

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

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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](mailto:chrc.cdhc2019@yahoo.com)

Web : [www.cdhc.cm](http://www.cdhc.cm)

Toll-Free Number. - 1523

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

4<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Theme.** – *Celebrating Accessibility and Inclusion for the Visually Impaired*

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* that Louis Braille, a French teacher, musician and inventor born on 4 January 1809 in Coupvray, France and who was accidentally blinded at the age of three, developed in 1829 a method of relief printing that enabled the blind or visually impaired people to read and write accurately<sup>1</sup>, by using raised dots representing letters, numbers, mathematical, musical and scientific symbols to form tactile, alphabetical or numerical representations,

*Considering* that the education of blind or visually impaired people developed significantly in the 19th century with the use of the Braille alphabet to learn to write, the World Blind Union (WBU) adopted 4 January as World Braille Day in 2001, to commemorate the birthday of Louis Braille<sup>2</sup>, its inventor,

*Also having regard to* the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution No. A/RES/73/161, adopted on 17 December 2018, which proclaims 4 January of each

<sup>1</sup> See Ligue braille, « Journées mondiales ou internationales du braille », <https://www.braille-be/fr/journees-mondiales-ou-internationales>, accessed on 15 December 2024 at 00:03.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

year as *World Braille Day*, in recognition of the importance of this written language for the realisation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of the blind or visually impaired<sup>3</sup>,

**Emphasizing** that, according to Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006 and ratified by Cameroon on 28 December 2021, “Braille”, appears as “*a tactile writing system that uses raised dots to represent letters, numbers, and symbols, thereby enabling blind or visually impaired individuals to read and write independently,*”

**Recognising that** the above definition thus underscores the significance of Braille as a tool for the social inclusion and empowerment for blind or visually impaired persons,

**Recalling further** that as mentioned in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Braille is a means of communication for blind people, and as stated in Articles 21 and 24 of the above-mentioned Convention, it can be useful to them in the areas of:

- Education
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to information and written communication and
- Social inclusion, in accordance with Articles 21 and 24 of the Convention,

**Welcoming** the theme of the 2025 celebration, “*Celebrating Accessibility and Inclusion for the Visually Impaired*”<sup>4</sup>, which focuses both on *raising awareness about the importance of Braille as a means of communication* for the blind or visually impaired<sup>5</sup>, and on its crucial role in their education and empowerment,

**Aware** that Braille is thus a guarantee of equality, independence and competence, giving blind or visually impaired people access to the same books and magazines as sighted people, and enabling them to receive and communicate important information,

**Acknowledging** that question of the autonomy and integration of persons with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired, is still topical, since the means to help them exist, but are still too rarely present in the public arena<sup>6</sup>,

**Considering** the preamble of the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which states that:

<sup>3</sup> See United Nations, “World Braille Day, 4 January”, <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/braille-day/background#:~:text=En%20novembre%202018%2C%20par%20sa%20r%C3%A9solution%20A%2FRES%2F73%2F161%2C%20l%27Assembl%C3%A9e.des%20droits%20de%20l%27homme%20et%20des%20libert%C3%A9s%20fondamentales>, accessed on 14 December 2024 at 12:14.

<sup>4</sup> See SDG Ressource Center, “World braille Day 2025”, <https://sdgresources.relx.com/events/world-braille-day-2025>, accessed on 25 December 2024.

<sup>5</sup> See *Medicover Hospitals India*, « *Journée mondiale du Braille* », <https://www.medicoverhospitals.in/fr/articles/world-braille-day#:~:text=La%20Journ%C3%A9e%20mondiale%20du%20braille%202025%20vise%20%C3%A0.de%20communication%20pour%20les%20aveugles%20et%20les%20malvoyants>, consultée le 14 décembre 2024.

<sup>6</sup> See *Weka.fr*, « *Journée mondiale du braille* », <https://www.weka.fr/fiches-et-outils/journee-mondiale-du-braille-4092/#discours>, accessed on 26 December 2024.



[t]he nation shall protect [...] the disabled [and that the] 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,

**Recalling** that the national, African and universal normative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, especially the blind or visually impaired people – as referred to in the previous statement to mark the World Braille Day on 4 January 2024<sup>7</sup>, has not changed,

**Taking into account** Article 24 (3a) of the above-mentioned Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which provides that:

States Parties shall enable persons [with disabilities, including visually impaired persons] to learn life and social development skills necessary to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. [To this end, States Parties] shall take appropriate measures, [...] including the learning of Braille [...],

**Noting** that the blind or visually impaired are more likely to experience difficulties associated with high rates of poverty, as vision loss often leads to discrimination in the fields of education, health and employment<sup>8</sup>,

**Having regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** adopted by the UN General Assembly at the United Nations Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, held in New York (United States of America) from 25 to 27 September 2015 and which, as part of the international action planned over 15 years:

- plans to implement an ambitious Programme of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to achieve 169 targets with more than 230 indicators to assess them,
- commits all relevant stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind by 2030, including the blind or visually impaired and
- guarantees all human beings, without distinction, a prosperous and fulfilling life<sup>9</sup>,

**Taking into account also** Objective 4 of the above-mentioned Programme, which invites all States Parties to “[e]nsure equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all [human beings, including persons with visual impairments,]”,

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<sup>7</sup> See CHRC Statement to mark the World Braille Day, 4 January 2024, 10 pp. 3 to 5, <https://cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2024-01-0310-06-52.pdf>, accessed on 15 December 2024 at 00:53.

<sup>8</sup> See United Nations, “World Braille Day, 4 January”, *op. cit.*, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> See United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2 pp., *esp.* p. 1 and 2.



**Considering** Aspirations 1 and 6 of the African Union's Agenda 2063, adopted on 31 January 2015 at the 24<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,<sup>10</sup> on 30 and 31 January 2015, which aim for:

a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development [based on] a high standard of living and quality of life as well as well-being for all, [through an Africa where] no man will be left behind or excluded ,

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**The Commission welcomes** the efforts made by the public authorities and their partners to promote the rights of blind or visually impaired people, with a view to their full development in society, in particular by:

- the multi-sector validation of the *National Inclusive Education Plan for the period 2024-2028*, by the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) and the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), in Yaoundé, on 8 October 2024. This Plan seeks to promote access to education for all, including people with special needs, and to *ensure that* by 2028 at least 25 per cent of people with special needs - such as the blind or visually impaired - benefit from equitable, quality education and vocational skills development with increased opportunities to learn in an adapted, healthy and protective environment<sup>11</sup>
- the official launch of the *Project to Strengthen Access to Inclusive Education and the Economic Empowerment of People with Disabilities in the Centre Region of Cameroon*<sup>12</sup>, by the Association for the Promotion of Persons with Disabilities in Cameroon (PROMHANDICAM), in Mfou, Mefou and Afamba Division (Centre Region), on 29 August 2024. This ceremony was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts (MINPMEESA), the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), and the administrative authorities of the said locality,

**The Commission is proud** of its actions in support of the rights of the blind or visually impaired, by:

- the purchase, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), of Braille transcription equipment, including a Braille embosser, a complete computer system, and reams of Braille paper, to ensure that its statements, press releases, and other documents are accessible to blind or visually impaired persons

<sup>10</sup> See Média terre, « L'Agenda 2063 de l'Union africaine (UA) adopté à Addis-Abeba, le 31 janvier 2015 », <https://www.mediaterre.org/afrique/actu.20150203152725.html>, accessed on 27 December 2024.

<sup>11</sup> See MINEDUB, « Validation multisectorielle de la Politique Nationale d'Education Inclusive », <https://www.minedub.cm/validation-multisectorielle-de-la-politique-nationale-deduction-inclusive/>, accessed on 16 December 2024.

<sup>12</sup> See PROMHANDICAM, « Lancement officiel du projet de renforcement de l'accès à l'éducation inclusive et l'autonomisation économique des personnes handicapées dans la Région du Centre », <http://promhandicam-asso.org/category/evenements/>, accessed on 16 December 2024.



- the operationalisation of its Braille transcription unit by the recruitment of a senior staff member specialised in Braille, in May 2024
- the publication of statements to mark the World Braille Day on 4 January each year, as well as for other commemorative days related to human rights. This includes transcribing these statements into Braille and distributing them to relevant authorities, structures and civil society organizations (CSOs),

*The Commission is pleased with the feedback* from various State structures to its previous Statement to mark the World Braille Day, particularly that of:

- The Office of the Prime Minister, which, by letter No. A39/C-1/SG/PM of 27 August 2024, informed the CHRC that the various ministries concerned by the recommendations in this statement have been instructed to implement them
- the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) which, through its letter No. 24-05714/MINESUP/SG/DAJ/CR/CEA2 of 29 July 2024, informed the CHRC that it *“is continuing to design and implement vocational training adapted to certain disabilities, especially visual impairments, in teachers training colleges and in faculties of Education Science; in the long term, this will help to significantly increase the proportion of [qualified] professionals in the relevant professions and improve the integration of students as well as visually impaired or blind teachers”*
- the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MINAC), which, by letter No. 0001611/L/MINAC/SG/DAJ/CC of 31 July 2024, informed the CHRC of the inauguration, on 12 July 2024, of the "Sao Room" at the National Museum, equipped with a sensory device for the visually impaired, in accordance with the legislation on the construction of public administrative buildings, which requires ramps for persons with reduced mobility and, in practice, for the visually impaired,

*The Commission also welcomes* the reply of the Cardinal Paul Émile Leger National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (CNRPH), which by letter No 2024/584/L/CNRPH/DG/CT of 22 July 2024, informed the CHRC of the following actions carried out in favour of the blind or visually impaired people,

- the recruitment by the CNRPH in 2024 of nine people with vision impairments, including three teachers, two physiotherapists, a specialist in information and communication technologies (ICT) accessible to people with vision impairments, a specialist in education, a specialist in cooperation, communication and international public action and a communicator

- the organisation of screening campaigns for visually impaired pupils in their school and the management of diagnosed pathologies with the help of parents and a partner association
- transcribing into Braille a collection of rhymes to help pupils from Primary One to Six to learn to read
- participation in the inter-ministerial consultation on the Braille transcription of official documents in Cameroon, under the coordination of the Prime Minister's Office,

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*The Commission deplors* the fact that:

- the cost of the white cane - the main mobility tool for visually impaired persons, is between 20,000 and 30,000 CFA francs<sup>13</sup>, which is beyond the financial means of most of them
- mainstream schools lack appropriate equipment to support blind or visually impaired pupils
- training for teachers in these schools is inadequate to meet the specific needs of these pupils
- specialised treatment for eye problems is sometimes inaccessible due to their high costs or the insufficient numbers of specialists in some regions
- negative stereotypes and stigma against blind or virtually impaired people persist in their families and communities, where some people see them as a burden
- public policies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly the inclusion of blind or visually impaired people, are ineffective in areas such as education, employment and culture
- Braille traffic signs are missing in public and private places
- audible warning devices for traffic lights are non-existent
- the failure to consider an inclusive approach in the design and construction of urban infrastructures such as pavements and pedestrian crossings, increases the dependency and isolation of the blind or visually impaired
- the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities remains inadequate, despite its ratification by Cameroon,

<sup>13</sup> See *Voa Afrique*, « *La bonne canne blanche se fait rare au Cameroun* », <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/la-bonne-canne-blanche-se-fait-rare-au-cameroun/5162750.html>, accessed on 29 December 2024.



*The Commission notes* that out of the 220 recommendations accepted by the State during the adoption of Cameroon's Report after undergoing the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 26 March 2024, 11 concern vulnerable persons, five of which are in favour of persons with disabilities, including the blind or visually impaired. These recommendations have been transmitted by the CHRC to State bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs), each as far as it is concerned, as follows:

- the recommendation to *"take appropriate measures to better protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities"*, addressed to the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic, the Office of the Prime Minister Head of Government, the Ministry of Justice (MINJUSTICE) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)
- the recommendation to *"strengthen the protection of persons in vulnerable situations, such as [...] persons with disabilities"*, [in this case the blind or visually impaired], addressed to the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic (SGPR), the Office of the Prime Minister Head of Government, MINAS and MINJUSTICE, the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), the Ministry of Public Health (MINSANTÉ), MINEDUB, MINESEC, the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN) and CSOs
- the recommendation to *"continue efforts to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, including the blind or visually impaired"*, which was addressed to MINJUSTICE and MINAS, as well as to CSOs
- the recommendation to *"work to improve the integration of persons with disabilities in educational institutions to promote and ensure respect for their fundamental rights"*, addressed to MINAS, MINPROFF, MINEDUB, MINESEC, the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP) and CSOs
- the recommendation encouraging to *"take measures to ensure the participation of marginalised groups, in particular [...] blind or visually impaired people, in political and decision-making bodies"*, addressed to the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), MINPROFF, MINAS and Elections Cameroon (ELECAM),

*The Commission reiterates* the recommendations made in its previous Statement to mark the World Braille Day in 2024, addressed to:

*The Government:*

- to guarantee access to basic education and free primary education for all, and especially for blind children, by

- building and equipping state 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
- to fully implement the *Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate access to printed texts or other published works for the blind, visually impaired and other print disabled*
- to further facilitate access for visually impaired people to health care, built-up environments, public and private buildings, and training and employment opportunities
- to reduce the cost of books, materials and special education equipment for blind children,

*MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINESUP and vocational training centres*

- to provide exhibition and operating areas with specialised material and equipment for the visually impaired
- to provide schools and universities with teaching materials for visually impaired pupils and students
- to train more teachers on the knowledge, usefulness and use of the above equipment
- to include the study of Braille as an optional subject in school curricula,

*MINAS and CSOs*, to increase awareness and initiation campaigns for Braille,

*MINSANTÉ and CSOs*, to raise parents' awareness of the importance of their children's eye health,

***The Commission recommends*** that the Government take the necessary measures to ensure that official documents are gradually and systematically transcribed into Braille so that *no one is left out*,

***In particular, the Commission recommends that:***

*MINAS should:*

- set up new programmes for the social and professional integration of blind or visually impaired people, particularly in the fields of crafts, culture and trade
- increase financial support for the families of blind or visually impaired children (scholarships and aid for the purchase of special equipment such as white canes), to facilitate their socio-professional integration,

*MINSANTÉ* should improve access to health care for visually impaired or blind people, and train doctors and healthcare staff to be more sensitive to their needs and provide appropriate care,



*The Ministry of Transport (MINT)* should improve the accessibility of public transport and associated urban infrastructure for the blind or visually impaired,

*The Ministry of Finance (MINFI)* should set up financial mechanisms to encourage entrepreneurship among blind or visually impaired people by offering them low-interest loans or assistance in setting up businesses adapted to their needs,

*MINEFOP* should offer vocational training programmes that are accessible and adapted to the needs of blind or visually impaired people in sectors such as IT, craft trades and intellectual services

*MINESUP* should include the teaching of Braille as a cross-curricular and compulsory subject in the curricula of teacher training colleges,

***The Commission encourages*** parents of visually impaired children to take them to Braille training and initiation centres and ensure their development in all areas of social life,

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For its part, ***the Commission will spare no effort*** to further promote the rights of persons with disabilities, and those of the blind or visually impaired persons in particular, to facilitate their socio-economic integration through the learning of Braille. This will be achieved through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, the complaint handling and self-initiated investigations,

***The Commission once again invites*** anyone who is a victim or witness of a human rights violation, and particularly the violation of the rights of the blind or visually impaired, to reach out through any available means, including via its **toll-free number: 1523** (free calls).

**Useful CHRC addresses:**

Web site: [www.cdhc.cm](http://www.cdhc.cm)

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

WhatsApp : **691 99 56 90**

Yaoundé, 2 January 2025

