

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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

Secrétariat Permanent

Division de la Protection
et de la Promotion des Droits de l'homme

B.P./P.O. Box 20317, Yaoundé

Fax : (237) 222-22-60-82

No
Numéro Vert.- 1523



CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE
OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION

Permanent Secretariat

Human Rights Protection
and Promotion Division

Tel.: (237) 222-22-61-17 / 691 12 86 70

E-mail : chrc.cdhc2019@yahoo.com

Web : www.cdhc.cm

Toll-Free Number. - 1523

STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL DAY TO PROTECT EDUCATION FROM ATTACK

9 September 2024

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter referred to as "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,

Bearing in mind that

in countries grappling with armed conflicts, attacks on education including the military use of the premises of schools and other educational institutions remain a constant feature that deprives students of their right to access quality education and teachers of the ability to deliver learning adequately¹,

Noting that “globally, regions like the Sahel in West Africa, [the Lake Chad Basin States with Boko Haram terrorists activities], and Ukraine in Eastern Europe, and parts of the Middle East [are facing severe security situations]”², and that the most effective way to manage these situations is through a coordinated international response,

¹ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), “International Day to protect education from attack”, 9 September, <https://www.unesco.org/eng/days/protect-education-attack>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

² See United Nations, “General Assembly: amid the deteriorating security situation in the world and different crisis, leaders demand a unified response”, <https://press.un.org/fr/2022/ag12451.doc.htm>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

Noting that the need for international coordination of action to prevent and suppress attacks on education is the reason some Member States of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on Safe Schools in Oslo, Norway, on 29 May 2015 (hereinafter: "Oslo Declaration"), as part of the activities of the Global Coalition for the Protection of Education from Attack, as well as the Six *Guidelines for the Protection of Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, published in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16 December 2014, instruments aimed at safeguarding education during armed conflict and protecting the right to education at all levels, while providing guidance to reduce the impact of conflicts on education,

Bearing in mind that the aforementioned Oslo Declaration "*is an important inter-governmental [political] commitment to protect education [pupils, students, teachers, schools and universities from the worst effects of] armed conflicts*",

Bearing further in mind that the need to better advocate for the right to education for all and protect educational institutions from attacks, led the African Union to declare 2024 the "*Year of Education*", so that no one should be unaware if it,

Recalling that to uphold the right to education, particularly in conflict areas like in the Far North Region, or in areas experiencing severe public disorder like in the North-West and South-West Regions, where students, teachers, and education officials are victims of violence resulting in loss of life, serious injuries, amputations and material damage, in violation of human rights principles and norms or international humanitarian law, the United Nations General Assembly, through its Resolution No. A/RES/74/275 of 28 May 2020 proclaimed *9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack*⁴,

Recalling also that, in line with the requirements set out in this Resolution, governments and all relevant stakeholders are called upon by the UN General Assembly, to ensure the provision of "*protection and [...] inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels to all learners, especially those in vulnerable situations*"⁵,

Keeping in mind that the United Nations General Assembly, in the above-mentioned resolution, requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to raise public awareness of the plight of millions of children living in countries affected by armed conflict,

Recalling the words of Ms Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who made a statement during the annual open debate at the UN Security Council meeting held on 26 June 2024, that "*children must be protected from man-*

³ See *Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies*, "the safe school declaration-from Oslo towards the Abuja Conference: making commitments a reality", <https://eichub.org/en/events/la-declaration-sur-la-securite-dans-les-ecoles-dolso-a-la-conference-dabuja-des-engagements-a-la-pratique>, accessed on 14 August 2024.

⁴ See United Nations, General Assembly, 74th session, Resolution 74/275 adopted by the General Assembly on 28 May 2020, *International Day to Protect Education from Attack*, 4 pp., spec. p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

made conflicts if we aim to break the cycle of violence that has put the world at the brink of extinction so many times before”⁶,

Bearing in mind the Programme of Action for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict, in which UNICEF urges all concerned parties to:

uphold children’s rights in conflict, [particularly] end attacks on education, end attacks on and threats to students, teachers and schools, end the use of schools for military purposes, end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups and release children associated with armed forces or groups⁷,

Bearing in mind also that UNESCO emphasis on the fact that:

education is a fundamental human right, [and with regard to] children and youths caught up in emergency situations, [not only] education means the continuity of learning, but it also provides a sense of normalcy and the key to a different future, [for it is w]ith the knowledge, skills and support gained through education, [that] generations survive crises and lead the world towards a sustainable future⁸

Recalling that at the *High-Level Event on Education* under the *Global Gateway strategy*, jointly organised by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union (EU), in Brussels, Belgium, on 11 April 2024, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General stated that:

education is [not only] a fundamental human right [but most importantly it is] the greatest investment we can make [for humanity] in our common future in peace, and sustainable development, and gender equality⁹,

Noting also that the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks (GCPEA) defines attacks on education as:

any threat or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education personnel education buildings, resources, or facilities [by] armed forces and non-state armed groups. These violations [generally] occur for strategic political, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons¹⁰

Considering the 18th indent of the Preamble of the Cameroon Constitution of 18 January 1996, which stipulates that, “*the State shall guarantee the child’s right to*

⁶ See United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: the Security Council debates on the alarming increase in grave violations and steps to reverse this trend”, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/cs1574.doc.htm>, accessed on 14 August 2024.

⁷ See UNICEF, “Change agenda for protecting children in armed conflicts”, <https://www.unicef.org/en/pris-pour-cible/programme-daction-pour-la-protection-des-enfants>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

⁸ See United Nations, “International Day to protect education from attack”, <https://www.un.org/eng/observances/protect-education-day>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

⁹ See United Nations, Regional Information Centre for Central Europe, “UN Deputy Chief: make 2024 a turning point for education”, <https://unric.org/en/la-numero-2-de-lonu-appelle-a-faire-de-2024-un-tournant-pour-leducation/>, accessed on 14 August 2024.

¹⁰ See *Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks (GCPEA)*, *GCPEA-Definitions-FR.pdf*, pp 1, p. 1.

education. Primary education shall be compulsory. The organization and supervision of education at all levels shall be the bounded duty of the State”,

Considering that Article 17(1) of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (AChHPR), adopted on 27 June 1981, and ratified by Cameroon on 20 June 1989 and entered into force on 21 October 1986 states that, “*every individual shall have the right to education*”,

Considering also Articles 11(1) and 22(1) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), adopted on 11 July 1990, ratified by Cameroon on 5 September 1997 and entered into force on 29 November 1999, which states that:

every child has the right to education [and that] States Parties to this Charter shall undertake to respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts which affects the child,

Considering also Article 13(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966, and ratified by Cameroon on 27 June 1984, and rendered operational on 3 January 1984, which states that:

States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. [and] agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality [to value] its dignity, and strengthen the respect for human rights,

Considering Article 19 (1) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted on 20 November 1989, ratified by Cameroon on 11 January 1993 and entered into force on 2 November 1990 which urges the States Parties to take:

all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian (s) or any other person who has the care of the child,

Recalling that in the light of its 54 articles of the abovementioned CRC highlights four fundamental principles on children and, states in Article 38(1) that every child has:

[the right not to wage war or be subjected to it] and that States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child¹¹,

Noting that, owing to the security situation in certain regions of Cameroon, characterised by the persistence of serious human rights violations by Boko Haram terrorists in the Far North and by secessionist terrorists in the North-West and South-West regions, Cameroon had, in June 2024,

¹¹ See United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), <https://www.unicef.en/convention-droits-enfants/>, accessed on 14 August 2024.

an estimated 482 000 school-aged children, including 366 654 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), need humanitarian assistance in the Far North Region, while in the North-West and South-West Regions an estimated 667 000 school-aged children, including 367 000 IDPs [who were in the same situation] need humanitarian assistance¹²,

The Commission remains concerned about the high number of attacks on education, which has devastating short, medium and long-term effects on access to education and on education systems, with a significant impact on the overall development of society,

The Commission deplores and strongly condemns the persistence of cases of kidnappings and abductions of the educational staff and learners, with ransom demands by secessionist terrorists (in the North-West and South-West Regions) and *Boko Haram* (in the Far North and North Regions), as well as other major criminal actors in certain Regions of Cameroon hosting a significant number of internally displaced persons (such as the Centre, East, Littoral, and West Regions). In some cases, the victims have been killed. This has included an increasing number of pupils, students, teachers, and other individuals involved in the education sector in the affected Regions,

The Commission commends the efforts made by public authorities and their partners to protect schools against terrorist attacks and to guarantee a final return to peace, in particular through:

- the organisation by the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education (MINJEC) of a significant youth awareness campaign at the Bamenda Military Stadium, in the North-West Region, on 25 August 2024. The activity formed part of the national campaign against hate speech, web crime and xenophobia, highlighting the vital role of youths in peace-building efforts
- the organisation by the Cameroon National Youth Council (CNYC) of a youth march and dialogue in Ngaoundéré, Adamawa Region on 25 May 2024, *as part of a national campaign against hate speech, web crime and xenophobia, highlighting the crucial role of youths in peace-building efforts*. The initiative aimed to mobilise youths across the country for a common cause, address pressing social issues and promote a spirit of unity and peace
- The organisation of a significant March for Peace in Yaoundé on 25 May 2024, by the CNJC, in collaboration with Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL), a Korean NGO established for global peace and the end of war. The event formed part of the 11th annual commemoration of the Declaration of World Peace and addressed the theme of Communication for a Global Citizenship of Reconciliation and Tolerance. This demonstrated the CNJC's dedication to fostering national unity and peace

¹² See Consortium *Education Cannot Wait*, « Le droit à une éducation sûre et de qualité reste inaccessible pour des millions d'enfants au Cameroun », <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/le-droit-une-education-sure-et-de-qualite-reste-inaccessible-pour-des-millions-denfants-au-cameroun-septembre-2023>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

- the organisation of an awareness-raising workshop by *Plan International Cameroon* in partnership with the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) in Ebolowa from 27 to 29 February 2024. The aim of the workshop was to enhance *the comprehension and application of the guidelines for the protection of schools and universities from military use during armed conflicts* by members of SDF in the North, North-west and South-west Regions¹³
- the introduction of early warning systems and emergency plans in schools by the Ministries of Secondary and Basic Education, as well as the regular exchange of information between the Security and Defence Forces, members of vigilance committees and members of local communities¹⁴ to report attacks on pupils, students or teachers
- enhanced mobilisation of resources, with an increase in the budgets of MINEDUB and MINESEC totalling CFA 25.39 billion¹⁵ and CFA 17.4 billion¹⁶ respectively, part of which was allocated to making schools and educational establishments safer¹⁷,

The Commission is pleased to note and encourages the efforts undertaken by CSOs and religious organisations to raise awareness among the population and the different actors in the regions where there is high insecure situation, in order to prevent violence, promote peace and security, and protect education facilities, in particular:

- the publication of a press release by the members of the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference (BAPEC) at the end of their session held from 17 to 23 August 2024 at the Episcopal House of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bamenda. In their press release, they called on the perpetrators of terrorist attacks to “*give peace a chance*” to preserve the right to education for all ¹⁸
- the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Civic Watch and the Cameroon National Youth Council (CNYC) on 9 February 2024, as part of the activities leading up to the celebration of the 58th Youth Day in Cameroon and

¹³ See. *Visartculture.com*, “Engaging Cameroon's Security and Defense forces in quality education: Plan Cameroon launches advocacy campaign”, <https://visartculture.com/decouverte/engager-les-forces-de-defense-et-de-securite-du-cameroun-pour-une-education-de-qualite-plan-cameroun-sengage-dans-le-plaidoyer/>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

¹⁴ See *Actucameroun.com*, « *Conférence semestrielle des gouverneurs de régions: des mesures discutées pour une meilleure sécurisation des établissements scolaires* », <https://actucameroun.com/2023/07/17/conference-semestrielle-des-gouverneurs-de-regions-des-mesures-discutees-pour-une-meilleure-securisation-des-etablissements-scolaires/>, accessed on 16 August 2024.

¹⁵ See *panoramapapers.com*, « *Cameroun - Ouest-Éducation de base : le budget 2024 du MINEDUB est connu* », <https://panoramapapers.com/cameroun-ouest-education-de-base-le-budget-2024-du-minedub-est-connu/>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

¹⁶ See *Ecomatin.net*, « *Cameroun: avec 556,7 milliards de Fcfa, le ministère des Enseignements secondaires obtient le plus gros budget en 2024* », <https://ecomatin.net/cameroun-avec-5567-milliards-de-fcfa-6-le-ministere-des-enseignements-secondaires-obtient-le-plus-gros-budget-en-2024>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See. *Aciafrique.org*, “The bishops of a province in Cameroon denounce ‘growing insecurity’ and call for an end to the violence”, <https://www.aciafrique.org/news/11393/les-eveques-dune-province-au-cameroun-denoncent-insecurite-croissante-et-appellent-a-la-fin-de-la-violence>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

the organisation by the CNYC of a Youth Development Forum with young leaders from different sub-regions of Africa

- the training from 1 to 3 February 2024 and release of more than 30 peace weavers (including leaders of youth associations, peace advocates, leaders of faith and ethnic groups from the North-West and South-West Regions) in Bamenda, at community level, by the Civic Watch association as part of the *Defyhatenow* initiative for their second knowledge-sharing meeting on topics such as collaboration with local authorities to carry out peace-building projects, identifying and combating hate speech at local level, etc. At the end of the training, the participants organised sessions to pass on the knowledge they had gained to their respective communities in order to have greater impact. The event has culminated in a peaceful march called *#HateFreeAbakwa* from Custom Junction to the North-West Regional Assembly¹⁹,

The Commission also welcomes the feedback from some Ministries on its previous statement to mark the 2023 International Day to Protect Education from Attack, in particular those from:

- *the Ministry of Justice*, by Letter No. 000449I2D/05/007/SC181/PPE/DDHCI/MJ/SDCI/CEA/GP/SH of 22 January 2024, assures the CHRC of the use of the statement by the relevant services of its Ministry
- *the Ministry of Higher Education*, by Letter No. 24-00592/MINESUP/SG/DAJ/CR/CEA2 of 22 January 2024, assured the CHRC that its recommendations had been taken into account and that it would do more to ensure respect for the physical and moral integrity of the various members of the university community
- *the Ministry of Basic Education*, which, by its Letter No_B1/1464/MINEDUB/SG/DAJ of 16 January 2024, assured the CHRC that its recommendations had been taken into account and were duly being implemented by the relevant services,

The Commission also note that of the 220 recommendations accepted by the State during the adoption of the Report of Cameroon after undergoing the Fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 26 March 2024, six were related to the protection of education from attacks. These recommendations were addressed by the CHRC to the relevant stakeholders, each as far as they are concerned. These recommendations listed below, called on:

- the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), MINEDUB, MINESEC, the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL) and

¹⁹ See. *Defyhatenow.org*, “Youth Day 2024: Engaging Cameroon's youth in peace processes and advocacy!- #defyhatenow”, <https://defyhatenow.org/fete-de-la-jeunesse-2024-engager-la-jeunesse-camerounaise-dans-les-processus-de-paix-et-le-plaidoyer/>, accessed on 28 August 2024.

- MINDEF to “intensify efforts to guarantee access to education for all children, including those facing insecurity due to terrorist activities”
- MINEDUB, MINESEC, the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), MINJEC, MINDEF and the General Delegation for National Security (GDNS) to “take immediate measures to protect schools and other educational facilities, as per the Safe Schools Declaration”
 - MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINJEC, MINAT and MINSANTE to “remedy the negative effects of the crisis on the right to education”
 - MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINESUP, MINJEC and MINDEF to “guarantee access to education for all children, particularly in the North-West and South-West Regions”
 - MINDEF, MINAT, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINESUP, MINDDEVEL, the GDNS and the Secretariat of State for Defence in charge of the National Gendarmerie (SED) to “take effective measures to ensure the safety of pupils and educational staff throughout the country”
 - MINDEF, MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINESUP, MINJEC and GDNS to “continue strengthening the protection of children affected by conflict and ensure that all schools used for non-educational purposes are rapidly evacuated and that schools are no longer used for military purposes”;

The Commission also recommends that the Government in particular:

- *the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of External Relations should*
 - o increase measures for the implementation of Resolution S/RES/2601(2021) adopted by the United Nations Security Council on the protection of education in armed conflict, on 29 October 2021
 - o ensure that the *Safe Schools Declaration* and the *Guidelines for the Protection of Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* are fully taken into account
- *MINSANTE* should rapidly assess and care for the victims of attacks on education and their families, for them to benefit from appropriate psychosocial care and support;

The Commission calls on the secessionist terrorists to withdraw their call for a lockdown from 7 to 17 September 2024 in the North-West and South-West Regions, as it constitutes a serious violation of the right to education;

The Commission reiterates its recommendations made last year to *secessionist terrorists and Boko Haram terrorists* to:

- immediately and definitively cease all forms of attacks against civilians and civilian property and to lay down weapons for the definitive return of peace for

the development of the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions and for their rapid reconstruction

- join disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration centres where they can receive appropriate training and develop new skills;

The Commission, for its part, will spare no effort to continue raising awareness for the protection of education against attacks through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions and through the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations;

The Commission therefore calls upon every individual to report any case of Human rights violation and particularly any attack on pupils, students, teachers, those in charge of public or private educational facilities and school infrastructures, by contacting the CHRC at its Head Office or branches, including via its toll-free number: **1523** (free calls).

Useful CDHC addresses

Website: www.cdhc.cm

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

WhatsApp : 691 99 56 90

Yaoundé, the 8 August 2024

