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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
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RIGHTS COMMISSION

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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE 15th INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE FOR FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

"ACCELERATE INVESTMENT TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION"

6 February 2022

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter : "the Commission"), created by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019, and established on 29 April 2021 following the swearing in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in Assembled Chambers,

Considering that the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted on 18 December 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly,

Bearing in mind that on 20 December 2012, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 67/146 against female genital mutilation (FGM), which calls on States to intensify their efforts to end it¹,

Considering that on 6 February 2003, Mrs Stella OBASANJO, first lady of Nigeria and spokesperson for the Campaign against Female Genital Mutilation, made the official statement on "zero tolerance to FGM" at a conference organized by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children in Africa²,

Recalling that female genital mutilation is an irreversible and irreparable form of violence which abuses the fundamental rights of women and girls as well as a serious threat to their health, especially psychologically, sexually and in the area of procreation; susceptible to increase their vulnerability to HIV and has harmful and even deadly obstetrical and prenatal consequences,

Considering that the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 states that "every person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to

¹ <https://onu.delegationfrance.org/journee-internationale-de-tolerance-zero-a-l-egard-des-mutilations-genitales>, consulted on 19 / 01 / 2022.

² <https://burkinafaso.unfpa.org/fr/news/lutte-contre-les-mutilations-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9rales-f%C3%A9minines-une-bataille-rude-%C3%A0-remporter>, consulted on 19 / 01 / 2022.

humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment” and that “the Nation shall protect and promote the family which is the natural foundation of human society [...] women, the young, [...]”

Noting that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted on 27 June 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya, and ratified by Cameroon on 20 June 1989 provides in Article 4 that: "*Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.*" It also states in Article 18 that "[t]he State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions",

Recalling that the Protocol of this Charter on women's rights (Maputo Protocol) adopted in Maputo in Mozambique on 11 July 2003 and ratified on 28 May 2009 by Cameroon, contains commitments to put an end to female genital mutilation,

Recalling that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 provides in article 5 that: "*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*"

Recalling that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted on 18 December 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations was ratified by Cameroon on 23 August 1994,

Considering that objective 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, envisages the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and all forms of violence on women and girls,

Taking note that since the outbreak of the corona virus disease (COVID-19), new data and recent reports from front-line workers indicate that all types of violence against women and girls have intensified in countries affected by the pandemic³,

Observing that according to UN-WOMEN statistics⁴, at least 200 million women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation with numerous effects such as mental health problems, suicidal thoughts, sexual dysfunction, infertility and even death⁵,

³ https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39878-doc-final-final-policy_paper_gbv_in_africa_during_covid-19_pandemic-fr.pdf org, consulted on 28 / 09 / 2021.

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/fr/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>, consulted on 27 / 10 / 2021.

⁵ <https://www.unfpa.org/fr/events/journ%C3%A9e-internationale-de-toI%C3%A9rance-z%C3%A9ro%C3%A0-I%C3%A9gard-des-mutilations-g%C3%A9nitaIes-f%C3%A9minines-2021>, consulted on 19 / 01 / 2022.

Noting that governments, civil society and other social movements have a role to play in the fight against female genital mutilation, the United Nations Population Organization (UNFPA) noted in 2021 that eliminating this harmful practice by 2030 would cost \$2.4 billion (about 1388,679,120,000 CFA francs), or \$95 (about 55,000 CFA francs) per girl to protect⁶. Hence the theme of this year's 15th edition which is "Accelerating Investments to end Female Genital Mutilation",

The Commission notes that violence against women is one of the most widespread and devastating human rights violations in the world. Yet it remains one of the most under-reported violations due to impunity, silence, stigma and shame,

The Commission sadly observes that in Cameroon, FGM is still practiced in the Far North, North and South West Regions, among tribes such as the Ejagham, Fulbe, Hausa and Arapsha⁷,

The Commission observes that in 2021 in Cameroon, surveys have shown that up to 20 per cent of women in the most affected communities have undergone FGM. This is a marked improvement in the country's rates compared to the mid-1990s when it was close to 40 per cent of women,

The Commission regrets that since 39 per cent of the Cameroonian population lives below the poverty line and the risk of violence against women and the girl child is likely to increase,

The Commission is aware of the challenges linked to the total eradication of FGM and has taken part in and organized several activities for the promotion and protection of women's rights, such as:

- the celebration of the 73rd International Human Rights Day from 6 to 11 December 2021, in Garoua, in the North Region, with an emphasis on the rights of vulnerable groups including women and girls
- the celebration of International Women's Rights Days such as the Zero Tolerance Day against genital mutilation on 6 February and the International Women's Day on 8 March
- participation in the workshop to enrich the document on the implementation of legal instruments relating to women's rights, from 1 to 2 March 2021, organized by the women's rights promotion network (GTOG)
- participation in the workshop to evaluate the 2017-2020 national strategy to combat Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), on 5 May 2021, organised by MINPROFF with financial support from UNFPA.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ <https://croissant-rouge-europeen.org/mutilations-genitales-feminines-au-Cameroun>, consulted on 19 / 01 / 2022.

The Commission commends Government efforts to end violence against women, especially through:

- the ratification of international and regional treaties in favour of women's rights
- the creation of local committees to combat FGM by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Family since 2015
- the promulgation of Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 on the Penal Code, in which Sections 277 and 277-1, punish with imprisonment of 10 to 20 years, anyone who mutilates a person's genital organ, regardless of the procedure
- the provision of a hotline since 2018 in the socio-medical centres of universities to receive cases and reports of sexual abuse
- the on-going review and evaluation of the national strategy to combat gender-based violence (2017-2020) and the development of a new strategy for the period 2020-2030
- the production of 300 radio programmes in local languages, French and English in collaboration with traditional and local authorities, and civil society to combat violence against women and raise awareness on human rights in particular women's rights⁸.

The Commission also commends the efforts of the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Population Organization (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which since 2008, have been carrying out activities under the Global Programme to Accelerate the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, currently focusing on 17 countries in Africa and the Middle East and also supporting regional and global initiatives.

The Commission encourages the efforts of development partners and civil society organizations that work tirelessly to promote the rights of women and the girl child.

The Commission invites men and boys to work in partnership with women and girls to fight genital mutilation.

The Commission recommends that the government should use this year's theme to engage in collecting and publishing disaggregated data to better inform policy making.

The Commission equally recommends that the State should assist civil society organizations, universities and other social actors engaged in the eradication of this harmful cultural practice through research, education and other actions.

⁸Official website of MINPROFF www.minproff.cm consulted on 3/9/2021

The Commission recommends an increase in the human, financial and material resources of existing social structures such as call centres and gender desks, which deal with victims of FGM to provide support and advice to victims.

The Commission recommends that the government should accelerate the adoption of a new national strategy to combat gender-based violence for the period 2020-2030.

The Commission recommends to actors of the judicial chain that investigations on FGM should lead to the sentencing of perpetrators and punishment commensurate to the offence, including adequate care and compensation for victims.

The Commission recommends continuous training of actors involved in the fight against FGM, such as law enforcement officers, immigration officers, medical staff, social workers and all actors in the judicial chain.

The Commission recommends that state and non-state actors should ensure that the role of men and local communities in preventing and combating FGM is further explored and strengthened.

The Commission recommends that traditional leaders, media professionals, parents, families and the community should contribute more to the fight against FGM and to eliminate the stereotypes that legitimize it.

The Commission recommends that women be made aware of the various forms of protection and recourse available to them and encourage them, regardless of their age, social status and religion, to denounce all forms of violence which they undergo.

For its part, *the Commission will spare no effort* to promote and protect human rights as a whole and specifically apply the gender approach in the conduct of its training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, and the handling of complaints and self-initiated cases.

Done in Yaounde, - 5 FEB 2022



James MOUANGUE KOBILA