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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN**

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**CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE
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**STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 32nd INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES**

Theme. – *United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons
with disabilities*

3 December 2023

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

Recalling that the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated yearly on 3 December with the aim of "*eliminating prejudice and fear from society*"¹, while promoting their integration and access to economic, social and political life,

Recalling also that the 47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on 7 October 1992, adopted Resolution 47/3 proclaiming 3 December each year as the ***International Day of Disabled Persons***,

Noting that this Day provides an appropriate opportunity to mobilise the actors involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, to assess the progress made in their development, to identify the difficulties encountered and to look to the future, considering new challenges,

¹ See Joseph SHAPIRO, *No Pity*, Nouveaux Horizons, 1993, 247 pp., p. 3.

Noting further that '[t]he time [has come] to showcase their skills, potential and talents, while mobilising the international community to support the dignity and well-being of persons with disabilities'²,

Considering that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/61/611, which entered into force on 3 May 2008 and was ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2008, aims to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities and to respect their inherent dignity,

Recalling that Article 3 of the same Convention sets out eight general principles, namely:

- *Respect for inherent dignity [...]*
- *Non-discrimination*
- *Full and effective participation and integration in society*
- *Respect for differences [...]*
- *Equal opportunities*
- *Accessibility*
- *Equality between men and women*
- *Respect for [the rights of the child with disabilities]*³,

Also recalling that Cameroon actively celebrates this day yearly under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), and that the expected results include:

- highlighting the main actions and progress made in promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities
- raising national awareness of the theme of the Day
- identifying the best strategies for mainstreaming disability issues in each sector,

Considering that the theme of this year, *United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons with disabilities*, underlines the global commitment to promote inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

Noting that, according to the UN,

[t]he attainment of genuinely sustainable development for individuals with disabilities necessitates a clear emphasis on their requirements and entitlements, not only as

² See "Journée internationale des personnes handicapées", <http://www.minas.cm/fr/journee-internationale-des-personnes-handicapees.html>, accessed on 29 November 2023.

³ See UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with, Article 3.

recipients but also as dynamic participants in social, economic, and political realms⁴ of the country,

Noting that, according to Article 1 of the above-mentioned Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others,

Taking into account Section 2 of Law No. 2010/002, of 13 April 2010, on the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, and of its Implementing Order No. 2018/6233/PM of 26 July 2018, holds that “*a person with a disability [is] someone who is incapable of attending to all or some requirements for a typical individual or social life, due to a physical or mental impairment, regardless of whether or not it is congenital; [the article also defines disability as] a constraint that limits the ability of an impaired person to fully participate in an activity within a given environment*”,

Noting that, according to the United Nations,

the [17] Sustainable Development Goals, [adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015], provide a universal call to action to eliminate poverty, safeguard the planet and improve the quality of life for everyone, [including those with disabilities], across the globe; the goals also aim to create opportunities for all individuals⁵,

Considering that the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Report published on 9 December 2022 highlights that “*the Coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and climate change have all hampered Africa’s (including individuals with disabilities’) efforts to achieve SDGs*”⁶,

Noting that in spite of progress made in many areas of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals, it remains insufficient due to the inadequate speed and scale of its implementation, which exacerbates the vulnerability of persons with disabilities,

Considering that the UN Secretary General, during the *Weekend of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals* held on 16 and 17 September 2023 at the UN Headquarters in New York, said

⁴ See “International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December”, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/day-of-persons-with-disabilities>, accessed on 29 November 2023.

⁵ See “The Sustainable Development Agenda”, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/en/development-agenda/>, accessed on 29 November 2023.

⁶ See African Union, Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, *2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report*, November 2022, 152 pp.

[t]he global Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical divides, and the lack of public interest in achieving the SDGs necessitate a genuine stimulus package [as o]nly 15 per cent of the targets are on track, with many going into reverse⁷,

Also noting that during the same event, Mr Dennis Francis, President of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, encouraged all stakeholders across all fields and disciplines, including organisations representing persons with disabilities, to participate in “*delivering tangible outcomes for both people and the planet; it is imperative that concrete progress be made, and voices and hands lent to ensure a transformative process*”.

Bearing in mind that due to the vulnerability and social challenges experienced by individuals with disabilities, their rights are explicitly acknowledged and safeguarded at national, African and worldwide levels.

Considering that the Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon of 18 January 1996 states that “*the nation shall protect [...] the elderly and the disabled*”, thus promoting the equality of all before the law,

Considering also the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which was adopted on 27 June 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya, and ratified by Cameroon on 20 June 1989, stipulates in Article 18(4) that “*persons with disabilities shall have the right to specific measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs*”, **Taking into account** the African Charter of the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance, and Local Development, which was adopted on 27 June 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, entered into force on 13 January 2019, and ratified by Cameroon on 31 October 2019, and which, in its Preamble, recognises decentralisation, local governance and local development as prerequisites for improving the living conditions of all the peoples of the continent, including persons with disabilities,

Considering Article 27(2) of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, which provides that the State “*shall encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in various social and political bodies*” in Cameroon,

The Commission commends the Government and its partners for their efforts to enhance the legal and institutional framework related to the rights of persons with disabilities, including:

- the partnership agreement between the Inclusive Society for Persons with Disabilities Platform and MINAS, signed on 8 June 2023 in Yaoundé
- tDecree No. 0036/MINCOMMERCE, signed on 15 February 2023, establishing harmonised urban transport fares for persons with reduced mobility, the ceiling per kilometre being set at 7 CFA francs

⁷ Extract from the speech of Antonio GUTERRES, United Nations Secretary General, during the *SDG Action Weekend*, 16 December 2023 at UN Headquarters in New York.

- the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, ratified by Cameroon on 28 September 2023 and entered into force on 28 October 2023;

The Commission acknowledges the range of initiatives organised by domestic institutions, development partners and civil society organisations in support of persons with disability, specifically:

- the Douala Port Authority (PAD) which launched activities to commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 25 November 2023 in Douala
- the Cameroon National Paralympic Committee which organised the Paralympic Games in Yaoundé from 24 to 26 November 2023
- the *Institut Africain d'Informatique* (IAI) which presented around 100 certificates for ICT training to persons with disabilities in Mbalmayo on 13 October 2023 the Cameroon representation of
- the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and MINAS sponsorship of a capacity-building workshop for associations of persons with disabilities, focused on coordination mechanisms between such associations, which took place in Douala from 23 to 25 August 2023
- the training workshop for legal professionals on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, organised by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, from 20 to 21 July 2023, at *Hôtel Mont-Fébé* in Yaoundé
- The Association for the Promotion of Persons with Disabilities in Cameroon (PROMHANDICAM) which held an advocacy workshop for municipal councils and decentralised government services on the employment of persons with disabilities in Yaoundé on 17 July 2023
- the *Cercle des Jeunes aveugles réhabilités du Cameroun* (CJARC) and its partners from France and Chad, who conducted a training course in mathematical Braille, from 3 to 14 April 2023 in Mongo, Chad
- the Cameroon Federation of Sports for the Visually Impaired (FECASDEV) which held an elective General Assembly on Wednesday 7 December 2022 at the headquarters of the Cameroon Federation of Sports for the Intellectually Impaired (FECASDI), attended by the representative of the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education (MINSEP),

The Commission is pleased that it was able to release two statements between 4 December 2022 and 3 December 2023, on days commemorating the rights of categories of persons with disabilities, namely:

- the Sixth International Sign Language Day, celebrated on 23 September 2023 on the theme "*A World Where Deaf People Can Sign Anywhere*" and
- the 22nd World Braille Day, which was observed on 4 January 2023;

Noting that persons with disabilities, because of their disability, hardly enjoy the same rights as other citizens, which contributes to the frustrations they experience on a daily basis,

Observing that, in 2022, MINAS has recorded statistics in the ten regions, which indicate that⁸ :

- 382 children, comprising 221 boys and 161 girls, were born with disabilities
- out of 16,774 requests for assistance, MINAS provided support for income-generating activities (IGAs) to 2,308 persons with disabilities,

Noting also that, according to statistics recorded by the United Nations and published in 2022:

- there are seven SDG targets that explicitly refer to persons with disabilities
- some 80 per cent of the 1 billion persons with disabilities reside in developing countries
- more than 100 million persons with disabilities are children
- 50 per cent of persons with disabilities are unable to afford healthcare
- 46 per cent of persons above 60 years of age have a disability
- one in five women are likely to experience a disability at some point in their lives⁹,

Noting that the situation for persons with disabilities in Cameroon remains of great concern, given the difficulties they face daily, particularly:

- i) limited access to healthcare
- ii) low literacy and undereducation
- iii) stigmatisation
- iv) inaccessibility to both public and private spaces
- v) difficult access to information
- vi) lack of traffic lights adapted to different types of disability
- vii) difficult access to means of communication adapted to different types of disability
- viii) difficult access to decent jobs
- ix) the lack of public transport adapted to people living with disabilities, etc.,

The Commission acknowledges that the United Nations, in relation to SDG 3 on health and well-being, stresses the need to "*ensure universal health coverage, including protection*

⁸ See Ministry of Social Affairs, *Bulletin d'informations et de statistiques sociales*, No. 22, year 2022, published in February 2023, 219 pp.

⁹ See « "International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December" », <https://www.un.org/en/observances/day-of-persons-with-disabilities>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

against financial risks, and access to quality essential health services[,], safe, effective, high-quality and affordable essential medicines [and] vaccines";

The Commission laments the fact that, although the legal and regulatory framework for upholding the rights of persons with disabilities continues to be strengthened, the vast majority of persons with disabilities are unaware of the benefits of these instruments, which increases their vulnerability;

The Commission wishes to note that through its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Cameroon reaffirms the dignity of persons with disabilities and makes a strong commitment to promote and protect all their rights even more effectively;

The Commission wishes to remind that it held a range of events to promote and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities during the last celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, particularly through:

- the official launch ceremony for the International Day of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which took place on 29 November 2022 at the *Cardinal Paul Émile LEGER Centre national de réhabilitation des personnes handicapées* (CNRPH) in Etoug-Ébé, Yaoundé
- the Feedback Session of the *Monitoring of the implementation of the disability approach in public building construction*, which was held at the CHRC Head Office on 25 November 2022; *experts* from the administrative and State bodies responsible for public building construction attended the session, specifically, the Public Contracts Regulatory Agency (ARMP), the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure (MINDCAF), the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), the Ministry of Public Procurement (MINMAP), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINHDU), and the Ministry of Public Works (MINTP); they helped in developing recommendations
- visits conducted by CHRC teams in Yaoundé, from 23 to 24 November 2022 to *verify the incorporation of disability approaches in the construction of 23 public buildings, including:*
 - *old buildings* like the Ministry Building No. 2 (MINESUP, MINDCAF, MINEPDED), MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINFOPRA, MINPOSTEL, Central Hospital, Chantal Biya Foundation, MINFI, MINSANTÉ, MINJUSTICE, MINAS, MINTSS and MINPROFF
 - *newly constructed buildings* such as CURY, INS, ELECAM, CAA, ART, DGI
 - *buildings under construction, i.e.* MINTP, MINFOF, National Assembly,
- capacity building on 22 November 2022 for the CHRC's Commissioners and staff members; experts from administration and state structures, including ARMP,

MINDCAF, MINDDEVEL, MINMAP, MINHDU, and MINTP, were present to discuss measures to monitor the inclusion of disability in the accessibility of infrastructures;

The Commission is pleased with the range of activities it participated in, during the period under review, especially:

- the *Forum of leaders of deaf persons' organisations*, organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs under the theme "*Organisations serving the deaf community and commitment to reconciliation, solidarity, and respect for our language, culture, and active involvement in the development of our deaf community and our country,*" which took place on 29-30 September 2023
- the *Workshop for the Validation of the Guide on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Cameroon* for legal professionals organised on 29 May 2023 at the Djeuga Palace Hotel in Yaoundé; this workshop was organised by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa
- the *Training workshop for members of organisations of persons with disabilities on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, organised by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, from 10 to 11 May 2023 at Mérida Hôtel in Yaoundé
- the official launch ceremony of the "*We Ring the Bell 2023*" campaign by MINAS on 4 May 2023 at Yaoundé VI City Hall, to raise awareness of families and communities of the education of children with disabilities;

The Commission welcomes the National Association of the Blind of Cameroon (ANAC)'s *capacity-building workshop for individuals with disabilities to discuss legal instruments promoting and safeguarding their rights ratified by Cameroon*; the workshop occurred on 11-12 August 2023 in Dschang;

The Commission commends the Ministry of Communication's initiative to draft a bill outlining access conditions to information and communication for persons with disabilities;

The Commission extends its congratulations to Mr Paul TEZANOU, President of the Francophone Union of the Blind and ANAC, for his successful re-election at the end of the 5th Session of the General Assembly of the Francophone Union of the Blind held in Rabat, Morocco from 26 to 30 October 2023; Mr TEZANOU's longstanding efforts towards the advancement and safeguarding of the rights of persons with disabilities have been recognised with his appointment as Honorary Life Member of the Francophone African Union of the Blind (UAFA);

The Commission restates to the Government its recommendations as part of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2022:

- *to the Ministry of Public Procurement and the Public Contracts Regulatory Agency*, to ensure that the disability approach is methodically considered when preparing Call for Tenders (CFT) documents for infrastructure construction in Cameroon; for this to be achieved, this requirement should be an eliminatory criterion for bidding on public contracts, under the provisions of the Joint Circular Letter No. 002/LC/MINMAP/MINTP/MINHDU/MINAS dated 16 July 2013 on facilitating accessibility for individuals with disabilities or reduced mobility in the built environment
- *to the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development*, to guarantee that disability is considered at the local level through accessibility in councils, transport, and signage duly adapted to persons with disabilities, in coordination with the Local Authorities,
- *to the Ministry of Higher Education*, to expedite the implementation of the Joint Circular Letter No. 08/0006/LC/MINESUP/MINAS dated 9 July 2008 to lay out measures to enhance the reception and supervision of disabled or vulnerable students in State universities in Cameroon
- *to the Ministry of Transport*, to reinforce current provisions to provide public transport accessibility for individuals with disabilities
- *and to all players in the communication chain*, to set up teams of sign language interpreters in all national television channels to ensure access to information for the deaf and hard of hearing;

The Commission recommends:

1) To the Government,

- adopt the decree governing the establishment, organisation, and functioning of medical and functional rehabilitation institutions for persons with disabilities, in accordance with Article 2(2) of the Law of 13 April 2010, on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, to enable their setting up by the State, regional and local authorities, civil society organizations, and, if necessary, by international organisations,
- improve communication and change attitudes towards persons with disabilities
- ensure access to communication methods that are adapted to different types of disabilities
- take concrete measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to decent employment
- enhance the financial resources allocated to governmental bodies and structures responsible for the welfare, education, health and social development of persons with disabilities, to improve their effective participation in sustainable development at both local and national levels;

- 2) *To the Ministry of Social Affairs,*
 - further increase awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national laws that protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities to instil ownership and implementation by all
 - enhance actions to prevent disabilities, offer rehabilitation to those affected, and encourage their socio-economic integration
 - further enhance the capacities of individuals with disabilities and their representative organisations for their participation in sustainable development;
- 3) *To the Ministry of Public Health,*
 - raise awareness among the general population, especially women and girls, of the adverse effects of attempted voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), alcohol and drug abuse, psychotropic substances, violence against pregnant women, and lack of vaccinations, which can lead to disabilities in newborn babies
 - define the implementation procedures of:
 - o universal health coverage for individuals with disabilities, including children, women, and the elderly
 - o Section 19(1) of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, which establishes a family allowance for indigent persons with disabilities who have not been able to acquire a minimum level of autonomy and whose state of health requires constant medical supervision and care, and
 - o Section 22(1) of the mentioned law which provides full or partial coverage of medical rehabilitation and functional re-education costs for persons with disabilities recognised as destitute and possessing a national disability card, by the State in specialised institutions and public or private healthcare facilities;
- 4) *To the Ministries in charge of Basic, Secondary and Higher Education,* take further concrete steps to ensure equitable access to quality education for all, specifically for persons with disabilities;
- 5) *To the Ministry of Transport,* implement new measures to provide the population with accessible public transport, specifically for those living with disabilities; including at the regional and local levels
- 6) *To Regional and local authorities in Cameroon,* adopt the *Guide to Inclusive Local Development (DLI)* to ensure the effective participation of all local

stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, in collective local development work by mainstreaming their specific needs into local development policies;

The Commission, for its part, is fully committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy activities, fact-finding missions, handling of complaints, self-initiated investigations and, in the context of the prevention of torture, visits of all detention facilities; CHRC's actions include interventions through its **toll-free number 1523 (even without airtime)**.

Useful CHRC addresses. –

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