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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK
THE WORLD BRAILLE DAY

4 January 2024

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 Commissioners before the Supreme Court sitting in Joint Benches,

Bearing in mind that the United Nations General Assembly, by Resolution No. A/RES/73/161 of 17 December 2018, proclaimed 4 January as *World Braille Day* “to be observed each year, beginning in 2019, in order to raise awareness of the importance of Braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for the blind and partially sighted people”¹,

Recalling that 4 January was chosen for this celebration as a tribute to Louis BRAILLE, a teacher and musician, born on 4 January 1809, who became blind at the age of three and invented the Braille alphabet in 1829, thus improving the writing system developed by Charles BARBIER, known as sonography, which at the time was limited to sounds, without taking into account spelling, punctuation or mathematical signs²,

Bearing in mind that, according to the Preamble to the aforementioned Resolution of 17 December 2018, “Braille is a means of communication [...] relevant in the contexts of

¹ Article 1 of Resolution A/RES/73/161 du 17 December 2018 on World Braille Day.

² <https://www.journee-mondiale.com/165/journee-mondiale-du-braille.html>, accessed on 20 December 2023.

education, freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information and written communication, as well as in the context of social inclusion for blind persons”,

Bearing also in mind that the General Assembly, in the Preamble to the same resolution, affirmed that *“the importance of well-developed literacy skills on the part of all individuals [reflects] the value placed on reading and writing [Braille] in schools and throughout society [and] can justifiably be considered the cornerstone of education and an important tool in the fight against poverty”,*

Recognizing that visually impaired children have specific educational needs in terms of assistive technology according to the impact of their disability on their functioning³ and based on the relevant category within the International Classification of Visual Impairment adopted by the World Health Organisation⁴ :

- blind pupils in category 5⁵, which corresponds to complete blindness, need special equipment to read and write Braille
- visually impaired children classified in the other four categories⁶, which correspond to binocularly corrected visual acuity, may need glasses, hand-held magnifiers and reading-stands,

Noting that the writing and reading of Braille is a true alphabetic code consisting only of two lines and three dots, which requires the learner:

- to start by learning to write by tracing codes and symbols on paper and then to decode them by learning to read them⁷
- special schools and qualified teachers available to teach this alphabetic code and decode it for the learner and the sighted teacher
- an accessible learning system⁸ that *“includes textbooks, teaching materials, assessments and other documents that are available and provided in appropriate*

³ See Sightsavers, *Teacher’s guide: Inclusive teaching and learning for children with visual impairments*, Guy Le FANU, September 2018, p. 16.

⁴ See <https://www.who.int/en/news-rooms/fact-sheets/detail/blindness-and-visual-impairment>, accessed on 21 December 2023 and World Health Organisation, *World report on vision*, Geneva, 2020, p. 12.

⁵ Category 5 corresponds to blindness: no light perception, including the loss of the eye.

⁶ The other four categories in the WHO classification, in descending order, are:

- category 4.- visual acuity corrected by binoculars at 1/50^e, with light perception or visual field less than 5
- category 3.- visual acuity corrected by binoculars less than 1/20^e and better or equal to 1/50^e
- category 2.- visual acuity corrected by binoculars less than 1/10^e and better or equal to 1/20^e
- category 1.- visual acuity corrected by binoculars less than 3/10^e and better or equal to 1/10^e with a visual field of at least 20

⁷ See Marie-Alice DU PASQUIER, *Comment l’écriture vient à l’enfant, De l’histoire universelle à l’histoire de chacun*, published in le *Journal des psychologues*, 2009/9 No. 272, p. 22.

⁸ This includes a non-exhaustive list of 22 items published on page 635 of the General Tax Code, revised edition of 1 January 2022: reams of Braille paper (Canson), thermoformed paper (Brailion papers), talking scientific calculator, talking clock, digital tape recorder, Braille embosser (Braille printer), Braille rulers (school equipment), Braille measuring tape, Braille embosser (Braille printer), Special or adapted keyboards (hand-held keyboards), virtual keyboards, vocal telephones, raised rulers, low-voltage fluorescent lamps, ordinary white canes, electronic white canes, algebraic cubes, Perkins machines, Braille dolls, Velcro/threaded boards, woollen boards and pencils, etc..

formats such as audio, Braille, sign language and simplified formats that can be used by learners and teachers with disabilities/functional limitations”⁹

- a stimulating, supportive and accessible environment in which sightless people receive quality education with the support and encouragement of their teachers, parents and family members¹⁰,

Noting further as the remarks of Ulrike HANEMANN¹¹ during the International Literacy Day on 8 September 2023, “*continuous, independent and lifelong learning is not possible without mastering other key competencies, in particular reading, writing, and arithmetic, which in turn are necessary for the acquisition of other skills in high demand, including communication, problem-solving and the (critical) analysis of information*”,

Also noting that “*those without minimum level of literacy proficiency are potentially excluded from a range of opportunities in lives*”, and that literacy is above all a fundamental human right and an essential element of lifelong learning,

Noting that Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,

Bearing in mind the normative and institutional frameworks at the national, African and universal levels mentioned in its previous statement to mark the 2023 World Braille Day,

The Commission recalls that the preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 states that “[t]he people of Cameroon [...] affirm their attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all duly ratified international conventions relating thereto”,

The Commission notes that the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled, adopted on 27 June 2013, entered into force on 30 September 2016 and was ratified by Cameroon on 27 April 2021, obliges States Parties to:

- ensure that published works and books are produced in accessible formats, including Braille
- authorise, by way of exception, the import and export of copies in accessible formats by way of derogation from the distribution right, the rental right and the right of communication to the public, which are all prerogatives deriving from copyright and related rights
- ensure that the exception granted for the import and export of works intended for transcription into Braille meets the three requirements of the Marrakesh Treaty, namely

⁹ See UNESCO Institute of Statistics, *SDG 4 – Countries Profile*, https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/rapportvalidationdonnees_sdg4_cmr.pdf, p. 40, accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁰ See Sightsavers, *Teacher's guide*, op. cit., p. 6

¹¹ Ulrike HANEMANN, a German, is an independent international literacy and education specialist.

- that these works are intended exclusively for the beneficiaries
- that the exception does not conflict with a normal exploitation of the work
- that the exception does not unreasonably prejudice the legitimate interests of the right holder
- establish an “*information access point*” to enable the voluntary sharing of information that assists in identifying bodies authorised and recognised by governments to provide a wide range of services, particularly in the field of education and access to information, to persons benefiting from the Treaty.

The Commission also notes certain provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006, entered into force on 3 May 2008 and ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2008, including:

- Article 2 which defines, *inter alia*, the notions of
 - “discrimination on the basis of disability” as
any distinction, exclusion or restriction [...] which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field
 - “Universal design” as
the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design [and this design] shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed,
- Article 3 which recalls the principles which backup the content of the Convention, namely:
 - a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
 - b) Non-discrimination
 - c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
 - d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
 - e) Equality of opportunity
 - f) Accessibility
 - g) Equality between men and women
 - h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities,
- Article 9 which links the concept of accessibility to measures to identify and remove barriers to accessibility, particularly in:
 - Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces
 - Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services,

Finally, the Commission notes, as does the Ministry of Basic Education¹² (referred hereafter with the French acronym: “MINEDUB”), that according to the *2021-2022 Statistical Yearbook* published in February 2023

- out of a total of 596,197 pupils enrolled in the pre-school cycle¹³, there are 1,335 pupils with disabilities, including 324 pupils with visual impairments
- out of a total of 4,944,290 pupils enrolled in primary education¹⁴, 10,309 are disabled, including 4,560 pupils with visual impairments.

The Commission reaffirms that education, as a fundamental right enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is “*the learning of a set of skills [which] begins at an early age with the acquisition of basic knowledge, i.e. literacy [and at this stage consists of] children learning to read and write through primary education and parental guidance*”¹⁵,

The Commission reminds certain provisions of Decree No. 2018/6233/PM of 26 July 2018 to lay down the modalities for the application of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, in particular Articles 4, 20 and 22, require public and private structures to adopt specific measures to facilitate access to information for blind and partially sighted persons in the fields of education, vocational training, roads, built-up areas and consumer affairs,

The Commission commends the efforts made in 2023 by Government and their partners in a bid to promote and uphold aspects of the rights of blind people related to access to the built environment, education, lifelong learning, and employment in particular:

- the holding of the first edition of the giant concert entitled “*Handi sur scène Acte I*”, at the Yaoundé Multipurpose Sports Complex on Saturday 2 December 2023, with the performance of several disabled musicians¹⁶, including the visually impaired, under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Arts and Culture, as a foretaste of the International Day of Disabled Persons celebrated on 3 December 2023
- the organisation by the Club for the Young Blind Rehabilitated of Cameroon (referred hereafter with the French acronym: “CJARC”), under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs, of the ceremony of the handing over of equipment for

¹² See. MINEDUB, *Statistical Yearbook 2021/2022*, published in February 2023, 617 pp.
http://minedub.cm/uploads/media/Statistical_Yearbook_anglais.pdf, accessed on 26 December 2023.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 119 – 120.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 287 – 288.

¹⁵ See Humanium, *Comprendre le droit à l'éducation des enfants*,
<https://www.humanium.org/fr/comprendre-droits-enfant/droit-a-l-education/>, accessed on 21 December 2023

¹⁶ Grand Pacho, Angéline Tezanou, Coco Bertin, Prince Aimé, Cédric Ck, Chouchou Sinclair, Mysh-L, Pamela Luz.

the blind and of 20 school kits¹⁷ to blind children on the occasion of the International Day of the White Cane, from 23 to 26 October 2023 in Mokolo and Mora

- the organisation by CJARC, on 2 July 2023, of the ceremony marking the end of training for the 4th batch of student teachers specialising in inclusive education and specifically in the teaching of Braille, trained at the Louis Braille Government Teachers' Training College (GTTC), a batch of 60 graduates, three of whom are visually impaired
- The official launch of the "We Ring the Bell" Campaign on 4 May at the Yaoundé VI Town Hall by the NGO *Sightsavers* and the *Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services* (CBCHS), with the participation of five ministries¹⁸, under the theme "*From policy to practice: inclusive education for children with disabilities in Cameroon*", with the aim of increasing the enrolment rate of children with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments, to "*accelerate the achievement of [Sustainable Development Goal 4] in Cameroon and continue the implementation of inclusive education*"
- the organisation by the CJARC of a workshop to evaluate the effectiveness of access to information for visually impaired people, held at its headquarters in Yaoundé on 10 January 2023, as an extension of the celebration of International Braille Day.

The Commission expresses satisfaction with:

- the transcription into Braille of the CHRC's statement to mark the World Braille Day, to be celebrated on 4 January 2023, and its distribution to institutions for the blind, including schools, through letters which were themselves transcribed into Braille
- the publication of a press release by civil society organisations (CSOs)¹⁹ on 3 January 2023, acknowledging the said CHRC statement, which they believe "*contributes to increasing opportunities for persons with visual impairments*" to access education.

The Commission, however remains concerned about the persistence of various obstacles²⁰ faced by blind children, which prevent them from learning to read and write and, particularly, from enjoying the rights that come with literacy:

- social stereotypes that underestimate their abilities
- the negative attitudes of some parents who, ashamed of their children's disability, refuse to enroll them in school or leave the educational and social supervision of

¹⁷ Each kit was made up of a bag, a Braille tablet and a transcription clip.

¹⁸ The five Ministries concerned are: the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF).

¹⁹ These CSOs are Hope Social Union for the Visually Impaired (HSUVI) and Coordination Unit of the Association of Disabled People. (CUAPWD).

²⁰ Sightsavers, *Teacher's guide*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

their blind children to private centres for specialised accommodation and training without any follow-up

- the high cost of acquiring specialised educational materials and equipment for blind children ²¹, even though these materials and equipment are exempt from VAT under the provisions of Section 128 (21) of the General Tax Code
- the low number of specialised and qualified teachers in inclusive public schools
- the lack of textbooks and official documents in Braille
- the low attention given to the importance of children's eye health during educational talks in maternity, gynecology, and pediatric wards
- the limited consideration given to Braille displays and formats that are easy to read and understand in buildings and/or areas open to the public, as well as on consumer products, including pharmaceutical products.

The Commission is once more committed to ensuring that the rights of visually impaired people are better promoted and guaranteed so that they can develop more harmoniously in society,

The Commission is gratified by the positive response of public administrations to the recommendations highlighted in its statement to mark the World Braille Day on 4 January 2023, including from:

- *the Ministry of Higher Education*, which has undertaken to carry out an in-depth study, supported by proposals for appropriate measures, to further facilitate the integration of visually impaired and blind students and teachers into higher education in Cameroon;
- *the Ministry of Social Affairs*, which has reported
 - o the inclusion in its 2023 annual action plan of a budget of eight million francs to cover the costs of examinations and support for the special education of 836 pupils and students with disabilities or born to poor parents with disabilities
 - o the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty through the work of the National Committee for the Rehabilitation and Socio-Economic Reintegration of People with Disabilities (CONRHA)
 - o the planned initiation of a discussion forum with the Ministry of Trade, with the aim of identifying priority steps to be taken for improving access to printed texts, published works, and educational materials for the blind and visually impaired,
- *the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development*, which intends to launch an awareness-raising campaign among local authorities of the need for innovative solutions to the problems faced by the blind and visually impaired,
- *the Ministry of Arts and Culture*, which is committed to building the capacity of staff to facilitate the access of blind and partially sighted people to its central and deconcentrated services

²¹ It is a list of 22 items published on page 635 of the General Tax Code, revised edition of 1 January 2022

- *the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education* which appreciate and support the recommendations concerning the accessibility of services for the blind and partially sighted, both in terms of physical infrastructure, and information, and communication,

The Commission, also committed to making Braille more widely available, to disseminating related teaching tools and materials, and to encouraging people to “*play down visual impairment by showing that a blind person can live like anyone else with a few adaptations*”²², ***recommends that:***

- *Government* should take helpful measures to:
 - guarantee access to basic education and free primary education for all, and especially for blind children, by
 - building and equipping government nursery schools specialising in teaching blind children Braille writing, reading and arithmetic
 - ensuring the recruitment, training and assignment of teachers with braille proficiency in all-inclusive schools and specialised centres
 - implement the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate access to published works for blind, visually impaired and other print disabled people
 - facilitate access for visually impaired people to health care, built-up environments, public and private buildings, and training and employment opportunities
 - reduce the cost of books, materials and special educational equipment for blind children,
- *the Ministry of Basic, Secondary and Higher Education and Vocational training centres* should
 - provide exhibition and operating areas with specialised materials and equipment for the visually impaired
 - provide schools and universities with teaching materials for visually impaired pupils and students
 - train teachers in the knowledge, usefulness and use of the above equipment
 - include the study of Braille as an optional subject in school curricula,
- *the Ministry of Social Affairs and Civil Society Organisations* should increase awareness and initiation campaigns for Braille,
- *the Ministry of Public Health and CSOs* should raise parents' awareness of the importance of their children's eye health,

The Commission specifically urges parents of blind children to:

- become aware of their role in the education of their offspring and help them to acquire basic knowledge and to master teaching tools specific to their needs

²² See Dossier pédagogique on Musée Louis BRAILLE, <https://museelouisbraille.com/fr/dossiers-pedagogiques>, accessed on 21 December 2023.

- abandon their tendency to limit the socio-economic integration of their visually impaired children to learning a few low-class trades,

The Commission for its part

- ***undertakes***, as part of its efforts to fully implement its mandate, to increase its actions to ensure that the general public and the blind, visually impaired and partially sighted persons are not excluded from the implementation of measures for the promotion and protection of human rights
- ***reaffirms*** that it will spare no effort in continuing to raise awareness among the general public through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, and in with the handling of complaints or self-initiated investigations,

The Commission once more calls upon women, girls, boys and men to denounce or report any case of human rights violation they have experienced as victims or witnesses, including through its **toll-free number 1523** (even without airtime).

Useful CHRC addresses

Website: www.cdhc.cm

Facebook and X (former Twitter): ***Cameroon Human Rights Commission***

WhatsApp: **691 99 56 90**

Yaoundé, the 2nd January 2024



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