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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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Numéro Vert.- 1523



CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Theme: “Action for Peace: Our Ambitions for the #GlobalGoals”

21 September 2023

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: “the Commission”), established by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 and implemented on 29 April 2021, following the swearing-in of Commissioners before the Supreme Court sitting in combined chambers,

Bearing in mind that through Resolution A/RES/55/282 of 28 September 1981, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 21 September the **International Day of Peace**,

Recalling that the United Nations General Assembly has declared the International Day of Peace a Day dedicated to strengthening the ideals of peace by observing twenty-four hours of non-violence and ceasefire everywhere and by everyone at a time when our world, more than ever, needs peace¹,

Aware that humanity as a whole aspires to peace as a universal value and a social reality that is constantly being developed,

Considering that the theme of this year's International Day of Peace is “*Actions for peace: Our ambition for the #GlobalGoals*” It is a call to action that recognizes our individual and collective responsibility to foster peace. *Fostering peace contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

Aware that issues of inequality, injustice and exclusion are at the core of many conflicts that lead to the disruption of peace,

¹ See <https://www.21septembre.org/2023/07/17/theme-2023-action-en-faveur-de-la-paix-nos-ambitions-pour-les-objectifsmondiaux/>, accessed on 11 September 2023.

Recalling that the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 provides that *"The Cameroonian people [...] affirm our desire to contribute to the advent of a united and free Africa, while maintaining peaceful and brotherly relations with the other nations of the World, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations"*,

Bearing in mind Article 23 (1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which underlines that *"All peoples shall have the right to national and international peace and security. [Therefore] the principles of solidarity and friendly relations implicitly affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations and reaffirmed by that of the Organisation [now the African Union] of African Unity shall govern relations between States"*,

Noting that the Declaration on the Rights of Peoples to Peace, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2016, affirms in its Articles 1 and 2 that *"Everyone has to enjoy peace [and] States should respect, implement and promote equality and non-discrimination, justice and the rule of law, and guarantee freedom from fear and want as a means to build peace within and between societies such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realised"*,

Keeping in mind that Antonio Guterres the United Nations Secretary-General, said on 11 September 2023 that, *"Peace is needed today more than ever. War and conflict are unleashing devastation, poverty, and hunger, and driving tens of millions of people from their homes. Climate chaos is all around. And even peaceful countries are gripped by gaping inequalities and political polarization."*²,

Considering that the International Day of Peace in 2023 coincides with the Summit on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) held from 18 to 19 September 2023, to mark the halfway point in the implementation of these goals. The SDGs aim to bring us closer to having more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, free from fear and violence³,

Further considering the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development which *"there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development"*,

Noting that peace is one of the five critical dimensions by the United Nations 2030 Agenda,

Bearing equally in mind that peace-building approaches, including dialogue and participation, are among the indispensable tools for achieving Goal 16 of the new Sustainable Development Goals which is to *"promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development"*,

Recalling further that the first word in *"the motto of the Republic of Cameroon 'Peace-Work-Fatherland'"* is **PEACE**,

Considering the African Union's Agenda 2063, Aspiration 4 states that *"Africa is a continent that aspires to live in peace and security, utilizing mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centred approach for conflict prevention and resolution, and the establishment of*

² See <https://www.un.org/fr/observance/international-day-peace>, accessed on 11 September 2023

³ Ibid

a culture of peace and tolerance nurtured among African children and youth through peace education",

Also noting that according to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) in 2022, Cameroon ranks 6th out of the forty-nine (49) African countries most affected by terrorism⁴,

The Commission recalls that despite political commitments to SDG 16, measuring progress on peace, justice and social inclusion has proven challenging, not least because of the limited availability of data needed to assess and monitor progress towards the SDGs,

The Commission also reiterates, with BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI, that "peace, the economy, the environment and sustainable development are the pillars of development [and that] peace provides the security necessary for sustainable development",⁵,

The Commission is concerned about:

- the persistence of certain areas of tension in the Far-North, North-West and South-West regions, which make it difficult to achieve a permanent return to peace and the reconstruction of these regions,
- the persistence of the lockdown imposed by secessionist terrorists on people of the North-West and South-West regions,
- the attacks perpetrated by secessionist terrorists against the civilian population and the police leading to panic among the population of the localities concerned,

The Commission strongly condemns:

- the attack on the vehicle of two young men, aged 36 and 40 respectively in the early hours of Friday 15 September 2023 by secessionist terrorists in the locality of Mile 15 on the road to Mutengene in the Tiko Sub-Division, an attack which caused the death of the driver and left the other passenger in a critical condition⁶,
- the attack to which some staff of the Limbe Court of First Instance fell victim on Friday 15 September 2023 at around 8 a.m. Attributed to three armed individuals presenting themselves as secessionists who, at gunpoint, ordered these unfortunate people to respect the *lockdown*,⁷ this seriously undermined freedom to movement which lead to the violation of a long set of other human rights especially the right to education, the right to health, and the right to carry out a professional activity.

The Commission congratulates and further encourages the inhabitants of the Far-North, North-West and South-West, the majority of whom are in favour of the return and maintenance of peace in these Regions and who are relentlessly denouncing the terrorists hiding in their respective communities, while lending a hand to the Defence and Security Forces through the vigilance committees initiative, thus enabling the Defence and Security

⁴ Global Terrorism Index 2022, *The ranking of African countries most affected by terrorism*, <https://www.agenceecofin.com/multimedia/2004-96841-le-classement-des-pays-africains-les-plus-touchees-par-le-terrorisme-global-terrorisme-index-2022>, accessed on September 2023.

⁵For peace and development, a book by BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI, page 3.

⁶ Report of the regional branch of CHRC in the South-West on 15 September 2023.

⁷ Ibid

Forces (DSF) to dismantle numerous armed gangs and obtain information on possible attacks,

The Commission commends:

- the signing of Decree No. 2023/399 of 4 September 2023 on the creation, organisation and operation of the Peacekeeping Operations Training School,
- the arrest of Éric TANO TATAW, nicknamed "Garri Master", on 1 September 2023 in the United States of America, notorious for his incessant calls for violence, along with the perpetrators of ill-treatment meted out by the secessionists in the North-West and South-West Regions,
- the holding of the fifth session of the Follow-up Committee on the Recommendations of the Major National Dialogue chaired by the Prime Minister, Head of Government on 11 August 2023 at the Mountain Hotel in Buea, at the conclusion of which the following Resolutions were adopted:
 - intensify the implementation of economic recovery measures to consolidate the economic fabric,
 - promote the smooth implementation of the policy of sustainable development and economic growth,
 - consolidate the progress made on the ground to facilitate economic growth,
 - promote a community-based approach to the identification, study and allocation of development projects,
 - to encourage the population to denounce secessionist terrorists and to cooperate actively with the administration and the DSF,
- the signing of Order No. 044/CAB/PM of 24 May 2022 on the creation, organisation and operation of the Special Programme for the Reconstruction and Development of the Far North Region,

The Commission regret to observe that, according to statistics from the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development, the North-West and South-West Regions achieved 52.6 per cent and 31.05 per cent respectively of their public investment budget in 2022, a performance that is sub-optimally dependent on the security situation that still prevails in those Regions,

The Commission, in turn, to mark a certain number of Human Rights Commemorative Days in 2023, strongly condemned all acts undermining the safety of goods and persons, particularly through:

- its statement to mark the *International Day of Remembrance in Honour of the Victims of Terrorism* on 21 August 2023, and
- its statement to mark the *Day for the Protection of Education against Attacks* on 9 September 2023,

The Commission calls upon the armed separatists of the North-West and South-West Regions to observe *twenty-four hours of non-violence and free of any exaction* on Thursday,

21 September 2023 and to make a significant gesture towards lasting peace, which is a catalyst for development;

The Commission once again urges the remaining active terrorist groups in the three troubled regions to accept the Head of State's offer of peace, to permanently cease all forms of attack once and for all, and to join the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Centres. This will enable them to receive appropriate training and facilitate their social reintegration,

The Commission encourages all non-State actors and the Government to continue to seek new peaceful solutions for a definitive return to peace in the North-West, South-West and Far-North Regions,

The Commission makes a vibrant call to principals of armed attack to cease sponsoring attacks in the North-West and South-West Regions,

The Commission encourages the ongoing implementation of the option for the State to maintain and strengthen dialogue in order to address the situation prevailing in the North-West and South-West Regions,⁸

The Commission recommends that the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education accelerate and implement the reform of school curricular that promote tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding,

The Commission reiterates its recommendation that the judicial system should continue to hunt down the perpetrators and instigators of armed attacks wherever they may be hiding and to punish them to the full extent of the law,

The Commission once again calls on other countries where supporters of terrorism in the North-West and South-West Regions are located, to arrest them and bring them before the competent courts, in order to end atrocities in these Regions plagued by insecurity,

The Commission urges the Government to

- further accelerate the decentralisation process through the effective transfer of powers and resources to local authorities, so that municipalities can effectively take charge of their own development,
- to create specialised and strategic posts in the plantations in order to provide security for workers and restore the confidence of the local population,

The Commission also recommends that the Government, religious authorities and leaders of civil society organisations continue to advocate dialogue in their daily discourse,

The Commission recommends that the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development and the National Institute of Statistics set up a mechanism to evaluate the implementation of the twelve (12) targets of MDG 16 that contribute to peace,

⁸ See. Gary FRIEDMAN / Jack HIMMELSTEIN, *Défier le conflit, la médiation par la compréhension*, Nouveaux Horizons, en 2008, p.15.

The Commission urges local authorities in regions suffering from insecurity to work with the relevant State institutions to open up markets and enable people to benefit as much as possible from the produce grown in their fields,

For its part, *the Commission* will spare no effort to continue to promote and protect human rights, as well as to work for reconciliation and peace-building in regions facing security problems, through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, investigative missions, the processing of requests, self-referrals, and the prevention of torture, through visits to all places of deprivation of liberty, including places of detention. It also works to prevent torture by visiting all places where people are deprived of their liberty, including through its **toll-free number, 1523** (toll free).

Yaoundé, the 20 September 2023



James MOUANGUE KOBILA