this harmful practice than 30 years ago, there is still much to be done and actions to achieve the total elimination of FGM should be scaled up at a rate 10 times faster to reach the global goal of zero incidents by 2030⁹,

Considering many cultural and economic factors that contribute to the widespread prevalence of these harmful practices render the abandonment of FGM difficult for girls, women and communities, as it is a deeply entrenched social norm that leads society to accept violence against girls, most often from childhood to the age of 15, and against women¹⁰,

Considering also that WHO deeply regrets the new so-called "modern" form of the prevalence of such practices, i.e. the medicalisation of FGM, understood as FGM practised by trained health professionals, instead of traditional mutilators, with the illusion of rendering the practice safer and finding an excuse to legitimise it,

⁷ UNFPA, "Programme conjoint UNFPA-UNICEF sur les mutilations génitales féminines.- Intensifier les efforts pour éradiquer une violation des Droits de l'homme", Last update: June 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/fr/protection/programme-conjoint-UNFPA-UNICEF-mutilations-genitales-feminines>, accessed on 27 January 2023.

⁸ <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/female-genital-mutilation-day>, accessed on 17 January 2023.

⁹ <https://www.unfpa.org/events/international-day-zero-tolerance-female-genital-mutilation>, accessed on 1 February 2023.

¹⁰ UNICEF, "Que sont les mutilations génitales féminines ? Le point en 7 questions.- Gros plan sur une pratique néfaste qui touche des millions de filles dans le monde", Last update: 25 February 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/fr/recits/mutilations-genitales-feminines>, accessed on 27 January 2023.

Considering further that the UNICEF regrets that instead of abolishing FGM, some communities continue to practise it in secret, "*which means that girls are being excised at a younger age in total secrecy*"¹¹,

Bearing in mind that FGM has no health benefits for girls and women, but usually causes severe complications in the immediate healing of the wound, severe pain, excessive bleeding, and swelling of the genital tissue; it equally exerts long-term effects such as urinary, vaginal, menstrual and sexual problems, increased risk of childbirth complications and death of newborns, and the need for further surgery at a later stage; this is the case, for example, when the mutilation leads to the closure or narrowing of the vaginal orifice (type 3), which will have to be reopened to allow the woman to have sexual intercourse and give birth,

Bearing in mind furthermore that FGM also undermines the physical and moral integrity of the victims by exposing them to infertility, the risk of HIV transmission and loss of life, and thus contributes to the loss of self-esteem and self-acceptance, and also the loss of opportunities for an intimate and sexual life that is both sensory and fulfilling for these young girls and women,

Noting that all forms of genital mutilation and harmful practices against girls and women constitute a gross violation of the fundamental rights of these vulnerable groups, which are not only unjustifiable but also condemned by national, African and international human rights instruments which call upon States to take initiatives and commitments to put an end to female genital mutilation

Considering that the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 states that "*every person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment*" and that "*the Nation shall protect and promote the family which is the natural foundation of human society. It shall protect women, the young...*",

Considering further that the State of Cameroon is a party to several instruments that require the combating of FGM, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Declaration, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

¹¹ *Ibid.*

and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Cairo Declaration for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation,

The Commission is pleased with the activities it has organised and participated in on GBV, particularly:

- participation in the launch of the *16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women and Girls campaign* organized by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) in Yaoundé on 25 November 2022, and the activities marking the closing of that campaign in Bertoua from 8 to 10 December 2022
- the workshop on *the Organisation of Platforms for Discussion between Survivors, Human Rights Defenders, Defence and Security Forces and Public Administrations* to raise awareness of violence against women in times of conflict, Workshop organized by the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development in Yaoundé, from 27 to 28 May 2022
- the validation workshop of the National Strategy to Combat GBV and the Action Plan to Combat FGM as well as the related terms of reference, organized by MINPROFF in Ebolowa from 28 June to 1 July 2022
- 2nd Generation Validation Workshop of the National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security and Related Resolutions", organized by MINPROFF in Mbalmayo from 9 to 10 August 2022
- The National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence Review Workshop, organized by MINPROFF in Mbankomo from 29 to 31 August 2022
- Youth and Women Capacity Building Workshop, organized in Bafoussam by the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education from 29 September to 1 October 2022;

The Commission also applauds the gradual adoption by the population of the strategy based on the awareness of everyone on the consequences of genital mutilation,

The Commission commends Government measures taken with the aim of amplifying the mobilization actions aimed at eliminating female genital mutilation, such as:

- the validation of the National Strategy to Combat GBV in Cameroon 2022-2026 and the National Action Plan to Eliminate FGM in Cameroon 2022-2026
- the implementation of integrated GBV victim management systems to improve services offered and management of survivors
- awareness raising about GBV prevention, reproductive health, and prevention of harmful traditional practices among institutional and non-institutional actors, as well as in formal and non-formal education

- the establishment and strengthening of Gender Desks within the Police and Gendarmerie units of the city of Maroua, to increase the awareness of the Defence and Security Forces about their role in protecting GBV victims and disseminating legal instruments concerning these harmful practices,

The Commission observes and regrets that after the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family had undertaken to bring the Goulfey and Maltam female circumcisers of the Logone-et-Chari Division to cease this reprehensible practice a little over three years ago and that, almost in unison, these women had vowed not to do it again, resources were not allocated to encourage female circumcisers to engage in other lucrative activities instead of female circumcision, leading several of them to go underground;

Although cases of FGM were not brought to the Commission's attention during 2022, the institution is aware that some communities still practice them clandestinely and girls are, therefore, circumcised younger in the greatest silence and secrecy; *the Commission therefore strongly and energetically condemns* such dishonourable and dehumanizing practices that nothing can justify;

The Commission reminds everyone that FGM and the attack on the growth of an organ constitute offences sanctioned by Section 277 *et seq* of law no. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code of the Republic of Cameroon;

The Commission recommends the use of “gender” and not just “women/girls” as a unit of analysis of the problem and solutions to end FGM, calling on all actors to give it greater attention, working with men and boys to expose and address gender-related policy needs that are more related to structural inequalities,

The Commission recommends that the role of boys, men and local communities in the prevention and control of FGM be further examined and strengthened, including by traditional and religious authorities;

The Commission urges traditional leaders to change customary practices that support and tolerate FGM and to eliminate stereotypes that legitimize violence against women;

The Commission recommends that the Government should make available to the mutilators appropriate financial and material resources to bring them to carry out other income-generating activities in place of excision;

The Commission recommends to all key actors – including government officials, civil society, the media, local leaders, educational institutions and parents – to increase women’s awareness of the various forms of protection and recourse available to them and

to encourage women to report all forms of violence at an early stage, regardless of their age, their social status and religion;

For its part, *the Commission reaffirms* that it will spare no effort to continue raising awareness on violence against women with a view to the elimination of FGM through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding, and the handling of complaints or self-initiated investigations.

The Commission calls upon women, girls, men and boys to break the silence by denouncing or reporting any case of violations of human rights, especially genital mutilation of which they have been victims or witnesses, including through its **toll-free number, 1523**.

Yaoundé, 05 FEB 2023



James MOUANGUE KOBILA