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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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DE LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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CAMEROON HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION

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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
TO MARK THE GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY

15 October 2023

Theme.- *Clean hands are within reach*

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: “the Commission”), established by Law No. 2019 / 014 of 19 July 2019 and became operational on 29 April 2021, following the swearing-in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in Joint Chambers,

*Bearing in mind* that by resolution 64/292 of 28 July 2010, the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to water and sanitation,

*Recalling* that the *Global Handwashing Day* was established by the *Global Handwashing Partnership* during World Water Week, held from 13 to 17 August 2008 in Stockholm, Sweden, to enhance awareness among governments of the need to take measures to prevent disease through advocacy for handwashing, and with a view to better convey the importance of washing hand with soap<sup>1</sup>,

*Welcoming* the theme of *Global Handwashing Day 2023, Clean Hands Are Within Reach*,<sup>2</sup> which fosters strong leadership and collective efforts to close the gaps in access and practice in order to achieve hand hygiene for all,

*Recalling* that the WHO/UNICEF global partnership attaches particular importance to the prevention and fight against water-borne diseases, by celebrating two World Days in the same year: one dedicated to hand hygiene, on 5 May, and another dedicated to toilet, on 19 November,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.afdb.org/fr/event/journee-du-lavage-des-mains>, accessed on 4 October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unwater.org/news/global-handwashing-day-2023>, accessed on 4 October 2023.



**Bearing in mind** the first and sixth targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, that call on the international community to achieve access to adequate and equitable safe drinking water as well as sanitation and hygiene services for all, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations by 2030.

**Also bearing in mind** that one of the objectives of the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 is to encourage people to adopt healthy behaviours that promote good health, by working with local authorities to ensure that minimum standards of hygiene and sanitation are respected in residential areas,<sup>3</sup>

**Considering** that in Cameroon, the promotion and protection of health through handwashing is a key part of government policy and the NDS30, echoing the sixth sustainable development goal which promotes equitable access to water for all,

**Recalling that**, according to Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, correct and frequent hand hygiene also plays a significant role in the fight against epidemics and pandemics, as we have seen from the response to *Coronavirus* and cholera, as well as the burgeoning threat of antimicrobial resistance,<sup>4</sup>

**Acknowledging** the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly by resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, which entered into force on 23 March 1976, ratified by Cameroon on 27 June 1984, and whose Article 1 provides that "[t]he States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical health [...]",

**Considering** General Comment No. 15 on the Right to water of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which defines the right to water as "*an adequate, physically accessible and affordable water supply [...] for personal and domestic uses*"<sup>5</sup>,

**Recalling** the African Guidelines for the Development of Sanitation Policies launched on 10 June 2021 in Lagos, Nigeria, which constitute the minimum standards for the development of a sanitation policy with a view to achieving the conditions for equitable and sustainable hygiene,

**Considering** the World Health Organization (WHO) 2021 Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care for Hospital Administrators and Health Authorities, which provide an in-depth review of the statistics on hand hygiene in health care and specific recommendations to improve the practice and reduce the transmission of pathogenic micro-organisms to patients,

**Reiterating that** handwashing with soap is a particularly effective for hygiene since it:

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<sup>3</sup> See National Development Strategy 2020-2030, for structural transformation and inclusive development, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.afro.who.int/fr/regional-director/speeches-messages/journee-mondiale-de-l-hygiene-des-mains> accessed on 4 October 2023

<sup>5</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The right to water*, Geneva, November 2019, p. 1.



- removes 80 per cent of microbes from the hands, reduces diarrhoeal diseases by 30 to 48 per cent<sup>6</sup> and thereby protects against nosocomial infections;
- reduces the transmission of epidemic-related pathogens such as *Vibrio cholerae* and *Coronavirus*;
- reduce acute respiratory infections by 20 per cent<sup>7</sup>,

**Noting that**, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), hand washing requires adequate sanitary facilities that are accessible and easy to use<sup>8</sup>,

**Also noting that**, according to the same organisation, inequalities in access to hand washing are still evident insofar as:

- only 28 per cent of people in the world's least developed countries (LDCs) have access to basic hand-washing facilities;
- the availability of soap and water in handwashing facilities varies considerably from country to country;
- data from 54 low- and middle-income countries showed that 35 per cent of health facilities do not have soap and water for handwashing;
- only 57 per cent of the world's schools provide '*basic handwashing facilities*' for their pupils, meaning that 818 million students currently have nowhere to wash their hands<sup>9</sup>,

**Acknowledging** the 2023 *Report on the State of Local Development in Cameroon* (Ranedl), which states that "*of the ten (10) Regions of Cameroon, only two have an acceptable percentage of the population with access to an improved water source, namely the Littoral and South-West Regions with 80.9 per cent and 78.2 per cent respectively*"<sup>10</sup>,

**Observing** that when water is not readily available, people may decide that handwashing is not a priority,

**The Commission commends** Government's efforts to promote handwashing by launching a drinking water supply project for nine (9) towns in Cameroon<sup>11</sup> inaugurated on 28 August 2023 in Garoua Boulai (East Region) by the Minister of Water Resources and Energy,

**The Commission takes note of** the consideration partially given by Regional and Local Authorities to its 2022 recommendation regarding the installation and maintenance of handwashing facilities in public places and raising public awareness of the benefits of

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oc-cooperation.org/actualite/supports-de-sensibilisation-journee-mondiale-du-lavage-des-mains>, (Awareness-raising materials for Global Handwashing Day), accessed on 4 October 2023

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/fr/news/item/23-08-2013-who-hand-hygiene-strategy-feasible-and-sustainable-for-health-care-settings-around-the-world>, (The WHO's hand hygiene promotion strategy is applicable worldwide), accessed on 6 October 2023

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> <https://ecomatin.net/cameroun-apres-5ans-dattente-le-gouvernement-lance-enfin-la-2e-phase-du-projet-dalimentation-en-eau-potable-de-9-villes>, (Cameroon: after a 5-year wait, the government finally launches phase 2 of the drinking water supply project for 9 towns) accessed on 6 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> <https://ecomatin.net/cameroun-apres-5ans-dattente-le-gouvernement-lance-enfin-la-2e-phase-du-projet-dalimentation-en-eau-potable-de-9-villes> (supra) accessed on 6 October 2023



handwashing, as is the case in the Douala City Council, Douala 5 Council and some municipalities in Yaoundé,

*The Commission acknowledges* the signing of a strategic partnership between *Cameroon Water Utilities (Camwater)* and the *Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC)* on 11 April 2023 at the Yaoundé Hilton Hotel to improve access to clean water for the population,

*The Commission believes that* it is necessary to focus not only on individual handwashing behaviour but also on collective efforts to create an enabling environment for increased handwashing,

*The Commission recalls* that handwashing is an important element of food safety, disease prevention and child growth, that water is the basic element of life and that drinking water and sanitation are essential for the life and dignity of all<sup>12</sup> ;

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*The Commission reiterates the concerns expressed in its previous Statement to mark the Global Handwashing Day*<sup>13</sup> regarding the low-level of implementation of the regulatory framework that defines security, hygiene and sanitation rules for construction and safety at work, in Cameroon schools and universities, including:

- Decree No. 2008-0737-PM of 23 April 2008, Article 14(3) of which states that "[a]ny building with separate dwellings must have [a] handwashing facility and [a] water discharge system [...] set up for cleaning purposes";
- Decrees No. 2012/267 and No. 2012/268-PM of 11 June 2012 to organise the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Basic Education respectively, whose provisions clearly outline the missions of the Sub-Directorate of Health, Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities in the schools concerned, such as the coordination of health initiatives and the promotion of hygiene and sanitation in the school environment,

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*The Commission notes with regrets that some of its recommendations made in its previous Statement to mark the Global Handwashing Day*<sup>14</sup>, have not been taken into account and therefore reiterates those addressed to:

- Labour Inspectors and Labour Medical Inspectors within their sphere of competence, as well as the Health and Safety Officers of the National Social Insurance Fund, in accordance with the rules and regulations in force, that

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Right to Water*, Geneva, November 2019, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> See Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), Statement to mark the 2022 Global Handwashing Day, on 15 October 2022, published on 13 October 2022, Yaoundé-Cameroon, pp. 5 and 6, <https://www.cdhc.cm-admin-fichiers-Declaration-2022-13-10-pdf>, accessed on 6 October 2023.

<sup>14</sup> See 2022 CHRC's Statement (supra)



- awareness-raising campaigns should be intensified to ensure that all public or private owners of buildings comply with the standards laid down in the relevant instruments in force;
  - systematic inspections should be carried out to ensure that hygiene measures are applied in work and public places;
  - administrative tolerance should stop and offenders punished,
- the public authorities, that
- gutters and watercourses should be protected from pollution by waste, especially plastic from household waste, in order to reduce the risk of contamination for the population;
  - lively awareness raising campaigns of the benefits of hand washing as a sustainable habit in our society should continue,

**The Commission recommends** that Regional and Local Authorities should increase the number of facilities (boreholes and sanitation facilities), include monitoring and management of water points and sanitation facilities in their council development plans (CDP);

**The Commission further recommends** that Regional and Local Authorities install or reopen water points and make them as accessible as possible to residential areas and poor populations;

**The Commission specifically recommends** that the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy and its partners should:

- increase investment to improve people's access to water and sanitation;
- develop a comprehensive approach based on enhanced cooperation, partnerships and public-private investment to improve and maintain infrastructure for access to drinking water and sanitation,

**The Commission specifically recommends** that *Cameroon Water Utilities*:

- improve the quality and quantity of drinking water supply and ensure the maintenance of its water distribution network;
- diligently implement its 2023-2027 Five-Year Priority Investment Program (PPQI) in order to make access to drinking water for all a reality in our society, thus making handwashing part of our daily routine,

**The Commission wishes** to remind people of the most effective way to wash hands properly:

- 1- Wet your hands on clean, running water;
- 2- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with soap;
- 3- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds, including the backs of your hands, the spaces between your fingers and under your nails;
- 4- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water;
- 5- Dry your hands using a clean cloth or disposable towel,

For its part, the Commission will spare no effort to further promote and protect human rights through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy work, fact-finding missions, handling of complaints, self-initiated investigations and the Commission will also work to prevent torture by visiting all detention facilities and by using its toll-free number, 1523 (free calls even without communication credit).

Yaoundé, the 13 October 2023

