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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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CAMEROON HUMAN
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

5 June 2024

Theme.- *Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience*

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: “the Commission”), established by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 and rendered operational on 29 April 2021, following the swearing in of its Commissioners before the supreme Court sitting in Joint Benches,

Recalling that about six months after the first major conference on environmental issues held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972, UN General Assembly adopted Resolution No. A/RES/2994 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, which designated 5 June of each year, since 1973 as World Environment Day (WED) and urged “Governments and the United Nations organisations to undertake activities on that day each year to reaffirm their concern for the preservation and enhancement of the environment”¹,

Also bearing in mind that many of the rules adopted to protect the environment “originated in the early 1970s as a result of social and political awareness of the setbacks in economic progress, the degradation of sites and the risk of depletion of natural resources”²,

Noting that the WED celebrations are the main occasion for the United Nations to:

- encourage individuals, organisations and governments around the world to take action to conserve natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions

¹ See “World Environment Day, 5 June”, <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/environment>, accessed on 21 April 2024.

² See Agathe VAN LANG, “Environnement (Droit à- et de l’)”, in Joël ANDRIANTSIMBAZOVINA *et al.* (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Droits de l’homme*, Quadrige, Paris, Presses universitaires de France (PUF), 2012, pp. 372-375, spec. p. 373.

and conserve biodiversity, within the framework of sustainable development goals³

- encourage international cooperation to address the pressing environmental challenges of our era,

Further noting that respect for the right to a healthy environment is an essential foundation for the realisation of other human rights, such as the right to development and the right to food⁴,

Noting that Africa, and Cameroon in particular, is facing serious environmental problems as a result of seasonal changes, heat waves, land degradation, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, and extreme vulnerability to climate change,

Aware of the environmental challenges Cameroon is facing, the majority of which are a direct result of human activity, population growth and climate change. These challenges have been particularly pronounced in the North and Far North Regions, where temperatures have reached their highest levels in the last two years. In light of this, it is crucial to adopt a prudent and sustainable utilisation of natural resources, since they represent a significant pillar of the national economy⁵,

Emphasising that the theme of the 2024 WED commemorative activities is *land restoration, desertification and drought resilience*, with the slogan *Our Land. Our Future. We are #GenerationRestoration#*⁶,

Noting that the theme of the 2024 WED echoes the *United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*⁷, launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and their partners, to strengthen the protection of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems worldwide,

Noting also that the theme of the 2024 WED is undeniably relevant to the Cameroonian context, which is characterised by a serious decline in biodiversity, particularly due to:

Decades of deforestation, unsustainable farming practices and agricultural expansion [which] threaten the survival of forests and the species that live in them, [these changes] comes at a cost for local people, especially women and young people, some 80 per cent of whom depend on natural resources for their livelihoods⁸,

³ See MORGANE, “Planète durable, 5 June 2024 : Journée mondiale de l’environnement”, <https://www.planete-durable.fr/planete/5-juin-journee-mondiale-environnement/#Un-evenement-d'une-ampleur-mondiale>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

⁴ See Carten STAHN et al. (dir.), “Environmental damage as a human Right issue”, in *Environmental protection and transition from conflict to peace*, Oxford, University Press, 2019, 461 pp., spec. pp. 123-124.

⁵ See Ministry of the Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, *Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development Sub-Sector Strategy*, 247 pp., p. 1, paragraph 1.

⁶ See “Journée mondiale de l’environnement », https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/fr/journee-mondiale-de-lenvironnement/#scroll-nav_2, accessed on 24 May 2024.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See United Nations Environmental Programme, “In Cameroon, community led restoration efforts are paying off”, <https://www.unep.org/fr/actualites-et-recits/recit/au-cameroun-les-efforts-de-restauration-menes-par-les-communautes>, accessed on 24 May 2024.

Acknowledging that the serious threat of desertification and drought requires both national and international society to combine their efforts to stop and reverse the harmful effects of climate change⁹,

Considering the preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, which states that “every person shall have a right to a healthy environment [and that] the protection of the environment shall be the duty of every citizen”,

Noting that numerous African and universal human rights treaties binding on Cameroon require the protection, promotion and rational management of soils to preserve biodiversity,

Bearing in mind that Article 6 of the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, adopted in Algiers on 15 September 1968 and ratified by Cameroon on 18 July 1977, states that “the contracting States shall adopt measures for the conservation and improvement of the soil inter alia, combat its erosion and misuse”,

Considering that Article 1 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and ratified by Cameroon on 29 May 1997, spells out the essence of this year's WED theme by stating that:

- “desertification” means land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities¹⁰ ;
- “combating desertification” includes activities which are part of the integrated development of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas for sustainable development, and aimed at
 - o prevention and/or reduction of land degradation
 - o rehabilitation of partly degraded land and
 - o reclamation of arid land¹¹
- “drought” means the naturally occurring phenomenon that exists when precipitation has been significantly below normal recorded levels, causing serious hydrological imbalances that adversely affect land resource production systems¹²,

Bearing in mind that according to Article 5 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, adopted in Paris on 14 October 1994, it is the responsibility of “affected country Parties [...] to establish strategies and priorities, within the framework of sustainable development plans and/or policies, to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought”,

Considering Article 62 of the Framework Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, which states that:

⁹ See Geneva environment network « Journée mondiale de l'environnement », <https://www.genevaenvironnementnetwork.org/fr/journee-mondiale-de-lenvironnement/>, accessed on 29 April 2024.

¹⁰ See Article 1(a) United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Article 1(b)

¹² *Ibid.*, Article 1(c).

The protection of nature, the preservation of animal and plant species and their habitat, the maintenance of biological balances and ecosystems and the conservation of biodiversity and genetic diversity against all causes of degradation and threats of extinction are of national interest. It shall devolve on the Administration and each citizen to safeguard the natural heritage.

Considering also Article 63 of the same Law of 5 August 1996, which provides that: “[n]atural resources shall be managed rationally to meet the needs of the present generations without comprising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs”,

Considering also the Yaoundé Declaration on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests of 17 March 1999, in which the six Heads of State of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) undertake to:

- speed up the process of creating trans-border protected areas between Central African states and urge neighbouring countries to participate in the process by enhancing the management of the existing protected areas
- develop an appropriate forestry taxation system and attendant implementation measures to provide lasting support for conservation and sustainable management efforts as well as research on forest ecosystems

Noting that the objectives of the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) over the past two decades have focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in particular COP28, held in Dubai from 30 November to 13 December, aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 and by 60 per cent by 2035 compared to 2019 levels in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C,

Considering SDG 15, which calls on States to conserve and restore terrestrial ecosystems and ensure their sustainable use, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss,

Considering objective 7 of Agenda 2063, which particularly emphasizes on:

- sustainable natural resources management and conservation
- sustainable consumption and production patterns
- water security
- climate resilience and prevention of natural disasters
- renewable energy,

The Commission commends the efforts of the Government and its national and international partners to restore ecosystems, combat desertification and mitigate the devastating effects of drought to preserve biodiversity, in particular through:

- the signing of the Cooperation Framework on the Trans-Boundary Ecosystems Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forest and Wildlife Resources in Abuja, Nigeria, on 23 May 2002, through the development of a programme of mutual interest between the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife and the Federal Minister of Environment of Nigeria
- the signing of Decree No. 2023/07526/PM of 6 October 2023, to lay down the conditions of implementation of Law No. 2021/014 of 9 July 2021, governing

- access to genetic resources, their derivatives and associated traditional knowledge, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use
- the signing in Yaoundé on 7 May 2024, in the presence of the Minister of Decentralisation and Local Development, of the framework agreement on the anticipation of natural disaster in the country's cities, between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINHDU), the United Cities and Councils of Cameroon (UCCC) and the National Observatory on Climate Change (NOCC)¹³
 - the cancellation, by letter of 23 May 2024 from the Minister of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure (MINDCAF), of the terms of the letter of 6 July 2020, which granted a special exemption to the company *Complexe Cosmétique de l'Ouest (CCO SA)*. The provisional concession procedure was to be carried out on a 5000 hectares of State property in the Nkam Division. The project was to be carried upon agreement with the local population, following an application for special exemption submitted by *CCO SA* on 30 October 2019
 - the cancellation, by letter from MINDCAF dated 29 April 2024, duly signed in accordance with the instructions of the President of the Republic contained in Letter No. B1621/SG/PR of 5 April 2024, of the terms of Letter No. 053755/Y.6/MINDCAF/SG/D2/EA/MEF of 12 December 2023 granting special exemption to Mr Jean Baptiste Nganda, a representative of *Lyrebird Capital Company Limited* in Cameroon, for the implementation of the temporary concession procedure on about 400,000 hectares of State property, divided among 12 local communities in the Nanga-Eboko Sub-Division, namely, Bissaga, Emtse, Djassi, Wassa, Bamvele, Djombe, Zengoaga, Iboa, Dea, Meyosso, Okassang et Nginda, to carry out an agro-industrial project¹⁴
 - the signing of Order No. 00016/MINEPDED of 18 October 2023, to specify the tasks of the national focal points on access and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources
 - the signing of Order No. 00017/MINEPDED of 18 October 2023, to specify the tasks of the national clearing-house on access and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources
 - the signing of Order No. 111/PM of 6 October 2023 to lay down the organisation and functioning of the national access and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources committee
 - the signing, on 6 September 2023, of a memorandum entitled "*Sustainable wildlife management to improve the living conditions of local populations, phase 2*" between: on the one hand, MINFOF and, on the other, Dr Athman Mravili, the FAO representative in Cameroon, Mr Philippe Mayaux, the representative of the European Union delegation, and Dr Abdon Awono, the representative of civil society,
 - the signing, on 19 September 2023, of a revised Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) and the Association

¹³ See Marilyne NGAMBO TCHOFO, « Catastrophes naturelles : des pistes pour la résilience », *Cameroon Tribune* No. 13100/9299, 10 May 2024, 40 pp., spec. p. 10.

¹⁴ Elise SEH, « Le ministre des Domaines, du Cadastre et des Affaires foncières (MINDCAF) a refusé d'attribuer cet espace cultivable (400 000 hectares) à une société pas connue des populations », published on 24 May 2024, <https://magazine.pagesjaunes.online/production-de-manioc-400-000-hectares-de-terrain-refuses-a-lyrebird/>, accessed on 1 June 2024

Sanguia Baka Buma'a Kpodé (ASBABUK) to improve the access of the indigenous Baka community to natural resources in the protected areas of the Lobeke, Nki and Boumba Bek National Parks and the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve, to maintain their hunter-gatherer way of life

- the signing, on 4 July 2023, of a Memorandum of Understanding between MINFOF and the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network (NGO TRAFFIC) on support for the conservation and sustainable management of forest and wildlife resources in Cameroon
- the holding of a workshop in Yaoundé on 7 May 2024 by the *Centre for International Forestry Research* (CIFOR) to present the results of the research and implementation of the *Land Restoration Project for the empowerment of rural and indigenous women and poverty reduction in Cameroon*¹⁵
- the holding of a workshop by the Minister of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED) in Douala, on 28 April 2024 to build the capacity of local farmers to improve climate resilience through the use of artificial intelligence in local agriculture¹⁶
- the holding of a workshop on the state of biodiversity and ecosystems in Mbankomo on 23 November 2023, with the participation of experts and representatives of the sectoral administrations involved in scientific research, and indigenous peoples
- the launch, on 25 April 2023, in Garoua, by MINEPDED, accompanied by the FAO representative, of the activities of the *project entitled "Promoting neutrality with regard to land degradation and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions in production landscapes in the Sudano-Sahelian agro-ecological zone of Cameroon"*,

The Commission backs the endeavours of civil society and development partners to safeguard biodiversity and thus foster a healthy ecosystem, a factor for sustainable development, in particular by:

- the organisation of an awareness campaign on the importance of reforestation and the preservation of the mangrove by the Orange Cameroon communication network, through the media, throughout the month of April 2024¹⁷
- the holding, from 2 to 4 April 2024 in Douala, of a dialogue organised by the Regional Platform of Peasant Organisations of Central Africa (PROPAC) on agroecology, to adopt the Action Plan for a successful agro-ecological transition in Central Africa
- the organisation by the *African Mammal Conservation Organisation (Amco)* and the University of Douala of a workshop on the integrated management of water resources in the Sanaga Basin, entitled "*Street Manatee 2024*", held in Douala from 15 to 17 February 2024

¹⁵ See CIFOR, « La restauration des terres autonomise les femmes rurales et autochtones et stimule la réduction de la pauvreté au Cameroun », <https://www.cifor-icraf.org/press/press-release/la-restauration-des-terres-autonomise-les-femmes-rurales-et-pauvrete-au-cameroun/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁶ See *Canal 2 International*, 7.50 p.m. television news, 28 April 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/live/10PopjSBdvo?si=CmA3i11EJUicpv0s>, accessed on 11 May 2024.

¹⁷ See Advertisement after the 7:50 p.m. news bulletin on Cameroon's private television channel *Canal 2 international*.

- the organisation, from 21 to 23 October 2023, in Bertoua by the Archdiocese, of a national exhibition on the participation of young people in environmental management, to instil in them values related to environmental protection
- the planting of 800 tree seedlings by the parishioners of the Bafang diocese from 5 to 8 June 2023 on Mont Liha'a in the Bakou municipality of the West Region,

The Commission expresses its deep regrets at the recurrence of natural disasters linked to climate change and particular notes the landslide that occurred on 8 October in the Mbankolo quarter of Yaoundé, causing 28 deaths, three missing persons and significant material damage¹⁸,

The Commission is still concerned about:

- the expropriation of indigenous peoples' ancestral lands by local populations or by agroforestry entrepreneurs without their free, prior and informed consent, within the framework of the implementation of local development plans
- the prevalence of insecurity and illegal logging in protected areas
- the uninterrupted use of rudimentary agricultural techniques by rural populations, particularly extensive slash-and-burn agriculture,

Emphasising that natural areas such as forests, farmlands, savannahs, peatlands and mountains provide the food, water and raw materials humanity needs to survive¹⁹ and that current unsustainable food systems are a major driver of soil degradation,

The Commission is pleased with the steps taken by the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development to ensure the implementation of its recommendations spelt out in the previous Statements to mark the World Environment Day, specifically the report on measures taken in its field of competence to guarantee the right of populations to a healthy environment and the protection of biodiversity, through Letter No. 00334/L/MINEPDED/SG/DAJ/CR/CA of 4 April 2023 on the contribution of the said ministry to the preparation of the CHRC 2022 Report on the Human Rights Situation in Cameroon, namely,

- the official presentation, on 21 September 2022, of the framework document of the Harmonised Action Plan 2020-2030 for the restoration of 12 million hectares of degraded forest and landscapes in Cameroon and
- the launch, on 27 October 2022 in Garoua of the project “Enhancing the resilience of local communities to climate change through youth entrepreneurship and integrated natural resource management on the periphery of the waza (Far North Region), Benoué (North Region) and Kimni-Fungom (North-West Region) National Parks”

The commission recommends to:

- *the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure (MINDCAF) and the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) to enhance the security of*

¹⁸ See Jean FRANCIS, “Éboulement de terrain à Mbankolo : le Gouvernement fait le bilan”, *Cameroon Tribune* du 12 octobre 2023, <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/60799/fr.html/eboulement-de-terrain-mbankolo-le-gouvernement-fait>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁹ See United Nations Environmental Programme, “Seven ways to restore land halt desertification and combat drought” *op. cit.*

- indigenous peoples' land rights on their ancestral lands by the full implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 13 September 2007,
- *MINFOF* and the Ministry of Defence to strengthen measures to secure protected areas and combat illegal exploitation of protected area resources for the sustainable management of biodiversity
 - *MINFOF, MINDDEVEL, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and CSOs* to
 - promote alternative income-generating activities for people living near protected areas and sacred forests
 - raise awareness among local farmers about sustainable farming practices and environmental protection
 - support farmers to adopt new sustainable agricultural technologies adapted to climate change
 - increase the production of organic fertiliser
 - involve indigenous peoples in decision-making on environmental protection
 - ensure that councils comply with reforestation agreements,

Considering that one of the pillars of Cameroon's National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS-30) is to

promote the rational use of soil through sustainable farming practices, including soil restoration, avoidance of slash-and-burn agriculture, rational use of fertilisers and pesticides, and other modern techniques that facilitate sustainable soil management,

The Commission recommends that large agricultural companies and the general public reconsider their approach to land and natural resources use by adopting for agro-ecological farming and the use of organic fertilisers,

For its part, **the Commission will spare no effort** to promote and protect human rights and the right to a healthy environment through a range of activities, including training workshops, awareness-raising and information campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, and through the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations.

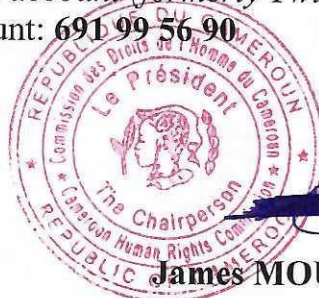
The Commission once more requests that anyone who has been the victim of a human rights violation or a witness to a violation of the right to a healthy environment, in particular, contact it, including via its toll-free number 1523 (free calls).

Useful CHRC addresses.-

Website: www.cdhc.cm

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

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Yaoundé - 4 JUIN 2024

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