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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

SOUS-COMMISSION CHARGÉE  
DE LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE  
L'HOMME

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CAMEROON HUMAN  
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
TO MARK THE 39<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March 2024

**Theme.-** *Invest in women: Accelerate progress*

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** Resolution No. 32/142 of 16 December 1977, by which the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 8 March each year as **United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace**,

**Also bearing in mind** that it was at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen in 1910 that Clara Zetkin, a German journalist, socialist activist and feminist, called on “*socialist women of all countries to hold an International Women's Day every year*”<sup>1</sup>,

**Considering** that 8 March every year is a day for action, awareness-raising and mobilisation dedicated to the fight for women's rights, gender equality and justice for all<sup>2</sup>, and that on this occasion various events and initiatives are implemented around the world, in particular, to:

- reflect, discuss and mobilise for gender equality

<sup>1</sup> See « Droits des femmes : cinq questions sur la journée du 8 mars », <https://www.vie-publique.fr/questions-reponses/273605-droits-des-femmes-cinq-questions-sur-la-journee-du-8-mars>, accessed on 26 February 2024.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.



- assess what has been done and what still needs to be done to end gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination against women and the girl child in all spheres of civil, political, social, economic and cultural life,

**Recalling** that the theme of the 39<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day (IWD) is "*Invest in women: Accelerate progress*"<sup>3</sup>,

**Considering** that the relevance of the theme for this year's IWD celebration is based in particular on the observation that "*poverty [being] the main cause of human rights violations in the world*"<sup>4</sup>, it is imperative in "[e]nsuring women's and girls' rights across all aspects of life [...] to secure prosperous and just economies, and a healthy planet for future generations"<sup>5</sup>,

**Considering further**, that another major obstacle to achieving gender equality by 2030 is "*an alarming lack of financing with a staggering USD 360 billion annual deficit in spending on gender-equality measures*,"<sup>6</sup> and given the urgency of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality, the United Nations Entity for Women (UN-Women) stated that it is more than imperative to take action to reduce poverty risk by 2030,

**Bearing in mind** that the theme of this year's 8 March celebration coincides with the theme of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in New York from 11 to 22 March 2024, which is "*Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective*,"

**Also bearing in mind** the words of Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), at the Women Deliver 2023 Conference in Kigali on 18 July that year, when he said that "*too many women and girls are living in countries that only allow them to reach a fraction of their potential* [...]"<sup>7</sup>,

**Recalling** that the theme of this year's IWD invites stakeholders to take initiatives and carry out activities in favour of women and to mobilise more financial, material and human resources:

to turn the challenges women face into opportunities [and] reflect on how to build a better future for all by tackling women's poverty through the reforms and institutions put in place, strengthening the fight against gender

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/nouvelles/annonce/2023/12/journee-internationale-des-femmes-2024-investir-en-faveur-des-femmes-acceler-le-rythme>, accessed on 26 February 2024.

<sup>4</sup> See Véronique CHAMPEIL-DESPLATS (dir.), *Pédagogie et Droits de l'homme*, Presses universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2014, 266 pp., spec. p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> See. UN Women, "United Nations Entity for Women: International Women's Day 2024, "Invest in women: Accelerate progress", <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/announcement/2023/12/international-womens-day-2024-invest-in-women-accelerate-progress>, accessed on 12 January 2024.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2023/07/press-release-less-than-1-percent-of-women-and-girls-live-in-a-country-with-high-womens-empowerment-and-high-gender-parity>, accessed on 23 January 2024.



inequality and improving responses to the financial needs of women and girls<sup>8</sup>,

**Noting** that the theme of the Day calls on women and girls to be agents of their own destiny and to transform the reality that keeps them in a state of lethargy, by seizing every opportunity offered by the State, civil society organisations and all development partners, and by demanding equal access to the full enjoyment of all human rights<sup>9</sup>,

**Recognising** that the current generation of women is caught up in a wave of emancipation that is raising the profile of female entrepreneurship<sup>10</sup> as well as innovations achieved by women in various fields, and that it is important to accelerate the process of gender equality as time now appears a critical factor in achieving SDGs 5.a, 5.c and 8.5, which respectively call on all States to:

- undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, and natural resources,
- adopt [...] sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels
- promote decent work and sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with a view to eliminating all forms of poverty to which women and girls are more vulnerable in our societies, by 2030

**Noting** that the theme of this year's IWD echoes the words of Sarah Hendricks, the Acting Executive Director of UN Women, who called on all stakeholders to "[...] *collectively and intentionally act now to course-correct for a world where every woman and girl has equal rights, opportunities, and representation.*" She reminded us that "*to achieve this, we need unwavering commitment, innovative solutions, and collaboration across all sectors and stakeholders*"<sup>11</sup>,

**Noting** that achieving gender equality requires joint efforts in four complementary areas, namely<sup>12</sup> :

- *invest in women*, by particularly taking action to counter the growing poverty rates among women resulting from crises, natural disasters, climate change, pandemics and economic downturns, for which women and girls pay the heaviest price

<sup>8</sup> See Mrs Marie-Thérèse ABENA ONDOA, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family extract from the speech delivered at the first preparatory meeting of the 39th IWD with partners on 16 January 2024 on the esplanade of the MINPROFF annex in Yaoundé.

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

<sup>10</sup> See Sarriette BATIBONAK, « Discrimination et entrepreneurialité des femmes au Cameroun », Cahier de recherches, Observatoire francophone pour le développement inclusif par le genre (OFDIG), No. 05, 2022, 38 pp., spec., p. 28, <https://ofdig.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Cahier-de-recherche-05-2022.pdf>, accessed on 26 February 2024.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2023/09/press-release-the-world-is-failing-girls-and-women-according-to-new-un-report> accessed on 23 January 2024.

<sup>12</sup> See Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, "Invest in women: Accelerate progress, 39<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day in Cameroon", Yaoundé, 2024, 7 pp., spec. p. 4.



- *implement gender-responsive financing programmes* as international conflicts and rising fuel which lead to an increase in food prices mean that the country will have to reduce public spending on basic social services and social protection by 2025, especially as austerity measures will have a negative impact on the situation of women and girls
- *move towards a green economy and a healthcare society*, as the current economic system exacerbates poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, all of which disproportionately affect marginalised groups, such as women
- *support women's empowerment policies*, as they are key actors, alongside governments and bilateral and multilateral partners, in the fight against gender inequality and poverty of women,

**Bearing in mind** that gender equality means that “*membership of a particular sex should not be a determining or, above all, a discriminatory factor in determining the place or position of individuals in society [and that] taking account of differences should not result in one gender being disadvantaged*”<sup>13</sup>,

**Noting** that, although gender equality is enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996<sup>14</sup> and in numerous universal and African instruments ratified by the State of Cameroon or to which it is otherwise committed, Cameroon society is deeply characterised by the subordination of women, who are generally considered to be the *weaker sex*<sup>15</sup>,

**Bearing in mind** that the recent recognition of the principle of gender equality in our societies is attributable to a change in mindset sparked by the struggle of feminists in their relentless quest for full respect for women's rights<sup>16</sup>,

**Emphasizing** that there has been no change in the legal framework for gender equality since the last IWD,

**Considering** the provisions on the promotion and protection of women's rights contained in the Statements issued to mark the celebration of the International Women's Day for the past two years<sup>17</sup>,

**Noting** that the State of Cameroon, in its efforts to ensure social inclusion, is heavily dedicated to combat gender-based violence, gender inequality and all other forms of discrimination against women, the girl child and other vulnerable groups in society,

<sup>13</sup>See Francine FINES, « *Égalité entre l'homme et la femme* », in Joël ANDRIANTSIMBAZOVINA *et al.* (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Droits de l'homme*, Paris, 2008, coll. Quadrige / PUF, pp. 353-357, spec. p. 353.

<sup>14</sup>The preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon states that “*all persons shall have equal rights and obligations [and that] the Nation shall protect and promote the family [...] women, the young [...]*”.

<sup>15</sup>See Rémy HERNU, “*Égalité et non-discrimination*”, in Joël ANDRIANTSIMBAZOVINA *et al.* (dir.) *Dictionnaire des Droits de l'homme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-360, spec. p. 375.

<sup>16</sup>See Francine FINES, “*Égalité et non-discrimination*”, in Joël ANDRIANTSIMBAZOVINA *et al.* (dir.) *Dictionnaire des Droits de l'homme*, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-357, spec. p. 353.

<sup>17</sup>See CHRC Statement to mark the International Women's Day in 2023, <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2023-03-07-12.pdf>, accessed on 23 January 2023.



*The Commission commends* the measures taken by the public authorities and the efforts made by private bodies and development partners to effectively promote the role of women in society, particularly for their better integration in the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres, namely:

- the holding of the first *Salon Africain de la Femme Rurale* [African Rural Women's Fair] (SAFER) in Yaoundé from 13 to 18 November 2023 by the *Fédération des Unions des Groupements d'Intérêt Commun (GICs) de Transformatrices des Produits Agricoles du Cameroun* (FUTPAC), under the auspices of Mrs Chantal Biya, First Lady of Cameroon, on the theme “*La femme rurale, mamelle nourricière de l'Afrique: Comment capitaliser son savoir-faire pour en faire une meilleure productrice de richesses*” (Rural women, the lifeblood of Africa: how to capitalise on their know-how to make them better producers of wealth)<sup>18</sup>
- the stepping up of capacity-building activities in mathematical sciences for girls, as from form five in the 10 regions of Cameroon by the African Institute of Mathematical Sciences; The Institute has also benefited from the renewal of the establishment agreement in Yaoundé, by the Government of Cameroon, represented by the Minister of External Relations, on 19 October 2023
- the activities of the *Union pour la Recherche et le Leadership au Féminin* (URLF), including:
  - o the organisation of an awareness-raising workshop on the opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Bafoussam from 26 to 27 July 2023
  - o training 300 women in income-generating activities in Bamenda in the North-West Region from 15 to 16 June 2023
- the publication of Circular No. 2023/001 of 30 August 2023 of the President of the Republic relating to the preparation of the State Budget for the financial year 2024, which reaffirms the integration of the gender budgeting approach as a priority in all sectors of national development and specifies the procedures for taking such approach on board
- the drafting of a preliminary bill aimed at combating violence against women and children to strengthen the existing legal framework, in particular Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016, as amended and supplemented by Law 2019/020 of 24 December 2019 relating to the Penal Code, and address the increase in violence against women observed in 2023, with 56 recorded cases of femicide<sup>19</sup>
- the organisation by the Ministry of Public Health of the “*Salon de la maternité et de la petite enfance*” [international forum on Maternal and early childhood health] (SIMAPE) at the Yaoundé Multipurpose Sports Complex from 26 May to 3 June.

<sup>18</sup> See Sonia OMBOUBOU, « Libre circulation : l'horizon encore plus inquiétant pour la femme rurale », <https://journalintegration.com/libre-circulation-lhorizon-encore-plus-inquietant-pour-la-femme-rurale>, accessed on 1 February 2024.

<sup>19</sup> See Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, <https://www.mimimefoinfos.com/violences-conjugales-36-femmes-tuees-au-cameroun-en-2023>, accessed on 1 February 2024.



The theme of panel No. 10 was “*The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a lever for women’s empowerment*”

- the organisation of the First Forum of Indigenous and Local Community Women of Central Africa and the Congo Basin (REPALEAC), as part of the promotion and strengthening of the role of women and girls from indigenous and local communities in climate resilience and biodiversity conservation<sup>20</sup>, from 8 to 12 May 2023 in Brazzaville<sup>21</sup>
- the official launch of the government’s digital platform for the promotion of local products by the Minister of Trade on 12 April 2023 at the Yaoundé International Handicraft Centre
- the presentation, on 21 February 2023, of the government’s new financial inclusion policy, called Cameroon National Inclusive Finance Strategy (SNFI 2023-2027), which aims to ensure, over a period of five (5) years (2023-2027),

to ensure over a five-year period, access to, and usage of a diversified range of adopted and affordable financial products and services for 65 per cent of the adult population of Cameroon, with special focus on rural populations, women and youth, socially vulnerable groups (SVG) and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)

- the adoption and dissemination of gender budgeting tools (Gender Budgeting Guide) and the training of 109 actors in the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (PPBS) chain in 2023, made aware of the implementation of gender budgeting in all public administrations to reduce inequalities
- improving the training offered to women enrolled in the Women Empowerment and Family Centre (CPFF), established in all regions of Cameroon to build the capacity of women and girls in entrepreneurship, project creation and management, with a particular focus on information and communication technologies during the 2022-2023 financial year,

***The Commission commends*** the implementation by some public authorities of the recommendations made to them in previous statements to mark International Women’s Day on 8 March, such as the Ministry of Higher Education (letter No. 2305403/MINESUP/SG/DAJ/CR/CEA2 of 24 July 2023), which has taken steps not only

<sup>20</sup>Ketty Marcelo Lopez, an indigenous leader from Perroux who attended the forum, said in his speech: “*We are building our own road and our own future. Now you must listen to us.*” extract from the speech given on the 4th day of the first ever African Indigenous Women's Forum in Brazzaville, 8-12 May 2023, <https://www.rightsandresources.org> , Accessed on 29 January 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Participants at the Brazzaville Forum adopted a roadmap in which trained women expressed the need to continue to protect the Congo Basin, which contains the most biodiverse landscapes on the planet.



to improve the numbers of girls in these fields of study, but also to encourage and help girls to:

- i) enter scientific and technical fields of study at state universities and private higher education institutions
- ii) pursue these fields until graduation, and
- iii) pursue careers in related professions,

***The Commission is pleased to note*** that the administrative authorities responded to the recommendations made to them on the occasion of the last International Women's Day by sending letters in which they commit their services to implementing these recommendations in an appropriate manner, namely:

- *the Ministry of Justice*, by letter No. 005788/CD/05/007/SC165/PPE/DDHCI/MJ/SDDH/CEA/PB of 16 May 2023,
- *the Ministry of Social Affairs*, by letter No. 2023/AS/0000804/L/MINAS/CAB/IG/12 of 10 May 2023
- *the Ministry of Basic Education*, by letter No. B/1464/L/MINEDUB/SG/DAJ of 8 May 2023
- *the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family*, by letter no. 00000782/L/MINPROFF/SG/DPSF/SDPDF/SPDSF/OEMT of 4 May 2023,

***The Commission commends*** the work done and contributed to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, as follows:

- The Vice-Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights in Africa, Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, was granted an audience with the Chairperson of the CHRC on Thursday 22nd February. The two personalities discussed the progress made in the promotion and protection of women's rights on the African continent and the challenges women are still facing in various spheres of life in Africa and more specifically in Cameroon
- Active participation of CHRC Gender Focal Point in preparatory meetings for the activities linked to the celebration of the 39<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day, which held on 30 January and 16 February 2024 respectively on the esplanade of the MINPROFF annex
- Active participation of CHRC Gender Focal Point, on 24 January 2024, at the MINPROFF annex, in the second preparatory meeting for the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in New York from 11 to 22 March 2024
- Participation in the workshop to improve the Manual on *women's* political education, organised by MINPROFF in Mbalmayo from 21 to 22 December 2023,



in order to refine the draft training manual prepared by a consultant hired for this purpose

- The meeting between the Chairperson of the CHRC and the Head of the URLF at the CHRC Head Office in Yaoundé on 17 December 2023, on the possibility of developing relations between the Institution and the URLF in general and specifically in the context of this organisation's parallel activity on the sidelines of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, scheduled for March 2024 in New York
- participation in the National Forum on the role of digital technologies and innovation in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, organised by the Women's Association of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in Yaoundé on 29-30 November on the theme of "*Digital innovation for women's financial empowerment*"
- the participation of the CHRC, represented by the Chair of the Sub-Commission on Promotion, at the 3rd Plenary Session of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO/PC 337) in Madrid, from 22 to 24 November 2023,

***The Commission welcomes and encourages*** the initiatives and actions taken by civil society organisations, including the implementation by the Cameroonian Network of Human Rights Organisations (RECODH) of Component 2 of the project *Promoting the Economic and Social Participation of Internally displaced persons and host communities* (PESOP) in the Kouoptamo and Dschang municipalities, where 127 and 97 IDPs and members of the beneficiary host communities, of whom 50 per cent are women, respectively, have been trained in income-generating activities in the agro-pastoral sector in 2023,

***The Commission is satisfied to note*** Government efforts to improve the economic empowerment of women, to promote the social status of women and gender equality, and to ensure the development of the family and children in particular. Such efforts are reflected in an improvement in some of the relevant indicators<sup>22</sup> between 2022 and 2023, including:

- the rate of female employment has increased from 70 per cent to 72 per cent
- the number of women receiving economic support from MINPROFF has increased from 6500 to 7500
- the percentage of women in positions of responsibility has increased from 30 per cent to 33 per cent
- the number of children registered in the civil registry with the support of MINPROFF has increased from 15,000 to 20,000
- the proportion of cases of violence resolved has increased from 50 per cent to 55 per cent of cases reported,

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<sup>22</sup> See Adjusted Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF 2023-2025), "Chapter 43: Ministry of Women and Family Development", 157 p., spec. , p. 14



**The Commission notes**, following the UN Women Division of Economic and Social Affairs in its *Annual Focus on Gender Equality report* published on 18 July 2023, that:

If [current] trends continue, by 2030 more than 340 million women and girls, or about 8 per cent of the world's female population, will live in extreme poverty, with nearly a quarter experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity [and] at the current rate of progress, the next generation of women will still spend an average of 2.3 hours a day on unpaid domestic work and care<sup>23</sup>,

**The Commission reiterates** that gender inequality remains a major concern in the world and in Cameroon in particular, given the difficulties encountered by women and girls on a daily basis, such as:

- the low level of enrolment of girls in the priority areas of education, with a peak in the northern part of the country
- the high incidence of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices against women and girls
- increasing discrimination and inequalities against women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres
- the security situation in the Far North, North-West and South-West regions, which exacerbates gender inequalities,

**The Commission is still concerned** about the alarming rise of GBV in Cameroon, where MINPROFF, in its MTEF 2023-2025<sup>24</sup> estimates 3,000 cases of GBV for the year 2022 and 35,000 cases for the year 2023<sup>25</sup>,

**Recognising that** gender inequalities undermine the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and that the marginalisation of women increases the risk of poverty and reduces opportunities for social change,

**The Commission recommends** that the Government take appropriate measures to:

- strengthen the mechanism for the repression of gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls, in particular by successfully completing the drafting process of the Law on Combating Violence against Women and Children
- increase the representation of women in positions of responsibility in all public and private sectors
- implement financial reforms that address gender issues and facilitate women's access to land ownership and project financing

<sup>23</sup> See UN Women's Department of Economic and Social Affairs Report, Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.unwomen.org/fr/nouvelles/communique-de-presse/2023/07/communique-de-presse-90-des-femmes-et-des-filles-vivent-dans-des-pays-marqué-par-un-important-deficit-d'autonomisation-des-femmes-et-par-de-forte-disparite-entre-les-sexes>, accessed on 29 January 2024

<sup>24</sup> See MINPROFF's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF 2023-2025), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.mimimefoinfos.com/violences-conjugales-56-femmes-tuées-au-cameroun-en-2023>, accessed on 16 January 2024.



- strengthen women's economic empowerment by improving MINPROFF's budget for supporting women and feminist associations
- facilitate the participation of women's organisations in policy discussions and decision-making at local, regional and international levels
- facilitate the access of women-owned SMEs to banking instruments and practices
- increase public awareness of the procedures for obtaining civil status documents and the risks associated with the failure to register civil status certificates and events,

**The Commission also recommends** a holistic approach involving governments, development partners, traditional chiefs and civil society organisations to:

- increase support for women's entrepreneurship in different sectors
- improve women's working conditions and stepping up the fight against gender-based violence and discrimination in the workplace
- strengthen awareness-raising activities among the population on respect for the dignity of women and girls and the equal distribution of roles between men and women in society,

**The Commission calls on** the general public, and especially parents, to:

- place equal emphasis on the education of young girls as they do on young boys, whose future actions very often reflect shortcomings in the transmission of human values within the family environment
- eradicate the practice of female genital mutilation, which is punishable in particular by Section 277-1 of Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Cameroonian Penal Code<sup>26</sup> whatever the procedure, because these practices constitute a serious attack on the physical and moral integrity of the victim, on her health and possibly on her life if the medical complications that follow lead to her death,

**The Commission** calls upon stakeholders to comply strictly with Circular No. 2023/001 of the President of the Republic of 30 August 2023 on the preparation of the budget for FY 2024, in order to better take into account, the gender dimension in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies,

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For its part, **the Commission** will spare no effort to continue promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, the handling of complaints, self-initiated investigations and, as part of the prevention of torture, through visits in all places of detention,

<sup>26</sup> According to Section 277-1 of the Penal Code, "Whoever mutilates the genital organ of a person, by any means whatsoever, shall be punished with penalties provided for in Section 277 above."



*The Commission once more* calls upon women and girls, to wake up from their slumber and report any case of human rights violation and particularly the rights of women and girls including discriminatory acts of which they have been victims or witnesses, including through its **toll-free number 1523** (free call, even without credit).

**Useful CHRC addresses**

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Yaoundé, - 7 MARS 2024

