



STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

21 September 2024

Theme. – Cultivating a culture of peace

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: “the Commission” or “the CHRC”), 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 one of the conclusions of the sixth triennial Conference of the International Association of the University Presidents held at San José (Costa Rica) from 28 June to 3 July 1981, which states that:

it would be appropriate to devote a specific time to concentrate the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States, as well as of the whole of mankind, to promoting the ideals of peace and to giving positive evidence of their commitment to peace in all viable ways¹,

Bearing also in mind the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution adopted on 30 November 1981 during its 77th plenary session, which declares that:

the third Tuesday of September, the opening day of [its] regular sessions [...] shall be officially proclaimed and observed the International Day of Peace and shall be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples,²,

¹ See United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), ‘International Year of Peace and International Day of Peace’, <https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/409/38/pdf/nr040938.pdf>, accessed on 13 September 2024.

² *Ibid.*

Noting that by its Resolution No. A/RES/53/243 of 13 December 1999, the UNGA adopted the *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace* "so that governments, international organizations and civil society may be guided in their activity by its provisions to promote and strengthen a culture of peace in the new millennium"³,

Recalling that by its Resolution A/RES/55/282 of 7 September 2001, the UNGA decided that as from its fifty-seventh session,

[t]he International Day of Peace shall be [celebrated] on 21 September each year [...] and shall henceforth be observed as a *day of global ceasefire and non-violence*, an invitation to all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day.⁴

Noting that the United Nations General Assembly recognises that, in the above-mentioned *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace*, "[t]he development of a culture of peace comes about through values, attitudes, modes of behaviours and ways of life, conducive to the promotion of peace among individuals, groups and nations",

Considering that the International Day of Peace is an opportunity to celebrate and promote this virtue throughout the world by highlighting respect for the right to life, and for other human rights, and by promoting and strengthening a culture of non-violence through education,

Welcoming the theme of this year's celebration of the International Day of Peace (IDP), *Cultivating a Culture of Peace*, which is in line with the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), adopted on 16 November 1945, which states that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed"⁵,

Noting that the 2024 IDP marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption by the UNGA of the aforementioned *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace*,

Noting further that through the aforementioned theme, the United Nations calls upon all Governments to focus on the need for *a shift in mentalities, in particular by promoting peace education for all and at all levels* as a key means to empower populations through formal education, continuous training and a culture of peace, which are essential for sustainable development⁶,

Noting that the concept of peace does not solely refer to "*the absence of conflict, but [above all to] a positive, dynamic and participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation*"⁷,

³ See UNGA, Resolution No. A/RES/53/243 on the *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace*, 11 pp., spec. p. 2, <https://decade-culture-of-peace.org/resolutions/resA-53-243-en.pdf>, accessed on 16 September 2024.

⁴ See UNGA, "International Day of Peace, 21 September", <https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace>, accessed on 18 August 2024.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See United Nations, "International Day of Peace, 21 September", *op. cit.*

⁷ See UNGA Resolution no. A/RES/53/243 on the *Declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

Noting also that the notion of "culture of peace" refers to values, attitude, modes of behaviours and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiations among individuals, groups and nations⁸,

Noting further that "cultivating peace" involves, through education, ensuring sustainable development, respect for human rights, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, the free flow of knowledge and other peace-building activities⁹,

Noting that in their book, *La paix ça s'apprend ! Guérir de la violence et du terrorisme* Thomas D'Ansembourg and David Van Reybrouck assert that:

[cultivating] peace is essential to profoundly heal the severe violence afflicting our societies, Peace results from consistent practice and psychological hygiene. Just as we regularly cleanse our bodies to prevent infections, we must also cleanse our minds through mental exercises like mindfulness, non-violent communication and kindness. These practices help us maintain mental well-being. Furthermore, we need to cultivate a civic-minded inner life, as deep personal development is the cornerstone of sustainable social development¹⁰,

Considering the Preamble of the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, where Cameroonian

assert their firm determination to build the Cameroonian Fatherland on the basis of the ideals of fraternity, justice and progress and affirm their desire to contribute to the advent of a united and free Africa, while maintaining peaceful and brotherly relations with the other nations of the world, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations,

Considering also that the culture of peace is legally grounded in the right to education "at all levels, [which is] one of the main means of building this culture", a right enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution and various standard human rights protection instruments to which Cameroon is a party¹¹,

Considering further that Objective 10 of the *Continental Education Strategy for Africa* (CESA 16-25), developed by the African Union (AU), aims at transforming the continent's educational systems by "promoting peace education and conflict prevention and resolution at all levels of education and for all age groups",

⁸ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "What is the Culture of Peace?", https://chaireunesco.org/Culture_paix#:~:text=%C2%AB%20La%20culture%20de%20la%20paix%20est%20un,les%20individus%2C%20les%20groupes%20et%20les%20Etats%20%C2%BB, accessed on 22 August 2024.

⁹ See United Nations, 'International Day of Peace, 21 September', *op. cit.*

¹⁰ See Thomas D'Ansembourg, David Van Reybrouck, *Quatrième de couverture, in La paix ça s'apprend ! Guérir de la violence et du terrorisme*, Actes Sud, published on 2 November 2016, 96 pp., <https://www.amazon.fr/paix-%C3%A7a-sapprend-violence-terrorisme/dp/233006327X>, accessed online on 25 August 2024.

¹¹ See African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (article 17), International Convention on Children's Rights (article 28 and 29), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (article 10), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (article 7), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article. 13), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26).

Considering also the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 16 whose aim is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, [to] provide access to justice for all and [to] build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”¹²,

Noting that in the context of achieving the above-mentioned SDG No. 16, particularly through Aspiration 4 of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which envisions “*a Peaceful and Secure Africa*,” the Pan African organisation utilises mechanisms that encourage a dialogue-centred approach for conflict prevention and resolution, as well as establishes and nurtures a culture of peace and tolerance in Africa’s children and youth through peace education¹³,

The Commission commands the Government and its partners for their initiatives to promote a culture of harmonious coexistence and peace among populations, including:

- the organisation, on 17 September 2024 at the Yaoundé Conference Centre, of the 24th *Forum of Ministers in charge of Security in the Central African sub-region*, chaired by the Minister of State, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic. The purpose of the Forum was to discuss new strategies for securing States and combating terrorism in the sub-region for a final return to peace¹⁴
- the holding, on 12 September 2024 in Yaoundé, of a consultation meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, Head of Government, upon the initiative of the traditional rulers of the North-West Region, with a view to the organisation, in December 2024, of the North-West Heritage Festival for Peace, Reconciliation and Sustainable Development, a cultural event whose aim is ‘*to lead all the sons and daughters of the North-West Region to return once and for all to the path of peace and to think about the development of their locality*’¹⁵
- the gradual implementation of the main resolutions of the fifth session of the Follow-up Committee on the recommendations of the *Major National Dialogue*, in particular:
 - o stepping up the implementation of economic stimulus measures to consolidate the economic system
 - o implementing the policy of sustainable development and economic growth
 - o consolidating the progress made on the ground to facilitate economic growth
 - o taking into account the community approach in the identification, study and allocation of development projects
 - o the denunciation by the population of secessionist terrorists and active collaboration with the administration and the DSF
- the setting up, in the Noun Division, West Region, of an operational unit mobilising elements of the National Gendarmerie called the Kouoptamo Task Force, created

¹² See United Nations, ‘Sustainable Development Goals, 16- *Peace, justice and strong institutions*’, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/fr/peace-justice/#:~:text=Objectif%2016%20%20Promouvoir%20l'avènement%20de%20sociétés%20pacifiques%20et%20inclusives>, accessed online on 25 August 2024.

¹³ See African Union, “Conflict resolution, peace and security”, <https://au.int/eng/resolution-des-conflits-paix-et-securite>, accessed on 23 August 2024.

¹⁴ See Cameroon Radio and Television - National station, 1 p.m. radio news, 20 September 2024.

¹⁵ See *Cameroon Tribune*, « *Nord-Ouest : un festival pour la paix* », <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/67088/fr.html/nord-ouest-un-festival-pour-la>, accessed on 20 September 2024.

by the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) to patrol and control the localities of Bangourain, Kouoptamo, Magba and Njimom, in order to ward off possible terrorist attacks,

The Commission is pleased with the actions it carried out and those in which it participated in line with its human rights promotion and protection mission through the promotion of a culture of peace. For instance, it particularly carried out advocacy for the definitive return of peace through greater respect for the rights of all in the South-West Region during the commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples and the Day in honour of homeland fallen heroes in Buea and Limbe, on 9 and 10 August 2024 respectively. These events brought together over one hundred traditional chiefs and more than one thousand people, primarily indigenous populations from the South-West Region and also from the North-West, Centre, Littoral and West Regions as well as other non-indigenous residents of the South-West Region,

The Commission acknowledges and encourages the participation of the North-West religious authorities to conflict prevention and peace consolidation through the publication of a press release on 23 August 2024 in Bamenda 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 Bishop's House of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bamenda. In this press release they called on the people of the North-West Region to “*work together to restore peace and justice, and to support initiatives that promote security and stability*” in the Region,

The Commission notes and encourages the efforts made by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation to promote a culture of peace in Cameroon, in particular through the holding of a peace conference on 19 April 2024 in Minawao, Mayo-Tsanaga Division, in the Far North Region, at the initiative of the Platform of the National Convention of Women for Peace in Cameroon, which focused on the consequences of insecurity on the border between Cameroon and Nigeria and the importance of a culture of peace, and identifying the needs of displaced persons,

The Commission is also pleased by the implementation by some administrative bodies of the recommendations brought to their attention in its previous statements to mark the International Day of Peace on 21 September 2023 in particular:

- the effective close cooperation between legal authorities and all the stakeholders involved in the fight and repression against web crime, as per the regulation in force stated in the letter No. 000813/CD/05/007/SC153/PPE/DDHCI/MJ/ SDDH/CEA/BP of 2 February 2024 addressed to the Chairperson of the CHRC by the Minister of State, Minister of Justice, Keeper of Seals
- the action of the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), stated in letter No. 000076/L/MINDDEVEL/GS/DSCG/ CD/ARO 1 of 9 January 2024 addressed to the CHRC by the Head of the said Ministry, namely MINDDEVEL's handling and methodical follow-up with relevant ministries on issues related to the transfer of powers to Regional and Local Authorities (RLAs),

The Commission is however still concerned about the prevailing security situation in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions between 21 September 2023 and 20 September 2024, in particular:

- the improvised explosive device (IED) attack on 19 September 2024 at around 11am, perpetrated at the Nkwen market, Mezam Division, in the North-West Region, by secessionist terrorists, which left five women seriously injured
- the explosion caused by secessionist terrorists on 9 August 2024, of a homemade bomb concealed in a tyre used to block the road at a checkpoint, at Mile 4, Nkwen in the city of Bamenda, Mezam Division, in the North-West Region, causing the death of two police officers and injuring one civilian who was taken to a health facility down town¹⁶
- the attack perpetrated by *Boko Haram terrorists* in the locality of Tourou in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division, Far-North Region, on the night of 23 to 24 June 2024. This resulted in three deaths, two seriously injured persons, two children abducted and significant material damage
- the attack and burning of teaching material and the national flag at Mbot Public Primary School, in Ndu Sub-Division, Donga-Mantung Division, North-West Region, on 15 May 2024
- the bloody brawl between refugees in the Yémé locality in the Mayo-Sava Division, Far-North Region on 27 April 2024. This resulted in 15 people injured
- repeated incursions in the West Region, by secessionist terrorists from the North-West Region in particular those perpetrated in Bamenyam, Bamboutos Division, in the morning of 21 November 2023. This resulted in the death of 9 persons, several houses burnt and motorbikes taken away,

The Commission notes, in the words of the General Secretary of the Centre for Environment and Development (CED), that investment projects related to the building of major infrastructure and/or agro-industries are primarily responsible for conflicts with the local communities who contest the occupation of their ancestral lands by investors without their prior, free, and informed consent, without their fair and prior compensation. Furthermore the methods of implementation of the said projects are unknown to the communities or do not address their collective needs. This situation violates Article 20(2) and Article 28(1) and (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which state that,

“[i]ndigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress.” “Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress¹⁷,”

¹⁶ See Journal du Cameroun, « Cameroun : l'explosion d'une bombe tue deux (2) policiers à Bamenda », <https://fr.journalducameroun.com/cameroun-lexplosion-dune-bombe-tue-deux-policiers-a-bamenda/>, accessed on 1 August 2024.

¹⁷ See Média terre, « Cameroun : le CED propose un dispositif d'alerte précoce et de prévention des conflits liés aux investissements à grande échelle sur les terres », <https://www.mediaterre.org/actualites/20240628143602.6.html>, accessed on 27 August 2024.

The Commission reiterates its recommendations made to mark the 2023 International Day of Peace, in particular:

- *to the government* to create specialised and strategic posts in plantations in areas affected by insecurity, in order to provide security for workers and restore confidence to local populations
- *to Ministries of Basic Education (MINEDUB) and Secondary Education (MINESEC)* to accelerate the implementation of the reform of school curricular that promote tolerance, dialogue and understanding
- *to local authorities in Regions suffering from insecurity* to work with the relevant State institutions for the permanent reopening of markets — which are generally closed during lockdown days — to enable people to make the most of the products from their farms,

The Commission notes that out of the 220 recommendations accepted by the State following the adoption of the Report of Cameroon on 26 March 2024 after undergoing the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), 15 recommendations concern peace and security, seven are in line with the theme of the 2024 International Day of Peace and have been distributed by the CHRC to State bodies, political parties and CSOs, each according to its sphere of competence, in the following manner:

- the recommendation to “*continue the dialogue in order to restore peace in the North-West and South-West Regions*” addressed to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) and the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM)
- the recommendation to “*continue adopting a pacific approach to resolve conflicts, put in place and strengthen transitional justice mechanisms in the country*” addressed to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), to the Ministry of Justice (MINJUSTICE), Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), MINAT (mainly to traditional rulers), to the General Delegation for National Security (GDNS) and to the Cameroon Bar Association
- the recommendation to “*adopt a comprehensive and inclusive approach to tackle the root causes of the conflict in the affected Regions of Cameroon, by putting in place a global strategy for sustainable peace*” addressed to the PMO, to the ministries in charge of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT), to MINAT and NCPBM
- the recommendation to “*conduct prompt, in-depth, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of crimes under national law and human rights violations perpetrated by all armed forces in the context of the armed violence in the North-West and South-West Regions*” addressed to MINJUSTICE, GDNS, MINDEF and MINAT
- the recommendation to “*continue to raise awareness of human rights by including this issue in school curricula at the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training*” addressed to the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), the Ministry of Public Health (MINSANTE), MINESEC, MINEDUB, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and MINJUSTICE

- the recommendation to “*develop effective measures to prevent and combat acts of violence, including attacks and threats against civilian population, medical personnel and patients, particularly in the North-West and South-West Regions, in application of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016)*”, addressed to MINAT, MINJUSTICE, MINDEF and the GDNS
- the recommendation to “*prioritise the effective participation of young people, women and children, including adolescents, at all levels of peace negotiations, peace-building efforts, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and crisis response plans and reconstruction programmes*” addressed to MINAT, MINEPAT, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), MINAS, MINJEC, the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), MINESEC, MINEDUB, political parties and CSOs,

Aware that the world at large and African countries in particular, including Cameroon, must make huge efforts to pick up the persistent challenges linked to the thorny problem of conflicts and security crises that compromise the culture of peace,

Noting that, according to Ms Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of UNESCO, “*being responsible for peace means acting to overcome the flaws and injustices which continue to prevent us from achieving an egalitarian world. Because a planet eroded by division is a planet which knows no peace*”¹⁸,

The Commission recommends that:

- MINEDUB, MINESEC and MINESUP should increase the number of modules on peace education in their curricula, to enable pupils and students acquire values, attitudes, behaviours and modes of life that will help them settle any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity, tolerance and non-discrimination
- MINESEC and MINESUP should create human rights clubs in all public and private secondary schools before the end of the first term or semester of the school or university year 2024-2025
- MINEPAT, MINFI, MINDEVEL, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINHDU), should ensure that, the process of drawing up, implementing and monitoring-evaluating development projects benefits from the full participation of all, including members/representatives of indigenous populations, to limit conflicts and other breaches of peace
- the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL) and the National Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ANTIC) should encourage the use of new information and communication technologies to promote peace education,

¹⁸ See. UNESCO, “International Day of Peace, 21 September”, <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/peace>, accessed on 25 August 2023.

Recognising the qualities of hospitality, tolerance and the peace-keeping which characterise the Cameroonian people, **the Commission specifically recommends** that:

- *CSOs and traditional authorities*, should intensify awareness-raising among the population on the importance of education and the culture of peace in families
- *parents*, should increase their efforts to spread and perpetuate the culture of peace by instilling respect for human values in their offspring from an early age,

The Commission urges all non-state armed actors active in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions to observe the *Global Day of Ceasefire and Non-Violence* on the International Day of Peace 2024.

For its part, the Commission will spare no efforts to further promote and protect human rights and the work for peace education for all at all levels. This will be achieved through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations including through its **toll-free number: 1523 (Free call)**.

Useful address of CHRC.-

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Yaoundé,

21 SEPT 2024

