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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 33rd INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS**

1 October 2023

**Theme: Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration
of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations**

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

Recalling that the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its Resolution No. 45/106 of 14 December 1990, proclaimed the 1st October as **International Day of Older Persons**, with a view to renewing the call on States to take greater account in their public policies of appropriate responses to the specific problems of older persons, as proposed at regional and international meetings on ageing and reflected in the instruments adopted in this field,

Bearing in mind that the United Nations' commitment to raising awareness on the obstacles older persons face in exercising their Rights was subsequently reflected in the celebration of *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day* every 15 June as set out in its Resolution No. A/HRC/RES/24/20 of 27 September 2013 on the Human Rights of Older Persons,

Recalling also that in the aforementioned resolution of 27th September 2013, the United Nations General Assembly "*recognises the challenges related to the enjoyment of all Human Rights that older persons face in areas such as prevention of and protection against violence and abuse, social protection, food and housing, employment, legal capacity, access to justice, health support, long term and palliative care*",

Bearing in mind, further that the same General Assembly require "*that in-depth analysis and action to address protection gaps is essential and that measures should be taken to [...]*"

address” not only barriers related to the accessibility of their environment, but also forms of abuse against older persons, assigned into *“five different categories [...]”*:

- a) *physical abuse,*
- b) *psychological or emotional abuse,*
- c) *sexual abuse,*
- d) *financial or material exploitation,*
- e) *neglect,* [to which the Independent Expert adds] *hate speech”*¹ as an additional form,

Recalling that, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), healthy *“ageing is the process of developing and maintaining functional skills that enable older people to enjoy a state of well-being, these skills [...] are the abilities that enable individuals to be and do what they find rewarding”*²,

Whereas the study entitled World Social Report: *“No one should be left behind in an ageing world”*³, published on 12 January 2023, states that the ageing of the population is a defining global trend of our time:

- the number of persons aged 65 or over in the world is expected to double from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion in 2050
- the number of people aged 80 or more will increase even more rapidly
- globally, babies born in 2022 are expected to live 71.7 years on average, 25 years longer than those born in 1950
- noting that by 2050, there will be twice as many older persons aged 65 than there are now, thus respecting their rights and wellbeing which will outnumber young people aged 15 to 24.⁴

Welcoming the fact that the theme of the 33rd International Day for the Rights of Older Persons, ***Fulfilling the Promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: across Generations***, was chosen *“with the perspective of a future that fulfills the promise of ensuring that all individuals, including older persons, fully enjoy their rights”*⁵,

Noting that the theme of this 33rd Day was selected to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) driven by the *“Droits Humains 75”*⁶ Initiative, and which is celebrated under the theme of *Social Protection and the Right to Development*,

¹ See Resolution A/HRC/54/26 of 7 August 2023 published a report Violence against and abuse and neglect of older persons by Rapport de Claudia MAHLER, paragraph 12, p. 4.

² See <https://www.who.int/fr/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing#:~:text=Qu%E2%80%99est%2Dce%20que%20le,ce%20qu%E2%80%99ils%20jugent%20valorisant> accessed on 25 September 2023.

³ See *“Human rights are key to ensuring no one is left behind”*, Initiative Droits humains 75, published on 12 September 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/stories/2023/09/human-rights-are-key-ensuring-no-one-left-behind>, accessed on 17 September 2023.

⁴ See Michelle BACHELET, *“Protection of older persons’ rights needed now ‘more than ever’*, on 11 April 2022, <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2022/04/1118142>, accessed on 25 September 2023.

⁵ See. 2023 Theme of the 33rd International Day for older persons, <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/older-persons-day>, accessed on 17 September 2023

⁶ *« Human rights are key to ensuring no one is left behind »*, op. cit.

Recalling that Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in his statement to mark the 75th anniversary of the UDHR in New York on 20 April 2023, "*urged States to adopt social protection frameworks that cater to the needs of the most marginalised and to integrate human rights into the decision-making processes concerning economic policies, investment decisions, consumer choice and business models*",⁷

Pointing out that the celebration to mark the 33rd edition of the International Day of Older Persons aims at:

- *increasing global knowledge and awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and generate commitments among all stakeholders to strengthen the protection of the human rights of current and future generations of older persons around the world,*
- *sharing and learning from intergenerational models for the protection of human rights around the world,*
- *calling on Governments and UN entities to review their current practices with a view to better integrate a life course approach to human rights in their work, and to ensure the active and meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, national human rights institutions and older persons themselves, in the work on strengthening solidarity among generations and intergenerational partnerships.*⁸

Considering once again the legal framework for the promotion and protection of the elderly referred to in its previous statements, particularly:

- Mindful of the Constitution of 18 January 1996 which provides in its preamble that "*the nation shall protect [...] the elderly*",
- Considering also that on 20 June 1989 Cameroon ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which was adopted on 27 June 1981 and whose Article 18(4) states that "*the aged and disabled shall also have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical and moral needs*",
- Articles 3 and 5 of the UDHR of 10 December 1948, which state respectively "*that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person, and that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment*",
- Article 2(1) of the Old-Age Insurance Convention (No. 35) adopted at the 17th Session of the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation on 8 June 1933, which provides that "*The compulsory old-age insurance scheme shall apply to manual and non-manual workers, including apprentices, employed in industrial or commercial undertakings or in the liberal professions, and to outworkers and domestic servants*",

⁷ See Statement of UNHCR on the economy of human rights, proclaimed on 20 April 2023 at New-York, <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/statements-and-speeches/2023/04/statement-un-human-rights-chief-human-rights-economy>, accessed on 17 September 2023.

⁸ See 2023 Theme of the 33rd International Day for older persons, *op.cit.*

- Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted on 18 December 1979, entered into force on 3 September 1981 and ratified by Cameroon on 23 August 1994, which deals with appropriate measures to be taken to combat these forms of violence,
- Articles 16 and 17 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006, which entered into force on 3 May 2008 and was ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, guaranteeing persons with disabilities protection against abuse,
- the United Nations Principles for Older Persons adopted by the United Nations General Assembly by Resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991⁹, which set out five pillars for the protection of the rights of these vulnerable persons, namely: independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity,

Considering specifically the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which defined civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights as rights "*inherent in all of us which embody values that all countries share and pledge to respect*"¹⁰, such as:

- Right to Life,
- the right to be free from all forms of discrimination, arbitrary detention and torture,
- freedom of opinion and information,
- freedom of association and peaceful assembly,
- freedom of religion or belief,
- the right to privacy,
- the right to a fair trial and equal protection of the law,
- the right to participate freely in the conduct of public affairs
- the rights to education, adequate food, health, housing and social protection throughout life,
- the right to just and fair conditions of work,

Determined once again to ensure that the rights of older people are promoted, protected and guaranteed in such a way as to ensure the achievement of their rights with a view to their full development in society, 75 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948,

The Commission joins the Working Group on the Rights of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities in Africa in **expressing its satisfaction** at the ratification by the State of Cameroon of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of the Elderly Persons on 8 September 2023, following the signing by the Head of State of Decree No. 2021/752 of 28 December 2021 which ratified the aforementioned Protocol making twelve the number of ratifications (with instruments of ratification

⁹<https://www.un.org/french/esa/socdev/iyop/friyoppo.htm#:~:text=Les%20Principes%20des%20Nations%20Unies,leurs%20programmes%20nationaux%20si%20possible>, accessed on 25 September 2023

¹⁰ See Statement of UNHCR on the economy of human rights, *op. cit.*

deposited) of the said Protocol, a satisfaction expressed in the Press Release of this Working Group made public on 22nd September 2023 in Banjul at Gambia,

The Commission recalls that, following this ratification, the provisions of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of the Elderly in Africa calls on States to ensure that "*the 1991 UN Principles [...] are incorporated in their national laws and are legally binding as the basis for ensuring their rights*" by guaranteeing this vulnerable group of people:

- the elimination of discrimination against them,
- access to justice and equality before the law,
- protection against discrimination in access to employment,
- social protection,
- protection against harmful traditional practices,
- protection of older women,
- care and support, including residential care,
- support for elderly carers of vulnerable children,
- protection of older people with disabilities,
- protection of older people in conflict and disaster situations,
- access to health services,
- access to training,
- participation in leisure programmes and activities,
- accessibility,
- awareness of ageing and preparation for old age,

The Commission is delighted that the Ministry of Finance has postponed the imposition of personal income tax (IRPP) on retirement pensions on 8 September 2023,

The Commission welcomes and commends the efforts of civil society organisations and actors who have undertaken actions in favour of older people, in particular:

- the creation and official opening on 1st October 2023 of the first Elderly Reception and Entertainment Center, known by its French name *Centre d'accueil et de divertissement des personnes âgées* (CAD'PA) in Douala, in the Deido neighbourhood by the Association *Comprendre la Maladie d'Alzheimer* ,
- the organisation, from 26 to 28 September 2023 in the Geriatrics Department of Yaoundé Central Hospital, of the 4th edition of the *Seniors' Days* as a prelude to the celebration of the International Day of Older Persons on 1st October 2023 on the initiative of the *Société camerounaise de Gériatrie-Gérontologie* (SOCAGER), a civil society organisation that campaigns for the maintenance of the autonomy and quality of life of the elderly by staff specialising in geriatrics (a medical specialty that contributes to reducing morbidity and mortality and improving - life expectancy without disability),

The Commission commends the implementation of the recommendation made in its previous statement published on the 29th September 2022 on the occasion of the 32nd edition of the international day of older persons calling¹¹ for the ratification by the State of Cameroon of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons, which was done on the 8th of September 2023,

The Commission nevertheless remains concerned about:

- the prevalence of risk factors for abuse of older people¹² which limits their access to appropriate care and support services along with means of redress and remedy, in particular
 - o ageism, which refers to stereotypes, prejudices and/or discriminatory measures or practices against older people based on the person's civil age,
 - o age stereotyping, which is coupled with other forms of prejudice and preconceived ideas, with the result that older people are made even more vulnerable,
 - o marginalisation and isolation of these vulnerable people
 - o neglect, which can be defined as the failure to meet the needs of an older person, *"the inability or unwillingness of the social environment of professional careers, family members, friends and neighbours to provide older people with the assistance, care and material goods they need to live in dignity"*¹³,
- the failure to include, in the outcome of the 2018 Survey carried out by the Ministry of Social Affaires on Social Situation published in June 2019, of disaggregated statistics by age¹⁴ made available to it on the situation of socially vulnerable people, particularly the elderly
 - o victims of physical, verbal and sexual violence
 - o victims of trafficking, smuggling and sexual exploitation
 - o victims of mistreatment, abuse and neglect,

The Commission endorses the recommendations outlined in the *Report on Violence, Abuse and Neglect of Older Persons* and addresses them to the public authorities, in particular:

- taking appropriate measures to prevent and protect against elder abuse, such as
 - o legal measures and ad hoc action by the public authorities,
 - o awareness-raising programmes targeting all the parties concerned,

¹¹ See Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), Statement on the occasion of the 32nd edition of the International Day of Older Persons slated 1st October 2022, published on the 29th of September 2022, Yaoundé Cameroun, p. 5, <https://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2022-09-2019-11-19.pdf>, consulted on the 23rd of September 2023.

¹² See Resolution A/HRC/54/26 of 7 August 2023, *op. cit.*, paragraphs 11 to 17, pp. 3 to 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, paragraph 48, p. 13.

¹⁴ Statistics available in the Ministry of Social Affairs in the *Bulletin d'informations et de statistiques sociales*, published in June 2019, p. 3.

- provision of age-appropriate community services,
- making it easier for the elderly to access the justice system to report cases of abuse, and effectively punishing anyone who contravenes the laws in force,

The Commission reiterates some of its recommendations especially to:

- *The Government* aiming at implementing a genuine policy of training and recruiting volunteers, to integrate them into national programmes for the care of the elderly,
- *The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family*, especially to increase the number of discussion platforms, to share experiences of older women in various socio-economic and cultural fields,
- *The Ministry of Public Health* aiming at implementing strategies providing care for the elderly, by subsidising the treatment of degenerative and neurodegenerative diseases, and providing care for elderly women who are victims of sexual violence, as well as those who are victims of all other forms of violence that harm their physical and moral integrity,
- *The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education* aiming at initiating the collaboration with civil society organisations that are partners of the Ministry, training courses to promote intergenerational dialogue, so that older people can make an effective contribution to the building of active and aware youth,
- *The Ministry of Social Affairs* aiming at involving civil society organisations working in the field of care for the elderly in the search for external funding and in the implementation of projects to promote and protect their rights,

The Commission, for its part, reaffirms that it will spare no effort in raising awareness of the rights of the older persons through its Statements, its advocacy, fact-finding missions, the handling of complaints or self-initiated investigations and workshops

The Commission once again calls upon any person to report any case of violation of human rights and the rights of the elderly, by calling the CHRC at its Head Office or Branches through its **toll-free number 1523**.

Yacoundé
1 OCT 2023

James MOUANGUE KOBILA