

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

SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION ON THE 1994 GENOCIDE
AGAINST THE TUTSI IN RWANDA

7 APRIL 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 Assembled Chambers,

Bearing in mind Resolution No. A/RES/58/234 of the General Assembly of the United Nations of 23 December 2003, which proclaims 7 April of each year as the *International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Rwandan genocide*,

Bearing in mind also Resolution No. A/72/L.31 of 12 December 2017 of the same General Assembly, which decides to change the title of the celebration adopted by the previous Resolution by proclaiming 7 April as the *International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda*,

Considering that this Resolution invites States, as well as political and civil society actors to remember the atrocities committed against the Tutsi victims of the crime of genocide between 7 April, known as *Kwibuka* (Remembrance), and 17 July, known as *Twiyubaka* (Liberation Day), in 1994, a period during which the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide in Rwanda places special focus on education and teaching about genocide,

Recognising also that the colonial power's *tribalisation* of the Rwandan society traditional organisation in which the terms *Tutsi*, *Hutu* and *Twa* referred not to ethnicities but to a classification of society according to economic activity and prosperity¹, *tribalisation* that

¹ According to the exhibition on the history of the Tutsi genocide at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, a memorial site visited by a CHRC team on the margins of the Commonwealth NHRI Forum Biennial in June 2022, the term *Tutsi*, in pre-

led to a policy of discrimination fuelling *rivalries, hate speech and incitement to revolt* which sowed the seeds of the genocide that occurred several decades after the country gained its independence,

Recalling that Rwanda recorded some 1,074,017 killings during the genocide², including men, women and children of all ages, mainly from the Tutsi minority, causing approximately 1,500,000 Hutus to flee for fear of revenge,

Recalling also that Hutu extremists killed moderate Hutus as well as others who were hostile to the Tutsi massacres,

Recognising that, according to His Excellency MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the objective of *"this commemoration is also to remind Africa and the rest of the world, as well as the younger generations, of this tragedy experienced by a country and a people, so that the tragedy will never be consigned to the grave of history"*³,

Noting, according to Gregory STANTON⁴, that for genocide to be carried out, its planning and preparations are implemented in 10 chronological stages⁵:

1. classification: The division of people into two groups ("us versus them") based on nationality, ethnicity, origin or creed by the genocide planners
2. symbolism: the use of names and symbols to distinguish these groups, to the point of stigmatising the targeted group in society
3. discrimination: members of the powerless or targeted group are denied their basic human rights

colonial Rwandan society, referred to any person possessing a flock of more than ten oxen, while the *Hutu* were those who possessed less, and the *Twa*, craftsmen who made a living from basketry, pottery, etc. These attributes were by no means hereditary and thus, each could move from one situation to another according to their economic prosperity and activity. However, the colonial authority, once established in the country, made those terms tribal denominations that were inscribed on the individual identity document it imposed, thus dividing Rwandan society into three tribes (Tutsi, Hutu and Twa) whose membership was now permanent and hereditary. Accordingly, the colonial authority had determined, no longer by the economic situation nor by the language, but rather by the face, who belonged to which tribe. Thus, those who have elongated faces and a lighter complexion (and who in general also possessed large herds) would henceforth be the Tutsi, while those with a less elongated face and darker complexion would be the Hutu, even though, from an ethnic point of view, they are the same people speaking the same language, Kinyarwanda. The former, considered more intelligent than the latter by the colonial administration, were then favoured in terms of education, then administrative posts, so that the Hutu were marginalized. It was the latter who later organized the systematic massacre of the Tutsi in the context of the 1994 Genocide.

² "Génocide - Plus d'un million de morts : Bilan officiel – Rwanda", <https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/rwandagenocide-plus-dun-million-de-morts-bilan-officiel>, accessed on 10 March 2023.

³ Statement by H. E. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the 28th Commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, 7 April 2022, p. 2.

⁴ Gregory H. STANTON, President of Genocide Watch, Professor of Research in Genocide Studies and Prevention at the Institute of Analysis and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, USA, <https://www.genocidewatch.net>, accessed on 23 March 2023.

⁵ *Centre pluridisciplinaire de transmission de la mémoire, dossier pédagogique*, Rwanda 1994, éditions, MNEMA asbl, 2022, p. 3.

4. dehumanisation: once identified, target groups are treated in a dehumanizing manner and begin to be compared to animals
5. organisation: the development of various activities and strategies to carry out genocide, including hate propaganda among citizens, the acquisition of weapons to carry out the planned killings and the creation of militias
6. polarisation: indoctrination into hatred and rejection of the target group, through the mass media, to polarise opinion, identification of moderate or anti-genocide groups and intimidation of them to remain silent and not interfere with the already planned genocide
7. preparation: plans for the implementation of the genocide are drawn up; the pretext is found and popularised under generic terms such as 'ethnic cleansing'
8. persecution: measures to ensure that members of the targeted group are formally identified, such as laws forcing them to wear distinctive signs or gather in (deport themselves to) specific places where they are subjected to a special regime: forced labour, deprivation of the possibility of satisfying vital needs such as food, water or access to certain public services, etc.
9. extermination: mass killings are perpetrated against the targeted group
10. denial: the implementation of methods of concealing the truth and evidence of the massacre (mass graves, burning of corpses, intimidation of witnesses, accusatory narratives of victims, etc.).

Underscoring that the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) "*reaffirms its unwavering commitment to combating anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of intolerance that can lead to group-specific violence*", including tribalism, and recommends that States combat the dissemination or proliferation of hate speech more effectively⁶, through:

- *promoting education and research*, including awareness of warning signs, a responsible civic engagement that supports peace and solidarity, studying historical episodes of violence targeting people groups, illustrating the dangers of all forms of discrimination and dehumanisation, raising awareness of the dangers of intolerance, racial, ethnic and religious hatred and ignorance of genocide, encouraging young people to engage against stereotypes, clichés and violence and providing guidance and tools to support the revision of textbooks and curricula, develop and revise policies, promote appropriate and relevant pedagogies and teaching methods
- *promoting the documentation and preservation of historical sites* to support the preservation and dissemination of exceptionally valuable archives relating to genocide, including through UNESCO's "Memory of the World Register" or "World Documentary Heritage", which should be fully preserved, protected and permanently accessible to all without hindrance, especially in areas affected by conflict or natural disasters,

⁶ <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/holocaust-genocide/need-know>, accessed on 18 January 2023.

Stressing also that the "*protection of victims of the manifestations of hate speech*", recommended by UNESCO, requires States to engage in the treatment of residual trauma through measures that allow, not only the punishment of the perpetrators of such acts and any offender but also the reparation due to the victims,

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 10 December 1948 proclaims, in Article 1 and in Article 2, paragraph 1, that "[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and must act towards each other in a spirit of brotherhood", and "any person may exercise all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, including race, religion or any other situation",

Considering the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 states that "*no person shall be harassed on grounds of his [ethnic] origin, religious, philosophical or political opinions or beliefs*",

Noting that, according to the findings of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (CNPBM), "*Hate speech, whether in written, oral or visual form, is increasingly felt in Cameroon and is characterized by any incitement to discrimination, harassment, threat or violence against the other because of their origin, sex, tribe, ethnicity, race or religion*"; in the case of xenophobia in the local context, it corresponds, according to the same source, to "*the feeling of hatred towards those who do not belong to the same social group from the point of view of culture, religion or language*"⁷,

Considering that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted on 27 June 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya and ratified by the State of Cameroon on 20 June 1989, prohibits, in Article 2, all forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity and colour, sex, language, religion, political or another opinion, national and social origin, wealth, birth or any other situation,

Considering that Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted on 16 December 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly and to which Cameroon acceded on 27 June 1984, states that "*any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law*",

Considering Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted on 9 December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly and not yet ratified by Cameroon, defines genocide as "*any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

- a) *Killing members of the group*
- b) *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group*

⁷ "Cameroun : une coalition créée pour lutter contre les discours de haine et la xénophobie", <https://french.news.cn/20220526/6d710c6f911343dfa968a7d8772c42c9/c.html>, accessed on 23 March 2023.

c) *Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part*

d) *Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group*

e) *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*"⁸,

Considering that the said Convention also provides that, as regards the crime of genocide, not only the "execution" as such but also "conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement, attempt and complicity" are punishable,

Considering that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 21 December 1965, ratified by Cameroon on 24 June 1971 and entered into force on 24 July 1971, condemns racial discrimination and, indirectly, tribalism, and calls on States Parties to take measures to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature in territories under their jurisdiction,

The Commission commends the Government of Rwanda for setting up National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide, which started by identifying the main sites of the genocide and established them as memorial sites, of which the four main ones⁹ have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, as follows:

- the Gisozi Memorial Site located in Kigali and built between 1999 and 2004, which is a site of remembrance, collective memory and teaching of the history of Rwanda, where the remains of approximately 250,000 people were buried
- the Nyamata Memorial Site which was a church located in the Bugesera District, where approximately 40,000 human remains were buried
- the Murambi Memorial Site, built in the Nyamagabe District, which was once a school complex, where approximately 45,000 human remains were buried
- the Bisesero Memorial Site, an architecturally unique building built in the Karongi district, which was a place of massacre and resistance, where 45,000 remains were buried,

Aware of the rise of hate speech, xenophobia and all other forms of intolerance among the peoples of the world and particularly in Cameroon,

The Commission welcomes the efforts of the Cameroonian authorities to combat intolerance, hate speech and incitement to violence, by promoting harmonious living together, particularly by:

- the Press Release of Saturday, 18 March 2023 in which Dr Roger MBASSA NDINE, the Douala City Mayor, strongly condemned "*the acts of intolerance and gratuitous*

⁸ République démocratique du Congo 1993-2003, Rapport des Nations Unies, Crimes de guerre, crimes contre l'humanité et génocide, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/CD/Fiche2_crimes_FINAL.pdf, accessed on 15 March 2023.

⁹ *Témoigner entre histoire et mémoire, Rwanda vingt ans après : mémoire du génocide des Tutsi*, n°117, mars 2014, p.160.

violence perpetrated abroad by a group of activists called the 'Brigade Anti-Sardinards (BAS)', and the calls for a 'ghost town' day in Douala, urging the authors of the leaflets in circulation to refrain from any action aimed at undermining social cohesion which is so precious to Douala¹⁰

- the traditional authorities of Wouri's condemnation, on 16 March 2023, of the calls for ghost town days in Douala by an illegal local association which, responding to the boycott by members of the BAS of a concert by the artist Ben DECCA in Germany, undertook to hinder the commercial activities of the nationals of the Region from which the majority of those diaspora activists originate
- the CHRC Chairperson's attendance at the 106th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), organised from 11 to 29 April 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland, during which Cameroon's 22nd and 23rd periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination were examined
- Cameroon's participation in the Human Rights Council's general debate on issues relating to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the United Nations Office in Geneva on 4 October 2022, through the Mother of Hope Cameroon Common Initiative Group¹¹
- the holding, on 16 May 2022, of the traditional "*Carrefour du vivre-ensemble camerounais harmonieux*" ("Forum for harmonious living together in Cameroon") by the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education on the topic: "My contribution to a more harmonious living together in Cameroon, to promote social cohesion, peace and tolerance"
- the submission by Cameroon, on 13 and 14 April 2022, of its Report under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination before the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- the increase in awareness campaigns against hate speech, intolerance and xenophobia as from 25 May 2022 throughout the national territory by the CNPBM, the CHRC, civil society organisations, the media, etc.;

The Commission, to further promote the culture of peace in Cameroon and to prevent hate speech and violent extremism, **once again encourages** education on genocide, promoting the values of tolerance, living together and patriotism at all levels of education, and ensuring that all Cameroonians and foreign nationals living in Cameroon adopt the values of civic education and education for citizenship;

¹⁰ Press release of Dr Roger MBASSA NDINE, the Mayor of Douala city, 18 March 2023.

¹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/press-releases/2022/10/human-rights-council-concludes-general-debate-racism-racial-discrimination>, accessed on 23 March 2023.

Nevertheless, *the Commission is still concerned* about some developments that could undermine national peace and cohesion, such as:

- the persistence of hate speech, acts of intolerance and violence perpetrated abroad by the group of activists known as the "*Brigade Anti-Sardinards (BAS)*", its supporters and their accessories;
- the resurgence, at the beginning of March 2023, of tribal rhetoric perceptible on social media, directed by a clandestine association which announced a plan to boycott in Douala the economic activities of citizens originating from one of the country's Regions;
- the dissemination of messages of ethnic supremacism in the media or during public or private meetings and demonstrations, which openly take the form of ambiguous speeches celebrating and outrageously sublimating an ethnic group;
- the land conflict between the Oliti and the Messaga Ekol in Akwaya, in the South-West Region, which resulted in the death of about 30 civilians¹² on 29 April 2022;
- the latent conflict between certain communities in Djérem, Adamawa Region, over the modernization of certain practices of Islam;
- hate speech and other acts of intimidation, including death threats, against militants of certain political parties following the election of senators on 12 March 2023 in Mbé and Mbéré Sub-Divisions of the Adamawa Region;
- hate speech, intolerance and incitement to violence committed between 2022 and 2023 by six journalists from three television channels and one radio station fortunately punished with temporary suspensions, as well as the letters of observation addressed to the Directors of publication of the press bodies incriminated by the National Communication Council;

The Commission strongly condemns the dissemination of ethnic supremacist messages in the media or during public or private meetings and events, as well as disinformation and incitement to hatred on social media;

The Commission equally condemns all forms and expressions of ethnic, religious and political intolerance, tribalism and attacks against minority communities, especially during intercommunity conflicts in certain regions;

The Commission reaffirms its commitment to human rights, as well as to the fight against tribalism, the theory of the superiority of an ethnic group or race and hate speech which are at the root of genocide and killings;

¹² https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/06/27/au-cameroun-des-dizaines-de-villageois-tues-dans-des-combats-intercommunautaires_6132212_3212.html, accessed on 25 March 2023.

The Commission recommends to all political actors, to all administrative authorities, to the Educational Community, the leaders of religious congregations, Civil Society Organizations and non-governmental organizations as well as parents, young people, artists and media workers, ***to practice zero tolerance against tribalism***, the source of hate speech, intolerance and all other forms of discrimination, including ethnic supremacy which is founded, as the genocide of the Tutsi and the *Shoah* of the Jews, on the theory of the superiority of an ethnic group;

The Commission recommends that public and private actors responsible for primary, secondary and higher education support the revision of textbooks and teaching tools to improve the ownership of civic education and citizenship;

The Commission recommends to the State structures responsible for education and promotion of living together harmoniously, as well as to the organs of the United Nations system and Civil Society Organizations to raise awareness of the root causes of genocide, to support concrete actions to erect strong barriers against hate speech and all forms of discrimination based on ethnic origin, religious beliefs, gender or language in Cameroon;

The Commission once again recommends that public institutions in charge of culture restore the dignity of the emblematic victims of the violence that marked the history of Cameroon, through the organization of ceremonies of remembrance, development of tourist sites and extension of existing sites;

The Commission recommends that those involved in education in schools, in communities and through the media, emphasize the importance of life and respect for human dignity, as well as collective and individual responsibility for disseminating hate, intolerance and violence speech against a religious, linguistic or ethnic group;

The Commission recommends that Civil Society actors mobilize more for the organization of activities that aim to perpetuate the memory of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and to make known its realities, to help prevent the recurrence of acts of misrepresentation of history, intolerance and violence directed at a particular people group;

The Commission urges the victims of hate speech, intolerance or discrimination to denounce the perpetrators of these acts, for them to be brought to book and for the deterrence of all those who would be tempted to commit the same acts;

The Commission reiterates once again the need to promote *respect for the rights of persons of different ethnic groups, religions or languages, which are fundamental human rights and rights of peoples*;

The Commission encourages the Government to improve international cooperation, strengthen the effectiveness of the prevention of genocide, discrimination or all forms of dehumanization, and promote a culture of peace;

Concerned about the preservation of peace and social cohesion in the country, *the Commission reaffirms that it will spare no effort* in promoting and protecting peace and human rights through training workshops, awareness-raising and information campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, as well as handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations;

The Commission, therefore, calls on all persons who are victims or witnesses of violations of human rights, and especially acts of tribalism, ethnic supremacism, hate speech, discrimination, violence or threat of violence to report such acts, including by using its toll-free number, 1523.

Yaoundé, 06 AVR 2023

Pour le Président
et par Ordre



Dr. Galega Gana Raphaël
Ministre Plénipotentiaire Hors Echelle