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COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace – Work – Fatherland

CAMEROON HUMAN
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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 34TH DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD

16 June 2024

Theme.- *Education for all children in Africa: the time is now*

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,

Bearing in mind Resolution CMRes-1290 (XL) of 18 July 1990, adopted at the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), which proclaimed 16 June as the *Day of the African Child* (DAC), celebrated since 1991, in honour of the 23 people killed, including 21 black students, by the *Apartheid* racist regime in power in Soweto, South Africa, on 16 June 1976, on the first day of public protest organised by millions of black students in South Africa,

Also bearing in mind that these public demonstrations in which nearly 20,000 students were supported by the *Black Consciousness Movement*. The Movement’s fundamental principle was “*the rejection by the black man of a value system that makes them strangers in their own country and destroys their human dignity*”.¹ The demonstrators were organised to protest on roadsides, to highlight the poor quality of education provided to black students² and demand respect for their right to be taught in their mother tongues³,

¹ See Augusta CONCHIGLIA, “*Steve Biko, la conscience noire*”, in *Le Monde diplomatique*, 11 September 2007, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/carnet/2007-09-11-Steve-Biko-la-conscience-noire>, accessed on 10 June 2024.

² The deterioration in the quality of education for black pupils was exacerbated by the introduction of *Afrikaans* (the mother tongue of white South Africans) as an official language of instruction in local schools, alongside English.

³ See African Union / African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), Concept Note for the Day of the African Child 2024, titled “*Education for all children in Africa: the time is now*”,

Highlighting that dedicating a special day to the African Child, the Heads of State and Government of Africa have reaffirmed their commitment to celebrating the courageous actions taken by the Soweto children, who risked their lives⁴ to defend their rights, particularly their rights to leisure and culture, their right to freely express their convictions, their freedom of thought, and the right to education,

Further noting that through this commemoration, each State is called upon to conduct a national assessment of legislative, institutional, administrative, budgetary and judicial measures to “take stock of the progress achieved and identify challenges with regards to the realisation of the rights of the child in Africa”⁵. The specific objectives are to:

- raise awareness about children’s rights, abilities, and potential and draw attention to the situation of those particularly vulnerable to marginalisation and/or violence
- popularise national and international child protection instruments and promote a better understanding of their practical implications of the [...] obligations they entail [particularly in the area of education]
- encourage the commitment of public and private administrations and partners to take synergistic actions to ensure the realisation of children’s rights
- identify effective mechanisms and strategies for preventing and addressing violations of children’s rights⁶,

Further noting that the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) selects a theme each year for the Day of the African Child, which is then presented to the Executive Council of the AU for approval. This theme serves as the basis for related protests held in all the member States,

Emphasizing that through the proposal to position the activities marking the Day of the African Child this year under the theme “Education for all children in Africa: the time is now”, the AU Executive Council acknowledges that “education for all” is critical for the full realisation of human rights, particularly the rights of African children,

Recalling that the ACERWC emphasised the importance of assessing the strides undertaken to fulfil the right to education and identifying emerging challenges that require further actions during the 2014 celebration of the DAC and that the 2024 theme on education provides the opportunity to do so⁷,

Considering that the theme of the Day of the African Child is in line with the theme of the AU for the year 2024, adopted during the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held on 18 and 19 February 2023 and which reads “Educate

21 pp., spec., p. 2, http://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2024-03/Concept-Note_Day-of-the-African-Child_2024_EN.pdf, accessed on 10 June 2024..

⁴ Officially, 575 people - including five whites - died during this unprecedented revolt. See Michel BOLE-RICHARD, « La révolte et le massacre de Soweto », in *Le Monde* du 16 June 1986, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1986/06/16/la-revolte-et-le-massacre-de-soweto_2914359_1819218_.html, accessed on 10 June 2024.

⁵ See AU / ACERWC, Concept Note for the Day of the African Child 2024, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶ See Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), « Journée de l’Enfant africain (JEA) », <http://minas.cm/fr/journee-de-l-enfant-africain-jea.html>, accessed on 10 June 2024.

⁷ See AU/ACERWC, Concept Note for the Day of the African Child 2024, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

*an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning in Africa*⁸,

Observing that the emphasis on education also arises from the review of the execution of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the African Union’s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) which calls upon Members States to set up a “*qualitative system of education and training to provide the African continent with efficient human resources adapted to African core values and therefore capable of achieving the vision and ambitions of the African Union*”⁹, and whose implementation revealed that despite the progress observed in this area, the number of out-of-school individuals continues to grow in African states¹⁰,

Noting also that the assessment of Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2040, which aims to ensure that “*every child benefits fully from quality education*”, reveals that early childhood education coverage remains very low, free and compulsory education also faces challenges related to the direct and indirect costs of education, which disproportionately affect girls’ access to education and completion of their studies¹¹,

Recalling the words of Catherine RUSSELL, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund, stating that

Today 400 million children across the globe are living in or fleeing conflict zones [and] in war, children suffer first and they suffer the most [because]:

- they lose family members and friends
- they are often killed or injured by explosive weapons in populated areas
- they are recruited and used by armed forces or groups
- they are displaced multiple times, risking separation from their families [and] losing on critical years of education¹²,

Further recalling that according to Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), a child is defined as “*every human being below the age of 18, unless national law grants majority earlier*”,

Further, mindful that the rights of the child refer to “*the set of rights held by minors or specific rights recognised for children*”¹³,

Highlighting that education is a fundamental right, a powerful driver of development, and one of the best ways to reduce poverty, improve health levels, promote gender equality, and advance peace and stability. It has significant positive impacts on income improvement and is a key factor in equity and social inclusion¹⁴,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ AU, Continental Education Strategy for Africa CESA 16-25, Addis-Ababa, 44 pp., spec., p. 7.

¹⁰ See. AU / ACERCW, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See the speech of Catherine RUSSELL, the UNICEF Executive Director, at the Oslo conference on the protection of children in armed conflicts, <https://www.unicef.fr/article/discours-de-la-directrice-generale-de-junicef-catherine-russell-lors-de-la-conference-doslo-sur-la-protection-des-enfants-dans-les-conflits-armes/>, accessed on 10 May 2024.

¹³ See Adeline GOUTTENOIRE, « *Enfant* », in Joël ANDRIANTSIMNAZOVINA et al. (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Droits de l’homme*, Paris, Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 2012, pp. 367-371, spec. p. 376.

¹⁴ World Bank, “Education overview”,

<https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/topic/education/overview#:~:text=L%C3%A9ducation%20est%20un%20droit,la%20paix%20et%20la%20stabilit%C3%A9>, accessed on 11 June 2024.

Highlighting that according to Article 1 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules), Member States should strive to create conditions that will enable juveniles to lead meaningful lives in the community. During this period of life when they are most susceptible to deviant behaviour, these conditions should foster a process of personal development and education that is as free from crime and delinquency as possible¹⁵,

Highlighting that the normative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, especially in to mark the area of education in Cameroon that has experienced little change since the celebration of the 33rd Day of the African Child. Furthermore, the relevant provisions are referred to in the statements published to mark this Day in 2023¹⁶ and International Day of Education in 2024¹⁷,

Noting with satisfaction the adoption of Law No. 2023/009 of 25 July 2023 to institute the Charter on Child Online Protection in Cameroon. This law encompasses some salutary measures to punish online violations of the rights of the child and therefore contributes to strengthening the fight against cybercrime, which children are particularly exposed to¹⁸,

The Commission commends the Government administrative bodies and their partners for their efforts in promoting and protecting child rights to education, in particular:

- the audience granted by the Minister of Basic Education to a UNICEF team led by its representative in Cameroon, Nadine Perrault, on 10 May 2024. During this audience, UNICEF reiterated its interest in accompanying Cameroon in the implementation of the sectoral plan for education in Cameroon as well as as its wish to be retained as the *coordinating agency* in the execution of the priority reform of basic education
- the approval, on 27 March 2024 by the Minister of Basic Education, of a budget of 175,000,000 FCFA for the rehabilitation of some schools in the West Region. This includes
 - o a total of 75,000,000 FCFA for the Djeleng V Public School (Bafoussam),
 - o a total of 50,000,000 FCFA for the Bamendzi Public School (Bafoussam) and
 - o a total of 50,000,000 FCFA for the Koptchou Maetur Public School (Bafoussam)
- the inauguration of Notre Dame de Fatima de Nko'ovos private Catholic bilingual complex in Ebolowa, South Region on 4 January 2024, by the Minister of Basic Education, was an important event. It was an opportunity to encourage the Catholic Church and its partnerships which are helping to improve the educational system in Cameroon and particularly in this locality

¹⁵ See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights / Center for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Law Enforcement. A Trainer's Guide on Human Rights for the Police*, New-York and Geneva, 1997, 228 pp., spec. p. 121.

¹⁶ CHRC, Statement to mark the 33rd Day of the African Child, published on 15 June 2023., <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2023-06-1511-54-09.pdf>, accessed on 11 June 2024.

¹⁷ CHRC, Statement by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission to mark the 6th International Day of Education, published on 22 January 2024, <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2024-01-2206-44-41.pdf>, accessed on 11 June 2024.

¹⁸ See Gaorang WANGKARI WAIROU, « Regard sur la loi n° 2023/009 du 25 juillet 2023 portant Charte de protection des enfants en ligne au Cameroun » in *Revue des Droits de l'homme. Actualités Droits-Libertés*, [published online on 16 October 2023], <https://journals.openedition.org/revdh/18563>, accessed on 10 May 2024.

- the signing on 19 December 2023, by the Minister of Basic Education and the Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reform, of Joint Order No. 113/B1/1464/MINEDUB/ MINFOPRA to open a selection test for the recruitment of 3,000 primary school teachers as part of the fifth phase of the third programme of integration of nursery and primary school teachers of the public primary schools of the Ministry of Basic Education, for the year 2023¹⁹
- a significant increase in the budget of the Ministry of Secondary Education, from CFAF 477.8 billion for the 2023 budget year to CFAF 539.2 billion for 2024, this represents an increase of CFAF 61.4 billion, in order to cover, amongst other, salary arrears and other legitimate demands from teachers in this Ministry²⁰
- a significant increase in the budget of the Ministry of Basic Education, from CFAF 261.2 billion for the 2023 budget year to CFAF 289.6 billion CFA for 2024, which represents an increase of CFAF 28.4 billion, in order to improve the reception infrastructure for this school sub-system and to facilitate the recruitment of new basic education teachers²¹,

The Commission highlights that, in furtherance of its mission to promote human rights, it is working towards its expansion into the ten Regions of the country in order to establish human rights clubs in primary, secondary and higher education institutions,

The Commission is disappointed to note that Africa has not yet achieved its objectives of universal education. According to statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) show that 20 per cent of children aged between six and eleven years, 30 per cent of children aged between twelve and fourteen and 60 per cent of children aged between fifteen and seventeen are not enrolled in school in Africa, this means that even if the school enrolment rate has increased, the drop-out rate remains high²²,

The Commission further notes that the rights of the child to education is severely affected by conflict, due to school closures, attacks on schools and the recruitment of children in armed groups,

The Commission notes and deplors:

- the persistence of some harmful practices in some parts of the country, such as early and forced marriage of children, child labour, child begging, frequent cases of child abuse and exploitation, which prevent children from fully enjoying their right to education
- the misuse of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), which encourages the depravity of morals and violence in schools
- the persistence of terrorist attacks against pupils, teachers and schools, resulting in the loss of many human lives and property and permanently compromising children's right to education

¹⁹ See *Cameroon Tribune*, « Recrutement des instituteurs : plus de 3 000 places disponibles », https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/62077/fr.html/details_2, published on 22 December 2023, accessed on 10 May 2024.

²⁰ See « Le top 10 des ministères qui ont eu une hausse de budget au Cameroun », <https://www.lebledparle.com/le-top-10-des-ministeres-qui-ont-eu-une-hausse-de-budget-au-cameroun/>, accessed on 10 May 2024.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See UNESCO / AU "Continental Report on Education in Africa. Placing equity at the heart of policy, 2023", <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384481>, accessed on 10 May 2024.

- insufficient consideration of the specific needs of children with disabilities in the Cameroonian educational system and, more specifically, the preparation of arrangements for accommodating candidates with disabilities in official examinations, as well as the complexity of the tests for these candidates insofar as transcription experts are not always involved in designing them,

The Commission highlights that “any meaningful and sustainable economic growth [demands that the right to education be] placed in the development agenda of nations”²³, for it is clearly established:

- that “a quality and relevant [...] education [system] can significantly address abject poverty in Africa”²⁴ and
- that “competitiveness [will improve] with regards to the global process of research, innovation and entrepreneurship requiring increasingly quality knowledge production from universities in African countries”²⁵, thereby enabling citizens to “be effective agents of change to achieve Africa’s 2063 Agenda for sustainable development goal as envisioned [by AU]”²⁶,

The Committee reiterates its recommendations outlined in its prior Statements, particularly those directed:

- To the Civil Status Registration Office, to enhance campaigns to issue birth certificates, and thus facilitate access to education for all, especially for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those living in isolated or remote areas,
- To the Ministry of Justice, to step up its initiatives aimed at combating violations of the rights of the child, particularly forced and early marriages, which hinder girls' education and accentuate inequalities in education, just as much as they compromise women's and girls' chances of empowerment,
- To the public and private players responsible for primary, secondary, and higher education
 - o to endorse the updating of course materials and educational resources so as to bolster the internalization of civic education and citizenship tenets, including by integrating instruction on genocide
 - o to outfit primary, secondary, and higher learning institutions with didactic equipment for visually impaired children, adolescents, and young adults,

The commission recommends:

To the Government,

- to strengthen the “following three components, higher education, scientific research and TVET (technical and vocational education and training)”²⁷, in a bid to enhance quality and foster relevance in the scientific production in relation to the development of the country

²³ AU, Continental Education Strategy, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ Unesco/AU, Education in Africa. Placing equity at the heart of policy, Executive Summary, 24 pp, spéc. p. 1, https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/ed3002/CESASDG4_VFR_2022_ADEA.pdf, accessed on 13 June 2024.

²⁷ See Continental Education Strategy, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

- to optimise the equitable distribution of resources across the regions, with due regard for the pressing requirements of the priority education zones,

To the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education

- to establish additional government-run nursery schools especially for children with disabilities in rural areas and in regions where the education system has been disrupted by the insecurity resulting from the *Boko Haram* terrorist activities (Far North) or secessionist groups in the North West and South West
- to take greater account of disability by recruiting significant numbers of teachers specialising in inclusive education and by equipping inclusive classrooms in all government and private schools,

To the Ministry of Finance to ensure an equitable distribution of resources across the regions, with due regard for the pressing requirements of the priority education zones,

To the General Delegation for National Security and the Secretary of State for Defence in charge of the National Gendarmerie, that security operations are further strengthened around schools in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions to more keenly encourage the enrolment of children in these areas,

The Commission strongly encourages families, public sector bodies including Regional and Local Authorities, public and private companies, development partners and civil society organisations to invest more in education for the emergence of Cameroon by 2035, as well as for the safeguarding and strengthening of morality, traditional values, and positive African cultures,

Finally, the Commission recommends greater synergy of actions by all stakeholders to foster the adoption and observance of the right to quality education, which is frequently compromised by infrastructure quality issues, deficient or poorly-equipped libraries and labs, and the substandard nature of teaching and assessments,

In turn, the Commission will spare no effort to continue to promote and protect Human Rights and child's rights to education in particular, through the establishment of 398 human rights clubs within schools in the country's ten Regions, educational talks, training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions within the framework of handling complaints, self-initiated investigations and the prevention of torture.

The Commission therefore calls upon anyone who is a victim or witness of human rights violations and particularly of children's rights, especially online, to immediately contact it via its **toll-free number 1523**.

Useful CHRC addresses.--

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

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Yaounde, 15 June 2024



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