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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 AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

**Theme.— *Call for Universal Ratification, Implementation, Domestication and
Periodic Reporting of the Maputo Protocol 20 years after its adoption***

21 October 2023

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

*Recalling that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (Hereinafter: "ACnHPR"), in its resolution ACHPR/Res.1 (V) 89 of 14 April 1989, at its 5th Ordinary Session, held in Benghazi, Libya, from 3 to 14 April 1989, called upon "Member States of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) [now known as the African Union] and all interested organisations to designate 21 October each year as African Human and Peoples' Rights Day"*¹,

*Bearing in mind also that the choice of date coincides with the anniversary of the entry into force on 21 October 1986 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (hereinafter : "ACHPR"), following its ratification by 25 States, adopted on 27 June 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya, at the 18th session of the OAU Assembly*²,

¹ See <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/africa/resolutions/f-rec4.html>, accessed on 10 October 2023.

² The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) became the African Union (AU) during the inaugural Summit of the African Union held in July 2000, at the 36th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the OAU in Lomé, Togo.

Recalling that this day of celebration is also an opportunity for the ACnHPR to call upon *"the peoples of the world in general and the peoples of Africa in particular"* to join with it in intensifying efforts to popularise African and international human and peoples' rights instruments and the rights enshrined therein,

Bearing in mind that four protocols have been adopted, which are instruments of the African Charter:

- either to improve and strengthen the universal protection mechanism, as is the case with the Protocol establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted on 9 June 1998 at the 34th Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which entered into force on 25 January 2004 and was ratified by Cameroon on 9 December 2014, when it deposited its instruments of ratification³
- or supplement the rights proclaimed therein or to improve the implementation of certain rights for the specific protection of certain groups of people, as follows:
 - o The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted on 11 July 2003 at the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union in Maputo, Mozambique (Maputo Protocol), entered into force on 25 November 2005 and was ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2012, when the instruments of ratification were deposited⁴
 - o The Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons, adopted on 31 January 2016 by the 26th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and ratified by Cameroon on 8 September 2023, when the instruments of ratification were deposited
 - o The Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 29 June 2018, which entered into force on 17 June 2020 and was ratified by Cameroon on 8 September 2023, when the instruments were deposited,

Considering that in the preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, the people of Cameroon reaffirm "[their] *attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in [...] the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and [all protocols thereto] duly ratified*",

Considering also Resolution ACHPR 522 (LXXII) on the protection of women against digital violence in Africa, adopted at the 72nd Ordinary Session of the ACHPR, held in Banjul, The Gambia, from 19 July to 9 August 2022,

Further considering the Guidelines on Combating Sexual Violence and its Effects in Africa adopted by the ACnHPR on 5 November 2017,

³ See Cameroon Initial Report under the Maputo Protocol, p. 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Recalling that the year 2023 will mark the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol, an event that justifies the choice of the theme for the celebration of the African Day of Human and Peoples' Rights in 2023,

The Commission warmly applauds the theme *Call for the ratification, domestication, implementation and periodic reporting of the Maputo Protocol 20 years after its adoption*.⁵ ;

The Commission notes that the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, by Resolution No. AHG/Res.240 (XXXI), adopted at its 31st Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in June 1995, endorsed the recommendation of the ACnHPR to elaborate a Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa⁶,

The Commission also notes that the Maputo Protocol promotes and protects the rights of women, defined as "*persons of the female sex, including the girl child*"⁷ **in the following areas:**

- **The elimination of discrimination against women**, defined in Article I, letter e, of this instrument as "*any distinction, exclusion restriction or differential treatment based on sex which is intended to impair or inhibit the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life*"
- **The elimination of harmful practices**, defined in Article I, letter i, as "*any behaviour, attitude or practice that harms the fundamental rights of women, such as the right to life, the right to health, the right to education, the right to dignity and the right to physical integrity*"
- **The elimination of violence against women**, which, according to the provisions of Article I, letter k, of the same instrument, refers to "*all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, restrictions on or arbitrary deprivation of fundamental freedoms, whether occurring in private or public life, in times of peace, conflict or war.*"

The Commission emphasises that the Maputo Protocol:

- **recognises** the civil and political rights of women and girls in general in Articles 3, 4, 9 and 10, and the economic, social and cultural rights in Articles 12 to 19, which are devoted to protection against discrimination, harmful practices and violence against them,
- **provides specific protection** for young girls (Articles 6, 11, 12 and 13), women in armed conflict (Article 11), women in marriage (Articles 6 and 7), widows

⁵ See Concept note drafted by the ACmHPR to mark the African Human and Peoples' Rights Day in preparation for its 77th Ordinary Session to be held from 19 October to 9 November 2023 in Arusha, Tanzania.

⁶ See Preamble of the Maputo Protocol of 11 July 2003.

⁷ See Article I (g) of the Maputo Protocol of 11 July 2003.

(Article 20), older women (Article 22), women with disabilities (Article 23) and women in distress (Article 24),

- **provides specific guarantees** according to:
 - o the principle of gender equality
 - o the principle of participation in the political process and decision-making
 - o integration of gender dimensions and human rights education in national development planning process
 - o access to justice, and equal protection under the law,

The Commission also emphasizes that the Maputo Protocol defines the nature and content of measures to be taken by states in their commitments and efforts to ensure the respect of women's rights, eliminate discrimination, harmful practices, and violence against women,

The Commission recalls that Cameroon submitted its initial report under the Maputo Protocol during the 67th Session of ACnHPR held from 13 November to 3 December 2020,

The Commission joins the Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Africa *to express its satisfaction* regarding the effective deposit, on 8 September 2023, by the State of Cameroon, of the instruments of ratification of the Protocols to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities. This brings the total number of ratifications to twelve (12), as highlighted in the press release of the Working Group issued on 22 September 2023, in Banjul, The Gambia,

The Commission therefore lauds the implementation of its recommendation formulated in its previous Statements, including:

- those published on 29 September 2022, and 2 December 2022, to mark the 32nd International Day of Older Persons ⁸ and the 31st International Day of Persons with Disabilities, respectively. This recommendation called for the ratification by Cameroon of the Protocols to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities, which were ratified on 8 September 2023
- the one published on 15 June 2023 to mark the African Day of the African Child, which called for the acceleration of the adoption and entry into force of the Charter for the Protection of Children Online through the enactment of Law No. 2023/009 of 25 July 2023, on the Protection of Children Online in Cameroon,

⁸ See Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), *Statement to mark the 32nd International Day of Older Persons* on 1 October 2022, published on our website <https://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2022-09-2019-11-19.pdf>, on 29 September 2022, Yaoundé, Cameroon, p. 5, Accessed on 23 September 2023.

The Commission also joyfully recalls the celebration, in 2023, of days that in one way or another address the condition of women and girls, including:

- the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February
- the International Women's Day on 8 March
- the African Child Day on 1 June
- the African Women's Day on 31 July
- the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August
- the African Day of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics on 10 August; and
- the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October,

On the occasion of the African Human and Peoples' Rights Day on 21 October 2023, *the Commission takes this opportunity* to recall the significant actions acknowledged, concerns raised, and recommendations made during African and Universal Human Rights Days celebrated throughout the current year regarding the elimination of discrimination, harmful practices, and the eradication of all forms of violence against women and girls,

Among the major actions carried out by public administrations, private entities, and civil society actors, the *Commission* notably *notes* the following:

- The *National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Cameroon 2022-2026* and the *National Action Plan for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Cameroon 2022-2026* have been validated
- An educational talk was organised on 2 May 2023, by the Regional Office for the North of the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC) to mark the International Day of the Girl Child in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The talk aimed to encourage and inspire young girls to pursue studies in science, engineering, technology, and mathematics and consider careers in the ICT sector
- The Digital Excellence Award was granted to six groups of young girls on 29 April 2023, by the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications after a two-day competition under the theme "*Digital Innovation on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health*"
- A conference on women's entrepreneurship in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) was organised on 31 March 2023, in Yaoundé by the *Women and Youth Leaders Empowerment Forum (WYLEF)*, under the patronage of the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications
- Two partnership agreements for the promotion of cybersecurity were signed on 28 March 2023, in Yaoundé, one with *Digital Access* and the other with the Department of Women and Social Affairs of the Protestant Churches of Cameroon,

Among the concerns, the Commission notes with regret:

- the fact for a majority of women to be more present than men in artisanal and agri-food activities, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as in the informal sector. This situation is characterised by precariousness, low productivity, and low income⁹
- Online harassment of adolescent girls and women, which takes various forms, including insults, spreading rumours and threats, disclosure of confidential information, dissemination of “revenge porn”, harassment, and sexual advances, often by strangers, which violate the physical and moral integrity of women and girls
- The contrast, as reported by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)¹⁰, between the pressing need for digital skills required by employers and the insufficient number of female students in mathematics, physics, computer science, and certain technical fields,

The Commission strongly and vehemently condemns all dishonourable and dehumanising acts publications against women on social networks, harmful cultural practices, and acts of violence that may violate the rights of women and girls,

As for recommendations, the Commission reiterates the following:

To competent administrative services

- speed up the implementation of the national gender policy concerning the promotion of equality, empowerment of women and their transition from the informal to the formal sector
- increase the budgetary resources allocated to the structures responsible for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls to enable them to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices against women
- enhance the role and contribution of women in peace-building and reconciliation activities in regions facing acute security challenges, in particular,

To the Ministry of External Relations ratify the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and the Protection of Personal Data, adopted on 23 June 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea,

To the administrative services and structures in charge of communication and telecommunications

- encourage the media to broadcast positive, non-sexualised images of women
- step up the establishment of channels and platforms:

⁹ See “The National Strategy of Cameroon for the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area 2020-2035” (AfCFTA), published on 22 April 2020.

¹⁰ International Day of Girls in ICT 2022, <https://www.itu.int/women-and-girls/girls-in-ict/fr/journee-internationale-des-jeunes-filles-dans-le-secteur-des-tic-de-2022/>, Accessed on 27 February 2023. Indeed, according to the International Telecommunication Union, “the gap is widening between the digital skills demanded by employers and the number of job seekers with the necessary technical know-how. [...] As a result, the number of female students in technical fields is extremely low”, *ibid*.

- reporting acts likely to violate the rights of women and the girl child in the public space
- support victims of online harassment and all other dishonouring and dehumanising acts on social media,

To the administrative services responsible for promoting the rights of women and the girl child

- intensify the dissemination of the *Resolution on the Protection of Women against Digital Violence in Africa*, as well as the one regarding the *Guidelines on Combating Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa*
- invest more in the collection and publication of disaggregated data, to better inform public policies and evaluate the measures already taken to combat violence against women and their impact
- increase gender-sensitive training for law enforcement officials such as law enforcement officers, immigration officers, medical staff, social workers, prosecutors and judges
- increase women's awareness of the forms of protection and redress available to them, and encourage women of all ages, regardless of their social status, to report all forms of violence done against them, including economic and domestic violence
- to encourage women to organise themselves into economic interest groups, to make the most of their dynamism and thus enable them to overcome the fragility of their individual and organisational structures,

To the ministries in charge of education

- increase awareness among pupils and students of the need to refrain from obscene and risky practices consisting of recording on an electronic medium any image or video likely to expose their intimacy
- ensure that education policies and teaching content do not exacerbate discrimination, harmful practices and violence against women,

To the Ministry of Justice

- ensure that investigations into acts of violence against women are closed and, if the perpetrators are found guilty, they are sentenced in proportion to the seriousness of the charges against them, and the victims are compensated
- to step up the operationalisation of the Commission for the Compensation of Victims of Human Rights Violations and facilitate access to justice for women survivors of acts of violence and harmful cultural practices,

The Commission recommends that Regional and Local authorities, educational establishments, the media, civil society players and parents:

- focus on building women's capacity in the range of services offered by innovative technologies, in the use of ICTs as a palliative solution for self-education and empowerment, and in the methods available to them to ensure their safety online
- change customary practices that support and condone violence against women, such as widowhood abuse and female genital mutilation (FGM), and eliminate stereotypes that legitimise violence against women
- further strengthen the role of boys, men and local communities in preventing and combating FGM, discrimination and violence against women
- demonstrate decency and prudence in the use of ICTs, especially by publishing positive and non-sexualised images of women in social media and using language that respects the image and consideration of women and the girl child in all circumstances
- develop and/or strengthen women's organisations and groups, especially in commerce - including the informal sector - by implementing specific support programmes and training for these organisations and groups:
 - o not to lose sight of the fact that *“education helps to protect communities and is undoubtedly a preventive measure against violence”*
 - o to remember also that *“when children [and particularly the girl child] go to school, their minds become less susceptible to those who try to recruit them to commit violence [because they] are trained to reason better [,] are better armed against manipulation [and] can make choices that will enable them to take care of themselves [...] and help their community and nation progress”*,

The Commission once again invites women, girls, men and boys to break the silence by denouncing or reporting any cases of human rights violations and women's rights violations in particular, of which they have been victims or witnesses, also through the Commission's **toll-free number 1523.**

Useful Addresses of the CHRC

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