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**COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN**

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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 INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE
AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING**

26 June 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 combined chambers,

Bearing in mind Resolution A/RES/42/112 adopted on 7 December 1987 whereby the United Nations General Assembly decided to celebrate, on 26 June each year, the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, to strengthen cooperation at national, regional and international levels as well as to free ourselves from a society plagued by drugs,

Considering the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, which states that "the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights [and that the Nation] shall protect women and the young",

Bearing in mind the United Nations Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 30 March 1961, which restricts the possession, consumption, trade, distribution, import, export, manufacture and production of drugs exclusively for medical and scientific purposes and which, to deter and discourage drug traffickers, lays special emphasis on combating drug trafficking through international cooperation,

Bearing in mind also, Article 1 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also known as the Palermo Convention, which was adopted on 15 November 2000, entered into force on 29 September 2003 and ratified by Cameroon on 6 February 2006, which states that "the purpose of this Convention is to promote cooperation to prevent and combat transnational organized crime more effectively",

Considering that the Covid-19 pandemic has altered drug supply chains and traffickers have explored new routes, including electronic channels for communication and maritime routes for transport, in their search for ways to circumvent the flow of their goods¹,

Noting that e-commerce is booming as new online market places emerge, making drugs and other psychotropic substances more accessible,

Bearing in mind the 2019-2023 Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention adopted by the African Union at the 3rd session of the Special Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control,

Noting that, according to the same Plan of Action, in the Member States of the African Union, the trafficking and consumption of substances such as cocaine, heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are skyrocketing, resulting in high transmission rates of HIV-AIDS and hepatitis among injecting drug users, especially women and young people due to the lack of adequate healthcare personnel²,

Bearing in mind that drug abuse involves the continued use of drugs, psychotropic substances or alcohol, despite their repeated undesirable effects on the persons who use them, and the harmful effects on those around them³,

Noting that in addition to the harmful effects on the health of the user, drugs create a doubly addictive effect vis-a-vis the products consumed such as:

- a physical dependence reflected in feelings of discomfort, craving, addiction, etc; and
- a psychological dependence manifested by a feeling of despondency, depression, etc,⁴

Recalling that the statistics of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for 2022, indicate that:

- Cannabis has long been the most widely used illicit drug in the world;
- Some 209 million people used it in 2022, i.e. 4 per cent of the world's population⁵ ;
- Cannabis cultivation has been on the increase over the last decade, and there has been a 23 per cent rise in the number of people taking the drug;
- Drug abuse affects not only the addicts themselves but also their families, friends, supervisors, etc;
- Opioids (substances with analgesic properties used mainly to relieve pain) continue to represent the greatest burden of disease attributed to drug use.

Noting with dismay the worrisome extent to which the phenomenon of drug use by children aged between 10 and 18 is gaining grounds in the continent, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) devoted a day of General

¹ <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/05/1068462>, accessed on 20 June 2023.

² African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention 2019-2023.

³ <https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/topics/substance.fr.html>, accessed on 29 May 2023.

⁴ <https://www.journee-mondiale.com/138/journee-internationale-contre-l-abus-et-le-trafic-illicite-de-drogues.html>, accessed on 29 May 2023.

⁵ World Drug Report 2022, Part 3, Drug Market Trends: Cannabis and Opioids (United Nations publication, 2022).

Assembly discussion of its 41st Ordinary Session, held from 26 April to 6 May 2023 in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho, to the topic of Drug Abuse and Children,

Noting in consternation that according to the state of affairs and government efforts in the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking, as presented by the Minister of Public Health of the Republic of Cameroon during his press statement of 6 July 2022 revealed:

- 15-year-olds are the heaviest drug users, with a 15 per cent higher prevalence in schools;
- 10 per cent of the drug-using community are regular users, while 60 per cent are young people aged between 20 and 25;
- the highest percentage (72.10 per cent) of drug users are young people aged 23, the majority of whom live in urban areas;
- some 25 per cent of Cameroonians have attempted taking a hard drug;
- a total of 946 new patients seeking treatment were registered in addiction care, support and prevention centres (CSAPA) in 2021;
- the percentage of patients seeking treatment in crisis zones (Far North, North West and South West) has risen from 22 to 43 per cent over the period 2019 to 2021;

Noticing with dismay per the report of the World Health Organisation (WHO) that:

- tuberculosis accounts for 38 per cent of deaths and respiratory diseases for 31 per cent, all due to smoking;
- a total of 300,000 children aged between 13 and 15 are smokers, and 31.3 per cent have tried cigarettes before the age of 10 in Cameroon;
- some 8.9 per cent of the population use compound tobacco products, while 7 million Cameroonians are exposed to tobacco smoke in public places and in their homes⁶,

Recalling that one of the most serious effects of taking psychotropic substances is the escalation of violence, especially in schools. Since 2018, there have been *at least 10 high-profile cases of homicide committed by pupils, most of them in schools*⁷, other cases of pupil violence against teaching staff and resulting in serious injuries on the victims, sometimes leaving them with lifelong scars⁸,

Opining by UNODC, "*when parents abuse substances, children have greater chances of repeated exposure to family conflicts and violence, including physical and verbal abuse, and to alcohol and drugs*" and that "[f]actors such as a lack of security, trust and warmth in parent-child relationships, a lack of structure in family life and inappropriate discipline

⁶ <https://infos-sante.home.blog/2019/06/29/cameroun-les-mefaits-du-tabac-et-de-la-drogue-se-donnent-a-voir/>, accessed on 30 May 2023.

⁷ These included the cases of a mathematics teacher and the principal of a private secondary school who were both stabbed to death by their pupils, minors aged 18, in the schools where they practised their profession, situated in the same quarter of Yaoundé (Nkolbisson), on 14 January 2020 and 6 April 2022 respectively. Similarly, eight secondary school pupils were killed by their classmates (victims and perpetrators all under the age of 18) during the period in question, in Douala (3 cases), Bafoussam (2 cases), Edéa (2 cases) and Ebolowa (1 case), in or around schools. Cf. CHRC Statement to the 41st Ordinary Session of ACERWC.

⁸ Case of a pupil whose classmate cut off his hand with a machete, in Obala, Centre Region, *Ibid*.

*practices and insufficient limit-setting can render children at greater risk of behavioural problem and subsequent substance abuse and mental health disorders*⁹,

Strongly recalling that the entire chain of drug trafficking from cultivation, manufacturing, distribution and sale of substances is strictly illegal and prohibited by law¹⁰,

Stressing that there is a close link between drug trafficking, corruption, crime, smuggling and human trafficking, firearms trade, cybercrime, money laundering and other abuses,

Bearing in mind that drug trafficking and cross-border crime fuel cycles of violence and conflict around the world, and that non-state armed groups and terrorists take advantage of this situation to perpetuate the cycle of violence, with disastrous effects on the economy, security, education and peace¹¹,

The Commission strongly commends the public authorities' efforts to eradicate these harmful practices and limit the effects on society, as demonstrated through:

- the seizure and destruction, in December 2022, of a shipment of 4,500 kg of Indian Hemp by teams from the North Regional Delegation of National Security¹²;
- the ban on the production and sale of whisky packaged in plastic bags by Decision of 11 April 2023 of the Minister of Mines, Industry and Technological Development
- measures taken to strengthen security in secondary schools, especially those in large towns, including systematic searches of school bags at school entrances and installing surveillance cameras in school premises. These measures have since led to the seizure of a large number of bladed weapons and substances such as tramadol tablets, whisky sachets and other toxic substances.

The Commission also make known to the public the setting up human rights clubs in secondary and higher education institutions throughout the country, launched in January 2023 and characterised by awareness-raising activities on the rights and duties of the child, to reducing the use of psychotropic substances by young people in schools, with particularly encouraging results in secondary institutions in Ngaoundéré,

The Commission further commends the efforts of the UN System Agencies, in this case UNODC, and other development partners involved in the fight against drugs such as the media and civil society organisations working to raise awareness of the dangers of public drug use, including young people.

⁹ UNODC, *Guide to implementing family skills training programmes for drug abuse prevention*, United Nations, New York, 2009, p. 8 et p. 1. Available in electronic format at: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/prevention/family-guidelines-F.pdf>.

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/fr/thematic-area/transnational-threats/drug-trafficking>, accessed on 29 May 2023.

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/end-drug-abuse-day/messages>, accessed on 29 May 2023.

¹² The CHRC North Branch Thematic Report on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking from 2022 to 2023.

Regrettably, *the Commission notes* that according to the 2021 Global Index of Organized Crime¹³ :

- Cameroon is considered a major importer and transshipment point for cannabis produced in the country and other African countries;
- Cameroon is ranked 10th in Africa and 28th in the world for organized crime
- Cannabis is the most widely used drug in the country;
- it is largely produced in the North-West and South-West Regions and is trafficked mainly to neighbouring Nigeria;
- tramadol is the most worrying synthetic drug in Cameroon and the most popular drug in the country after cannabis;
- Cameroon is a country of destination and transit of heroin,

The Commission also regrets that adequate monitoring and follow-up measures are not being taken to ensure the effective implementation of certain government decisions taken to date to combat the use of psychotropic substances, especially by young people. This is particularly the case with:

- the ban on the marketing and consumption of chicha¹⁴ throughout the national territory by the Minister of Territorial Administration in an Order signed on 8 February 2022. More than a year later the results indicate that *chicha* is still offered and consumed in the usual channels of its marketing¹⁵
- prohibition of commercial activities such as takeout sales, drinking places, and playrooms close to schools as provided for in the law of 14 April 1998 on the Guidelines of education in Cameroon and recalled by the Minister of Secondary Education in the circular letter of 20 March 2012, to regional and divisional delegates of secondary education and heads of secondary schools,

The Commission, therefore, recommends that Government takes the necessary steps for the strict application of the above mentioned measures, including those listed below :

- the prohibition of the manufacture and marketing of alcohol in bags, under Framework Law No. 2011/012 of 6 May 2011 on consumer protection in Cameroon [Idem] ;
- prohibition of water pipe consumption ("chicha") ;

¹³ Global Organised Crime Index, published in 2021 by the Ecofin agency, <https://www.agenceecofin.com/actualites/0210-92030-classement-2021-des-pays-africains-selon-les-niveaux-de-criminalite-organisee-global-organized-crime-index>, accessed on 30 May 2023.

¹⁴ Still known as a water pipe or hookah, a mixture of tobacco (28% on average) and molasses (70%), sometimes combined with drugs such as cocaine and opium, the Ministry of Public Health and the National Committee to Combat Drugs revealed in January 2022 that almost 46% of young people in Cameroon smoke shisha. Yet a 45-minute shisha session consumes the nicotine equivalent of one and a half cigarettes, the carbon monoxide of 20 cigarettes, the tar of 26 cigarettes and the volume of the smoke of 40 cigarettes. Harmful effects such as addiction, increased heart rate and blood pressure, carbon monoxide poisoning, loss of consciousness, reduced lung function, damage to the larynx and the development of cancer are some of the serious dangers faced by shisha users. See the article "MINSANTÉ: LA CHICHA, DU PLAISIR À LA MORT", published at <https://www.minsante.cm/site/?q=en/node/4189> on 19 January 2022, accessed on 22 April 2023.

¹⁵ SHEMA newsletter, no. 20, published by the Réseau Foi et Justice Cameroun, January 2023, p. 5.

- prohibition of risky commercial activities near schools;
- law on the movement and sale without prescription of psychoactive products¹⁶.

The Commission also recommends to the defence and security forces (including Customs) a stronger fight against the channels of entry and exit, production and marketing of drugs on Cameroonian territory, and enhanced synergy between their different structures, to better respond to the ever-increasing threat of drug trafficking and organised crime,

The Commission also recommends tougher laws and regulations on the advertising of these illicit substances, so that it is mandatory and systematically more explicit on the prohibition of these products to minors and on the dangers of their abuse for all, and the other hand, on the marketing of these products, including through much higher taxation, for deterrent purposes,

Aware of the importance of the role of parents in the fight against substance abuse by young people, the Commission recommends to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family to speed up the implementation, throughout the territory, of positive parenting program developed with support from the United Nations Children's Fund,

The Commission reiterates to the parents and persons in charge of children, that under paragraph 1 of Article 20 of the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, they "shall have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child and shall have the duty", and therefore the Commission recommends that they ensure that "the essential family factors" that UNODC believes should "help protect children from substance abuse"¹⁷, such as:

- a) Secure and healthy parent/child attachment
- b) Parental supervision, monitoring and effective discipline
- c) Communication of pro-social family values
- d) Parental involvement in child's life
- e) Supportive parenting (emotionally, cognitively, socially and financially)¹⁸.

Reminding parents of the importance of setting an example for children¹⁹, the Commission urges them to stop using psychotropic products in the presence of children and stop commissioning them to buy them,

The Commission endorses the concerns and exhortations addressed to the Member States of the African Union – including Cameroon – and to civil society through the Final Declaration of the Day of General Discussion on the Protection of Children from the Use of Substances of 29 April 2023, adopted at the 41st Session of the ACERWC²⁰ and, in the same vein, the Commission recommends that the Government improve the data collection system

¹⁶ Recommendations are taken from the "SHEMA" Information Bulletin, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ ONUDC, *Guide d'application des programmes d'acquisition de compétences familiales pour la prévention de l'usage de drogues*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ As outlined in the UNODC Guide *op. cit.*

²⁰ ACERWC, General Discussion Day on Protecting Children from Substance Use - Final Declaration, available online at https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2023-05/41%20Ordinary%20Session_DGD%20Outcome%20Statement_French_0.pdf.

concerning illicit drug use and trafficking in the country, to better assess and analyse the extent of this phenomenon and organized crime, and identify the most suitable solutions,

The Commission also reiterates its recommendation for greater regional and international cooperation, intending to considerably reduce cross-border drug trafficking and organized crime, concerning the porosity of certain borders and the ingenious development of the trafficking,

The Commission strongly condemns acts of public, domestic and school violence resulting from the use of drugs and psychotropic substances,

The Commission recommends that the Ministries of Public Health and Social Affairs work to ensure the availability of holistic and tailored management services for people, including children, who are addicted to psychotropic substances,

The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Public Health pay particular attention to the treatment of patients who use drugs for medical purposes and work more towards reducing stigma and discrimination among drug users, addiction being a chronic condition that requires treatment, in the same right as other diseases,

The Commission recommends greater mobilization and synergy of actions by all actors involved in the fight against this scourge, in particular, the Administrations in charge of education, the family, social affairs, health, youth, sports, recreation, etc.; specialized institutions, development partners, CSOs, self-help communities, parent, children, etc., to eradicate it.

For its part, ***the Commission will spare no effort*** to continue to: promote and protect human rights, especially the right to health and a healthy environment; creation of human rights clubs in secondary and university institutions in the 10 Regions of the country; and through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, and in handling complaints and self-initiated investigations.

The Commission calls upon anyone who is a victim or witness of drug abuse or illicit trafficking to freely report to the police by calling toll-free number 117 or the Gendarmerie at 113, and any person who is a victim or witness of any human rights violation – and especially the violation of the right to health and a healthy environment – to report such, including through its **toll-free number, 1523.**



24 JUN 2023

James MOUANGUE KOBILA