



Installation ceremony of the CHRC Permanent Secretariat officials

**Speech by the Chairperson of the Cameroon Human Rights
Commission (CHRC)**

Yaoundé Multipurpose Sports Complex

1 September 2022

**The Vice-Chairperson of the Cameroon Human Rights Commission
(CHRC),**

Distinguished Chairpersons of the Sub-Commissions,

Distinguished Commissioners,

The Permanent Secretary,

**The *outgoing* Head of the Division for the Promotion and Protection
(CDPP),**

**The *incoming* Head of the Division for the Promotion and Protection
(CDPP),**

The incoming Chief of Staff,

Distinguished Heads of the Regional Branches,

**The National Coordinator of the Cameroon Freedoms Observatory
(CFO),**

**The Coordinator of the Cameroon Network of Human Rights
Organisations here represented (RECODH),**

Dear colleagues, all protocols observed,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with a bundle of joy that I take the floor on this joyous occasion, which follows the launch of the CHRC toll-free number, **1523**, on 27 July 2022. The test phase of the operation of this public utility number will continue until the launch campaign scheduled for November.

I am all the more excited, I must say, as this ceremony is taking place at a time when the CHRC is in the process of obtaining an enormous donation of materials and equipment from the UNDP, one of the best partners of the Cameroon National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), following the needs assessment of the CHRC in 2021, as part of the Peace Building Project in the North-West and South-West Regions, a project that was also meant to strengthen the NHRI in the country.

This demonstrates that the process of setting up the country's new NHRI is actively underway, and the newly appointed officials bear witness to the ongoing changes at the Commission. This is indeed the first time that Heads of Branch Offices of the Cameroon NHRI are appointed from among the staff. Under the former structure, members served as Heads of Branch Offices, while senior staff members were Regional Secretaries.

The appointments we are celebrating today are therefore an important step towards the restructuring of the New Commission, while waiting for the cards to be reshuffled once the decree on the organisation and functioning of the Permanent Secretariat is issued. Today's appointments also reflect the desire to inject new blood into the Head Office and all the Branches of the Commission. The rate of renewal at the Permanent Secretariat since the beginning of the CHRC's operationalisation is especially eloquent in this respect:

- CDPP: 100 per cent

- Units: 100 per cent
- Services: 80 per cent
- Bureaus: 0 per cent
- Regional Branches: 100 per cent, of which 50 per cent are transfers
- Total: 72 per cent (21 out of 29), with 41 per cent of women in senior positions, i.e. 12/29 positions.

Ladies and Gentlemen promoted,

You have each largely earned your appointment on merit, with the criteria sometimes varying from position to position or from person to person.

Every appointment brings a number of benefits, but these symbolic, material and financial benefits are in return for the constraints impose on you and the work you are called upon to do to enable the CHRC to achieve its objectives. These constraints and obligations determine your daily behaviour, the way you perform your duty, your relations with your superiors and colleagues, and the management of the material and financial resources at your disposal.

As regards your daily behaviour, as leaders in the CHRC, you have an obligation to exemplify the vision and values of the Commission, including respecting the human rights of all: those of your respective family members (children, spouse, parents, and siblings), those of your collaborators, and those of the service users. You must not be among those who use their social ascension to monopolise family property or to spread terror around them.

The CHRC is indeed an institution of compliance whose members must take ownership of the missions, values and principles in their daily lives. In fact, if I hear that a staff member of the Commission has beaten his wife, he will first be given an eight-day suspension. Now, if the opposite happens... if a woman beats up a man who is a staff member of the Commission... the Observation, Investigation and Alert

Unit - which should probably be renamed: Prevention of Torture Unit - will automatically take up the case to protect the rights of my staff member. As you can imagine, my collaborators can only defend the rights of other Cameroonians if their own rights are protected. In general, the Sub-commission in charge of protection will have to deal with any case of violation of the rights of the Commissioners, the Permanent Secretary and any member of the Commission's staff.

As far as your colleagues are concerned, they must at all times be treated in a proper manner, i.e. with attention, a great deal of consideration, respect for the weakest and a smiling and fine courtesy, but without losing the firmness required for operational efficiency, whenever that is necessary. Even the superior's right to admonish should be exercised according to the rules of the art. But no laxity, no nonchalance and no indolence must be tolerated.

As far as your duties are concerned, you should never lose sight of the fact that the Commission is a public service. We are at the service of the public. With reference to the principle of good governance that the public sector should be managed according to the methods that have proved successful in the private sector, I would compare the CHRC to a business whose customers are the people.

In business, we all know that the customer is king. Any person concerned by our actions to promote human rights, to protect human rights - whether on complaint or on self-initiated investigation - any person concerned by our actions to prevent torture is a *customer of the Commission* and should therefore *be treated like a king*. You must always be committed to providing our clients with a memorable "customer experience" through a princely welcome, empathetic listening, diligent handling of complaints.

Update your knowledge of human rights and especially in your area of specialization: either as a focal point or concerning the Service for which you are responsible. Everyone should seek to be a leader or

co-leader on a topic. Developing competence is an ongoing process and categorical imperative. Make your mark through your expertise, but also through your soft skills and your ability to evolve.

To achieve this, stay focus. Lack of focus is the main cause of inefficiency. Keep in mind that a human being can only have two priorities. Anyone who has tried to have three or four has failed miserably - and that includes me. Yes, two priorities, the rest on auto-play mode. And your focus must be one of the two.

I should explain that the priority area is the one that keeps you busy beyond working hours. If work is your priority, as it should be, then you must still work off-duty, even at nights and weekends. A contemporary in our country has always said that "*the 40-hour week is a luxury for developed countries*". It is worth remembering that in Japan, the model worker puts in 17 hours a day. It is at this price that this country has risen to the level of the Western countries. During the International Economic Conference that His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic organised on 17 and 18 May 2016, former South Korean Prime Minister UN-CHAN CHUNG taught us that "many South Koreans have worked very hard to support themselves, their families and their communities in order to escape from poverty."

However, to work meaningfully, you need to read a lot. As they say, the difference between the reader and the non-reader is abysmal. It is reading that allows us to escape the routine of work, discover new ideas, be creative, inventive, proactive and able to anticipate many things. Many of us do not know this, but the standard of our belated modernity requires every adult to read at least a book a month.

As concerns, your relations with your superiors and collaborators, now that you have been appointed, transferred or confirmed in your positions, learn how to deal with your superiors and lead your teams to produce the expected results. This cannot be improvised. Management exists. It is a science and an art. As soon as

your appointment is announced, you should take notes on what you would say at your first meeting with your new colleagues, to avoid moments of uncertainty. Be clear with your staff by clearly allocating tasks and setting the rules from the start. Tell them what you expect from them and *what you would like to bring to the table*.

There is nothing worse than a leader who is disrespectful to the hierarchy, dawdles when instructions need to be carried out, imagines that he or she has a choice between carrying out instruction and not doing so, is slow, indolent or sleepy when it comes to dealing with complaints or carrying out human rights promotion activities, does not know how to work in a team, how to organize the work of their team, or does not know how to work at all. Yes, you are equally judged by your ability to adapt, forge ties and even secret alliances with others.

Update or suggest to the hierarchy the organisational chart of the Division, of your Service or Unit or even of the Branch. Write down procedures. The compilation of procedures for all services and structures by the Permanent Secretariat will make it possible, in due course, to consolidate a procedure manual with the help of a specialist firm.

Show your added value in small steps and learn from your failures, in the manner of Nelson Mandela who had as a viaticum: "*I never lose, either I win or I learn*".

Let us conclude this point by mentioning the management of the material and financial resources the Commission ***has made available to you***. Management should be administered in a reasonable manner – in the past, it was recommended to manage "*as a good father*" – in strict compliance with the regulations in force. Do not be those officials who refuse to replace a ruler in their own office or abandon a photocopier or a printer, make do with an air-conditioning unit that is running at low speed because they cannot bear the idea of spending a single franc for public service, forgetting that when we

speak of the Republic, we are speaking of the *res publica*, the public affairs, that is to say, everyone's affair, which is equally *our affair*. What you don't allow at home, don't accept at the Commission. I mean to say things such as broken chairs, missing ceiling panels, hanging wires, non-functional toilets, dilapidated walls, rubbish, etc.

In any case, those who deviate from the norms of the management of the Commission's resources know what awaits them, the recent dismissal of the former Regional Secretary of the Far North Branch, for reasons such as misappropriation of the Commission's assets is illustrative in this regard.

The Vice-Chairperson,

Distinguished Commissioners,

Dear collaborators,

Distinguished guests,

I would now like to dwell on two collaborators who occupy key positions at the Commission: the Head of the Promotion and Protection Division and the Chief of Staff at the Chairperson's Office, before talking to the Branch Heads.

The Head of the Division for the Promotion and Protection,

Your rise at the Commission can rightly be described as dazzling. Recruited in the former structure, the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms on 1 December 2016, you were assigned to the Vice-Chairperson's Office until 2020. You were elected as a staff delegate for the first time on 1 March 2018 and re-elected on 21 January 2022. After a brief 'journey through the desert in the Promotion and Protection Division, you were acclaimed as the best staff member of the Commission, and you were chosen by the current Vice-Chairperson to head his office, in the aftermath of the appointment of the Members of the new Commission by presidential decree on 19 February 2019. It was from there that you were

appointed Head of the Project to Improve the Conditions of Exercising Freedoms in Cameroon in September 2021. At the end of this project one year later, almost to the day, you are the new Head of the Division for Promotion and Protection at the CHRC.

Some people will be surprised by this dazzling career path that has enabled you to go from a supervisor to a Director within the NHRI of Cameroon in five years, or in two years, starting from your reclassification... *I am not very good at subtraction*. The fact remains that such people have never observed a Chinese bamboo. When you plant it, you can water it every day, but nothing happens for five years. At least, nothing is visible. During the first five years, it develops deep, powerful roots, and in the fifth year, it starts to grow and reaches several dozen metres within a few months.

To those who are surprised by your dazzling ascent at the Commission, first tell them "*like the South Koreans, I have embraced the universal success factors of 'education and the culture of excellence'*"; then, tell them that "*I am like the Chinese bamboo, this is my fifth year*".

The Chief of Staff at the Chairperson's Office,

Pierre Corneille once said that *'to a well-born soul, value does not wait for the number of years*. Unlike Descartes, who misled the whole universe by claiming that *'common sense is the most common thing in the world'*, Corneille is right, at least as far as you are concerned. You were recruited to the Commission on 4 May 2018 as a translator-interpreter and noticed by the Office of the late Chairperson for the quality of your work. It has come to my attention that you translate French texts into English better than many English speakers at the Commission. It was for this reason that you were proposed and appointed Chief of the Translation and Interpretation Service on 20 November 2020.

This position brought you into contact with the Chairperson, as you were responsible for translating the statements and press releases he had to sign, as well as his bilingual speeches, which were sometimes finalised at the last minute, often in the middle of the night. I thus had the opportunity to appreciate your perfectionism in your work and your keen sense of research. You rigorously check everything proposed in the statements: references and the accuracy of quotations, dates, names of people and places, often with a harassing and offensive precision.

These exceptional qualities led to your being chosen to integrate the Chairperson's corrections into the Commission's 2019 Annual Report, a task which you successfully completed. As a reward, one year later, on 2 December 2021, you were co-opted into the Chairperson's Office as an attaché, cumulatively with your duties as Chief of the Translation and Interpretation Service.

Your main task was to be responsible for special files, including the completion of the Commission's Annual Reports before and after their proofreading by the Chairperson. However, you were able to appropriate the spirit of the Office, demonstrating a high awareness of the issues at stake, the accuracy of your *sometimes critical and peremptory* judgement and your presence, rich in virtues and involvement, as well as your way of taking things in charge – when you feel like it; so many factors that naturally imposed you to the position of Chief of Staff at the Chairperson's Office.

From now on, you will be responsible for the functioning of the Office, for planning, for travel and for the Chairperson's speeches. It is your responsibility to gather information likely to be of interest to the Chairperson and to participate in all the discussions that concern the Chairperson, while at the same time ensuring the management and follow-up of the Commission's major files.

The Chief of Staff also assesses the feedback from Commissioners, staff, journalists and the public.

Your task will be facilitated by your keen sense of human relations and diplomacy, and by the thoroughness with which you handle files.

Dear Heads of Branch Offices,

I presume that you are ready to take on your promotion or your new position and that the time lag between the date of the appointments and the date of assumption of duty has given you time to mentally put on your new suit and prepare for the change.

It should be solemnly recalled that while the Commission is indeed independent of public authorities and of any influence by external actors, the Branch Offices are not independent of the Head Office. Neither are senior staff members in relation to their superiors.

One of the keys is to never think that the new position requires the same skills and organisation that you have been using. Indeed, *“What got you here won't get you there”*, as the title of Marshall Goldsmith's bestselling book suggests. Even if you are transferred to another Branch Office or service, you will either be working with different people or evolving in a context that is new to you, often with additional responsibilities, including, for some, being in charge of a team for the first time and having to learn how it works.

This is especially true as the mandate of the CHRC has been expanded and strengthened by the 2019 law. These requirements are now heightened by the introduction of the CHRC's toll-free number, which increases the need for speed and performance in handling cases, to satisfy users of the public service of human rights protection away from any undue bureaucracy.

The challenge is even greater for those who have to morph from a super technician to a leader of men. They must learn to deliver a

message adapted to each of their new interlocutors – their team, the superiors of the permanent secretariat and the Commissioners – by embodying this message. In an article published in the *Management* magazine in November 2018, Julie Krassovsky points out that "[one of the first questions to ask yourself is; 'with this change in position, will my new job change my family organisation?']" I hope you have each answered this question precisely. This is all the more important *as with the new configuration of the Cameroon NHRI, all positions involve taking on new responsibilities and a greater workload.* Fortunately, the salary has also increased and we are all happy about that.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are celebrating those promoted during the transitional phase, but when the decree establishing the organisation and functioning of the Permanent Secretariat is released, other – certainly more important – appointments will be made. Positions will be given to those who would have proven themselves capable of taking on new responsibilities, going beyond the criteria set out in their job description. Otherwise, you are unlikely to be offered a more interesting position. And it is up to you to go and get those new assignments, no one else will do it for you.

Finally, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to all of you who have been promoted. Promotions challenge you in many ways. You have to fight at two levels: decoding your new working environment and getting results. I remember reading somewhere that "*professional expertise is acquired in the first 15 years of work*". This shows that most of you have more or less room for improvement, including in terms of appropriation of public service ethics. But each of you shares in my confidence.

Whether you are in the North or in the South, in the East or in the West, in the Adamawa or in the Littoral, in the North-West or in the Far North, in the South-West or in the Centre, I will keep on

listening to you. My door is open, I never close my phones, day in and day out, and everyone here can testify to that.

I declare you installed into your new functions.

I wish you all the best in fulfilling your duties.

Long live human rights!

Long live Cameroon, united and indivisible!