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CAMEROON HUMAN
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 6th INTERNATIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE DAY
IN CAMEROON

23 September 2023

Theme: “A World Where Deaf People Everywhere Can Sign Anywhere!”

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 the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/161 of 19 December 2017 which proclaimed “23 September as **International Sign Language Day (ISLD)** celebrated annually since 2018 to raise awareness of the importance of sign languages for the achievement of fundamental rights for deaf people”¹,

Recognizing also that the United Nations pursues “Multilingualism as a means of promoting, protecting and preserving diversity of languages and cultures globally, as well as of improving the efficiency, performance and transparency of the Organization”²,

Recalling that according to the World Federation of Deaf, “there are approximately 70 million deaf people in the world and [...] deaf people collectively use more than 300

¹ See paragraph 1 of the Resolution No. A/RES/72/161 adopted on 19 December 2017 by the UN General Assembly to mark the International Sign Language Day, p. 2.

² <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/sign-languages-day> , accessed on 17 September 2023.

different sign languages” and that “the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the equality between sign languages and spoken languages and urges States Parties to encourage the use and learning of sign languages”,

Further recalling that “sign languages [which] are fully-fledged natural languages, structurally different from spoken languages, alongside which they coexist”.³ They are modes of communication used by deaf people during conversations, meetings, or public events.⁴

Underlining that, the 6th International Sign Language Day is celebrated in Cameroon under the theme: “**A World Where Deaf People Everywhere Can Sign Anywhere**” in **their National Sign Language**, and that the UN General Assembly once again calls upon “deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, Governments and civil society organizations their collective efforts - hand in hand - to foster, promote and recognize national sign languages as part of the dynamic and diverse linguistic landscapes of their countries”⁵

Further underlining that the above-mentioned theme appeals for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons to be given access to all necessary programmes and services, and that “accessibility does not only mean the removal of physical barriers, but also the provision of documents that can be used by people with disabilities”,

Finally, stressing that Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which defines accessibility as follows “State parties should take effective measures to ensure equality in society, access to physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public in both urban and rural areas”,

Considering certain provisions of the legal framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing people, mentioned in its previous declarations, published in 2022 to mark the International Sign Language Day in Cameroon and⁶ Persons with Disabilities⁷, including:

³. Ibid

⁴United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), Guidelines for the Inclusion of Disability in Written and Oral Language, p. 12, Department of Global Communications of the United Nations General Assembly, Guidelines for the Inclusion of Disability in Communications, March 2022, p. 31.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), Statement to mark the 5th International Sign Language Day in Cameroon on 23 September 2022, published on 22 September 2022, Yaoundé Cameroon, pp. 2 à 3, on the website <https://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2022-09-2312-56-23.pdf>, accessed on 10 September 2023.

⁷ CHRC, to mark the 31st International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2022, published on 2 December 2022, Yaoundé Cameroon, p. 2 et p. 7, cf. site <https://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Releases2022-12-0213-54-14.pdf>, accessed on 10 September 2023.

- the Preamble of the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which states that “[t]he nation shall protect [...] persons with disabilities”, and that this protection entails giving them the rights to equality by replacing *indirect equality with equality*,
- Article 18(4) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, adopted on 23 July 1987 and ratified by Cameroon on 20 June 1989, which states that “disabled persons should always have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical and moral needs”,
- Article 24, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that was adopted on 13 December 2006, became effective on 3 May 2008, and was ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, as it calls on States to take specific measures to foster the learning of sign language and the promotion of linguistic identity of deaf persons, as well as to employ teachers such as teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language or Braille and to train educational managers and staff at all levels,
- Article 2 of Law No. 2010/003 of 13 April 2010 relating to the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities which states that “any person who is incapable of providing for himself all or part of the necessities of a normal individual or social life whether due to a physical or mental disability congenital or not”,
- Articles 25 and 26 of the same law, which state that “special education consists of introducing disabled persons [...] with sensory impairments [...] to techniques of accurate communication, with the aim of enabling them to gain access to education and later to vocational training” and that “the State, local government and decentralisation, civil society and international organisations will implement programmes of inclusive education and set up training institutions for teachers according to the type of disability”,

The Commission commends Government efforts in promoting and protecting the rights of people with sensory impairments, enabling the deaf and hard-of-hearing to flourish more harmoniously in society, in particular through the convening of the 2023 session of the National Committee for the Rehabilitation and Socio-Economic Reintegration of Disable Persons (CONRHA) on 14 September 2023 on the theme of Inclusive education in Cameroon: *Challenges and Prospects in the context of promoting an inclusive society*,

The Commission recalls that it has organised or actively participated in several activities to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities in general, and those with hearing impairments, deafness and hard-of-hearing in particular such as:

- a workshop organised from 22 to 25 November 2022 to improve the skills of its staff in supervising the access to public buildings by disabled people which took place in Yaoundé, at the Chemuta Divine BANDA conference room of the CHRC,

- Official launch on 29 November 2022 of the ceremony to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at the Cardinal Paul Emile LEGER National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (NCRHP),
- Ceremonies to mark the International Day of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from 1-3 December 2022 in Bafoussam, Dschang and Koutaba in the West Region,
- Monitoring activities to ensure that disability is included in the official examinations for the 2022-2023 academic year in primary and secondary education, carried out by the regional branches of the CHRC,

The Commission nevertheless remains concerned about the persistence of certain factors that hinder the full development of individuals with hearing impairments, in particular:

- failing to implement the provisions of the national and international instruments which apply to them,
- the low interest that people with hearing impairments and their families have in understanding the content of these laws and regulations,
- the lack of interest in introducing modules related to sign language specialisation in the teacher training programmes,
- limited access to information through a host of communication tools not adapted to their disability (telephone, radio, television and ICTs),
- insufficient sign language interpretation equipment and services in public institutions,

The Commission remarks that none of its recommendations formulated on the occasion of the 2022 International Day of Sign Languages have been implemented to date, ***it consequently reiterates*** the recommendations concerning the adoption of reasonable accommodation measures, as set out in its previous statements, addressed to:

1.- the Government,

- training teachers in the use of sign languages, including opening a "*Sign Language Course*" in all teacher training schools in the country from the year 1 to *doctorat* level,
- training doctors and nurses in inclusive *medicine while* ensuring that there is an inclusive unit in every hospital,
- increasing training and employment opportunities – especially in large organisations – for deaf and hearing-impaired job-seekers,
- recruiting systematically a sign language interpreter, whose presence is essential during an interview or exchange with any deaf person in a public service,

- gradually integrating sign language interpreting into all mass communication strategies, and later, its mandatory inclusion in official communication,
- 2.- The Managers of public and private television channels
- providing a news slot in sign language at least in daily television news programme,
 - the progressive introduction of subtitles for deaf and hearing-impaired viewers in all programmes,
- 3.- *Civil society organisations, parents and public* need to be aware that sign language is not limited to gestures and imaginary facial expressions but that it obeys well-defined rules and codes, ignorance of which is a characteristic of illiteracy,

The Commission, for its part, reaffirms that it will spare no effort to continue to raise awareness on the promotion and protection of the rights of deaf or hearing-impaired people as part of handling complaints or self-initiated investigations, or through awareness-raising campaigns, fact-finding missions, advocacy and training workshops,

The Commission once again call upon any person to report any case of violation of human rights of which they have been a victim or witness, particularly any case of violation of the rights of a hearing-impaired, deaf or hard-of-hearing victim to contact the CHRC at its head office or at the branches through its **toll-free number 1523**.

Yaoundé, the 22 September 2023

James MOUANGUE KOBILA

