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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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DE LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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CAMEROON HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION

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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
TO MARK THE 38<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March 2023

**Theme - DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality**

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 the members before the Supreme Court sitting in Assembled Chambers,

*Bearing in mind* that it was by UN General Assembly Resolution No. 32/142 adopted on 16 December 1977 that the United Nations invited States "to proclaim, as appropriate according to their national and historical traditions and customs, a day of the year as United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace"<sup>1</sup>,

*Considering* that the proclamation of an International Women's Day (IWD) was preceded by the proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year by United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 3010 (XXXVII) of 18 December 1972, in which the Assembly "Decides to devote this year to intensified action:

- a) to promote equality between men and women
- b) to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, especially by emphasizing women's responsibility and important role in economic, social and cultural development at the national, regional and international levels, particularly during the Second United Nations Development Decade

<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 4 of Resolution No 32/142 adopted on 16 December 1977 by the United Nations General Assembly on the participation of women in strengthening international peace and security, and in the fight against colonialism, racism, racial discrimination, aggression, foreign occupation and all forms of foreign domination.



- c) *to recognize the importance of women's increasing contribution to the development of friendly relations and co-operation among States and to the strengthening of world peace*"<sup>2</sup>,

Recalling that the IWD celebrations originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was characterised, for instance, by the rise of social movements demanding that women participate in the management of public affairs on an equal footing with men, including<sup>3</sup> :

- 1) the demand of women in North America for recognition of their right to participate in public affairs, following the prohibition of women from taking the floor at the adoption of a convention against slavery in 1848 in the State of New York
- 2) Russian women's demonstrations in St. Petersburg on 8 March 1917 to demand their right to vote, better working conditions and a wage revaluation for women in Europe,

**Noting** that *"the emphasis on physiological, social or psychological differences has often been used as a pretext for the subordination, reduction or even lowering of women"* and that *"equality between men and women implies that the fact of belonging to a particular sex should not be a determining and, above all, discriminating factor in determining the place or position of individuals in society"*<sup>4</sup>,

**Bearing in mind** the coherent link between women's demands for their right to freedom and access to economic, social and cultural rights, and the need to eliminate all discriminatory and harmful practices against them, which moved political actors at the universal, African and national levels to step up the promotion of gender equality<sup>5</sup>,

**Considering** that the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 declares that *"the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights"* enumerated therein,

**Furthermore**, the State of Cameroon is a party to several general and specific instruments promoting and protecting women's rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol (2003), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Resolution 3010 (XXXVII) of 18 December 1972 of the U N General Assembly on the International Year of Women.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/womens-day/background>, accessed on 20 February 2023.

<sup>4</sup> « Égalité entre l'homme et la femme », J. ANDRIANTSIMBAZOVINA (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Droits de l'homme*, Paris PUF, 2008, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Concept note from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family on the celebration of IWD 2023, p. 2.



(1995), the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), and Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 by 2030,

*Likewise*, the State of Cameroon is a recipient of the general observations and recommendations of certain institutions and mechanisms dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, including:

- 1) the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)<sup>6</sup>,
- 2) the UN Women's Organisation (UNW),<sup>7</sup>
- 3) the African Union's Specialised Technical Committee on Gender and Women's Empowerment,

*Recalling* that the UN Economic and Social Council's Commission on the Status of Women focuses its efforts to reduce gender inequality on the trilogy of:

- 1) *improving women's access to economic, social and cultural rights*
- 2) *eliminating all discriminatory and harmful practices against them*
- 3) *ensuring the full and free exercise of their civil and political rights,*

*Meanwhile* it is based on that trilogy that the above-mentioned Commission adopts the themes of the IWD celebrations, including those of 2020, 2021 and 2022 as follows: "*Women Leaders: For an Egalitarian Future in the World of Covid-19*" (2020), "*Technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*" (2021) and "*Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow*" (2022),

*Noting* that the theme of the 38<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day on 8 March 2023, "**DigitAll: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality**", was adopted on 22 December 2022 during the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, to celebrate the contribution of women and girls who promote advances in technology and digital education<sup>8</sup>,

*Bearing in mind* that "*Digital law is the set of rules governing all activities or actions related to new information and communication technologies (NICTs)*"<sup>9</sup>, new technologies

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<sup>6</sup> Established by United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution No. 11(1) of 21 June 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a global intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, the main body of the United Nations System in charge of the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, was created by Resolution no. 64/289 of 2 July 2010 of the United Nations General Assembly.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/fr/nouvelles/annonce/2022/12/journee-internationale-des-femmes-2023-pour-un-monde-digital-inclusif-et-technologies-pour-egalite-des-sexes>, accessed on 20 February 2023.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.econuma.com/go-digital/quest-ce-que-le-droit-du-numerique-1619424565>, accessed on 20 February 2023.



understood as "any digital tool or hardware or software that is connected to the Internet and computers"<sup>10</sup>,

*Noting* that the digital field is "composed, but not limited to, e-commerce, telecommunications, cybercrime, cyber security, electronic communications, personal data protection and, finally, intellectual property of digital creations"<sup>11</sup>,

*Whereas* the CEDAW Committee, in its General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the Right of the Girl Child and Women to Education, identifies education not only as "a critical factor for change and empowerment in upholding human rights values, and as such is seen as the pathway to gender equality and women's empowerment"<sup>12</sup>,

*Meanwhile*, according to the same Committee, "the right to digital education for girls is part of a framework" having essentially three dimensions<sup>13</sup> :

- 1) Access to education, which refers to technological accessibility that offers special advantages:
  - to girls "who have limited access to traditional forms of education and training, including girls denied access due to the remoteness of the school structure in rural areas, due to domestic chores or parental responsibilities, especially in cases of child marriage and early pregnancy, or due to other social and cultural barriers"<sup>14</sup>
  - and to women "who wish to pursue higher studies while combining professional activities and family life [and] also derive benefit from this educational opportunity",<sup>15</sup>
- 2) Education as a Rights space, which raises the thorny issue of the acceptability of digital education, a phenomenon that manifests itself in online harassment, which is "another form of violence girls experience, consisting of bullying, threatening or harassing them by computer means and through social media"<sup>16</sup>
- 3) Digital literacy as a vector of rights that gives girls and women the necessary means to adapt to the needs of societies, which are increasingly reflected in the requirement for ICT skills as a major asset for access to employment in this domain<sup>17</sup>,

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<sup>10</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Azza Karam, "Education for Gender Equality", UN Chronicle, vol. I, n° 4, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Recommandation générale n° 36 (2017) du 27 novembre 2017 sur le droit des filles et des femmes à l'éducation du Comité pour l'élimination de la discrimination à l'égard des femmes.

<sup>14</sup> Recommandation générale n° 36 (2017), paragraphes 13 à 19, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, paragraphes 33 à 35, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, paragraphes 33 à 35, p. 22.



**Considering** that the International Telecommunication Union (herein referred to as ITU) is responsible for evaluating progress in implementing Target 5.b of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on women's access to ICTs through three indicators, "to wit:

- 1) *the percentage of individuals with a mobile phone, per gender*
- 2) *the percentage of individuals using the Internet, per gender*
- 3) *the percentage of individuals with ICT skills, per gender*"<sup>18</sup>,

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***Commission commends the efforts of:***

- the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC), focusing on women and girls in terms of organising:
  - o activities concerning the dissemination and development of ICTs and the Internet (forum on the impact of start-ups on the economy, raising awareness in secondary schools on the opportunities offered by ICTs, etc.)
  - o awareness campaigns in 11 secondary schools in the Littoral, North and South Regions on the opportunities offered by ICTs and the risks associated with their use
  - o the 6<sup>th</sup> Forum on the contribution of startups in the development of the economy (education sector) in Edea
  - o Digital Economy Day (MDN), an operation to support the best students in Cameroon in ICT-related subjects and the best female students in the domain
  - o provision of grants to startups that educate and raise young girls' awareness of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in general and ICT especially
  - o support for associations and other women's initiatives in the digital sector, such as sponsorship of the Digital Women's Festival organised on each International Women's Day by the start-up African WITTS
  - o participation in Plan International's "Free to be online" campaign, through the sponsorship of the "Girl take over" on International Day of the Girl Child, to promote online safety for young girls;
- the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, in collaboration with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, in carrying out the following activities:
  - o supporting women's digital start-ups
  - o fighting against cyber harassment of girls online
  - o developing the draft national charter for the protection of children online

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<sup>18</sup> Pourquoi organiser une journée des jeunes filles dans le secteur des TIC ? <https://www.itu.int/fr/ITU-D/Digital-Onclusion/women-and-Girls/Girls-in-ICT-Prtal/Pages/Why-a-Girls-in-ICT-Day.aspx>, accessed on 27 February 2023.



- creating Centres for Women's Empowerment and the Family (CPFF) throughout the country that build the capacities of women and girls in entrepreneurship, project design and management, with a particular focus on ICT
- linking women to the digital economy, through the progressive establishment of “digital houses” in the CPFF
- the implementation of the project “Central African Backbone / *Dorsale à Fibre Optique d'Afrique Centrale*” with a sub-component “support for women’s empowerment”
- Training of women and girls in the use of ICTs, in partnership with the Africa Institute of Computer Science (IAI)<sup>19</sup>;

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***The Commission remains worried about:***

- online harassment of teenage girls, which comes in many forms, including name-calling, spreading rumours and threats, divulging confidential information, *revenge porn* (blackmail by threatening to publish pornographic images or videos exposing the intimacy of the blackmailed person), sexual harassment and advances, often by strangers, that undermine the physical and moral integrity of women and girls
- the contrast between the increasing need for digital skills in the ICT sector, as demanded by employers, and the insufficient number of female students in mathematics, physics, computer science and in some technical fields
- according to data published by the ITU to mark the 2022 International Girls' Day in the ICT sector, “48 per cent of women in the world use the Internet, as opposed to 55 per cent of men”
- that according to a report published in January 2022 by Hootsuite and We Are Social, Cameroon has 4,550,000 subscribers on social media platforms, representing an overall penetration rate of 16.5%, distributed per platform as follows<sup>20</sup>:
  - 4,100,000 on Facebook (42.05 per cent women and 57.05 per cent men)
  - 613,600 on Instagram (39.9 per cent women and 60.1 per cent men)
  - 145,300 on Twitter (22. 7 per cent women and 77. 3 per cent men)
  - 820,000 on LinkedIn (36.7 per cent women, 63.3 per cent men);

***The Commission vigorously condemns*** the use of social media to spread hate speech, to post obscene images that violate public decency, privacy and human dignity, especially of women;

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<sup>19</sup> Minister for Women's Empowerment and the Family: the 38th International Women’s Day in Cameroon/ Terms of Reference (French version) pp 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> ANTIC Contributions to MINPOSTEL’s National Representation Response F22.



***To the Government, the Commission makes the following recommendations:***

- encourage the media to disseminate positive and non-sexual images of women
- raise the level of knowledge and competence of teachers in the use of ICT and systematize the training required for them to practice their profession in an open education system
- increase awareness of the responsible use of ICTs, which is a push-factor in fostering human rights promotion and protection
- vigorously combat the improper use of NICTs, which can serve as a catalyst for abuses, by systematically sanctioning any violation of the regulations in force
- Increase the implementation of channels and platforms to:
  - o report acts likely to undermine the rights of women and girls in the public sphere
  - o support victims of online harassment and other dishonourable and dehumanizing acts on social media;

***The Commission also urges:***

- *parents* to give more importance to the education of their children with an emphasis on the responsible use of social media, while protecting them from the risks and possible abuses of these networks, by delaying as far as possible the age of the offer of telephones and of any electronic device providing access to said networks;
- *pupils and students* not to engage in obscene and risky practices of recording any image or video likely to expose their privacy, on an electronic medium
- *women* to increase capacity building on the range of services offered by innovative technologies, on the use of ICTs as a self-learning and empowerment palliative solution, as well as existing methods to ensure their online safety ;
- *the people* to:
  - o demonstrate decency in the use of ICTs, including the publication of positive and non-sexual images of women on social media, and the use of language that respects the image and consideration of women and girls;
  - o never lose sight of the fact that the dissemination of obscene, dehumanizing and dishonourable messages may, depending on the case, constitute:
    - *offences against public morality* punishable by Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Cameroonian Penal Code in Section 263 (*Public Indecency*), 264 (*Corruption of Moral*) and 265 (*Obscene Publications*)
    - *private indecency* punishable by Section 295 of the same Law, the penalties of which may be aggravated, according to Section 298 of the above law, where the guilty party is
      - (i) a person having authority over the victim or having custody of him by law or by custom
      - (ii) a public servant or minister of religion
      - (iii) helped by one or more others.



On its part, *the Commission reaffirms* that it will spare no effort to continue raising awareness on women's rights through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding, and handling complaints or conducting self-initiated investigations.

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

Yaoundé, - 7 MARS 2023

Pour le Président  
et par Ordre

