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Demonstration of visually impaired persons in Yaoundé

**THE CHRC'S INVESTIGATION**

A total of 19 men and 8 women, belonging to an organisation called the Collective of Indignant Blind and Visually Impaired Persons of Cameroon (CAMIC) were arrested in front of the Prime Minister's office in Yaounde on Monday, 28 June 2022 and taken to the Central Police Station No. 1 of Yaounde. Among other reasons for their arrest, the Central Police Station Commissioner No. 1 of Yaounde cited the absence of a public demonstration permit or a document justifying their presence in front of the Prime Minister's office for a protest that rapidly flooded the social media. Consistent with its Republican approach and faithful to its principles and values, the Cameroon Human Rights Commission took up the matter and conducted an investigation to establish the facts and shed light on the situation.

**THE DEMONSTRATION**

The demonstration at the Prime Minister's office started at 8 a.m. and the persons concerned were arrested less than an hour later and taken to the Central Police Station No. 1 in Yaoundé. These persons brandished placards on which were inscribed a number of demands, notably on the measures expected from the Government for persons living with disabilities, as prescribed in Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities in Cameroon, in Decree No. 2018/6233/PM of 26 July 2018 to lay down the modalities for the application of the 2010 law, and the Prime Minister's Order No. 040/PM of 19 May 2022, to lay down the modalities for granting age exemption to persons with disabilities in public examinations and recruitment into the State Civil Service. The details are as follows:

* 1. the immediate recruitment of three visually impaired journalists who failed the 2020 competitive examination for direct integration into the civil service, although they were eligible and on the waiting list
  2. the granting of a disability pension to disabled persons in Cameroon
  3. the creation of a special fund to finance projects and micro-projects undertaken by persons with disabilities
  4. the organisation of special recruitment to the Civil Service exclusively reserved for persons living with disabilities, considering the different types of disabilities
  5. The respect of the 10 per cent quota reserved for persons living with a disability, considering the different types of disability, in competitive examinations and recruitment to public and private jobs.

**THE CHRC'S INVESTIGATIVE VISIT**

Immediately alerted, the CHRC dispatched a team composed of the Regional Secretary of the Centre Branch, the Head of the Observation, Investigation and Alert Unit at the CHRC Head Office, and two senior staff members working in this Unit to the scene of the demonstrations. The team met three officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs on the ground (Technical Advisor No. 2, the Director of General Affairs and the Director of Social Protection for the Persons with Disabilities). The team thus constituted went to the police station at around 10 a.m., where it was joined by the First Deputy SDO of Mfoundi.

The main reason given by Central Commissioner No. 1 for the arrest of these demonstrators was the absence of a public demonstration permit or a document justifying their presence there. This reason was corroborated by the first deputy SDO who said that he had received neither a declaration of public demonstration nor a strike notice from the demonstrators.

The discussions between MINAS representatives and the demonstrators revealed that:

* Their demands are well-founded for the most part, but it was the method used that did not comply with the regulations in force
* MINAS affirmed that it had already held four working sessions with the representatives of CAMIC between December 2021 and April 2022 and that measures had been prescribed to follow up on some of these demands, especially the integration of the three failed journalists, whose process is underway, following the relevant instructions from the President of the Republic
* concerning recruitment quotas for the Public Service, representatives of persons living with a visual disability were asked to wait for the launch of public examinations before submitting their applications and participating in them so that such quotas could be taken on board
* Regarding the financing of projects, MINAS took a copy of some projects that had previously been deposited in the Ministry by the persons concerned, who were requesting funding. MINAS officials promised to follow up on them.

The demonstrators were released at about 1.30 p.m. and MINAS granted transport fares to those who were willing to return to their respective homes and communities.

The CHRC regretted that this demonstration was held at a time when the Government was making many efforts to improve the living conditions of Cameroonians living with disabilities. It should be recalled that on 28 December 2021, His Excellency Paul BIYA, President of the Republic of Cameroon signed decrees that can be described today as "historic" in terms of their contribution to lifting the community of Cameroonians living with disabilities from social discomfort. These are Decree No. 2021/751 of 28 December 2021 ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the decree ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. An act which tirelessly translates the State's and Cameroonian lawmakers' determination to considerably improve the daily life of these men and women whom today constitute one of the most marginalised and stigmatised social groups. These instruments were signed on 27 April 2021 on the ratification of the Marrakech Treaty aimed at facilitating access to published works for the blind, the visually impaired and persons with other print reading difficulties, and the signing in 2018 of the implementing order of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, and Prime Ministerial Order No. 040/PM of 19 May 2022, fixing the modalities for granting age exemption to disabled persons in administrative examinations and recruitments in the State Public Service. These are considerable advances to be recognised, which mark a real revolution in the Cameroonian legal landscape in favour of persons living with a disability.

Communication for behavioural change in favour of persons with disabilities needs to be stepped up, advocacy and lobbying for better consideration of the concerns of persons with disabilities in schools and other training institutions, in development programmes and to ensure that persons with disabilities are represented in public and political life. Further awareness-raising and training for the appropriation and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national legal instruments for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, for which the National Human Rights Institution of Cameroon will spare no effort.