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DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace – Work – Fatherland

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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO
MARK THE 37th INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND
ILLCIT TRAFFICKING

26 June 2024

Theme: *The evidence is clear: invest in prevention*

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 that, further to a resolution of the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held in Vienna from 17 to 26 June 1987, which

recommended the establishment of a day to draw attention to the importance of combating drug abuse and illicit trafficking, the United Nations General Assembly, by resolution A/RES/42/112 of 7 December 1987 resolved to observe 26 June each year as the **International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**, also known as **World Drug Day (WDD)**. This day serves as a reminder of the goal set by the Member States of the United Nations to strengthen national, regional and global action and cooperation to achieve a world free from drug abuse,

Also bearing in mind that this day marks the dismantling by Lin Zexu, High Commissioner in the Canton city of China, of a network of over 1,500 Chinese opium consumers or dealers, and the seizure from foreign ships of over 20,000 boxes of opium, the contents of which were publicly destroyed¹,

Noting that the World Drug Day (WDD) provides an ideal opportunity to address the significant issue of drugs, considering that drug use damages the health and well-being of consumers and claims hundreds of thousands of lives every year through overdoses², and that “*the illicit drug market is breaking production records, feeding crime and violence [around the world and resulting to negative impact] on users' health and well-being*”³,

Highlighting that, in the wake of the 36th WDD commemorative activities, held in 2023 under the theme “*People first: stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention*”, the 2024 edition of this day will be celebrated under the theme **The evidence is clear: invest in prevention**⁴, a theme that reminds us that:

effective drug policies must be rooted in science, research, full respect for human rights, compassion, and a deep understanding of the social, economic, and health implications of drug use⁵,

Recalling that drugs are defined as “*any psychotropic chemical substance considered harmful and capable of causing dependency*”⁶,

Recalling also that the word “drug” is understood to mean “*a substance whose production and use is illegal*”⁷,

¹ See *Les échos*, « Lin Zexu : Guerre à l'opium ! », <https://www.lesechos.fr/2008/08/lin-zexu-guerre-a-lopium-513079>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

² *Idem*.

³ See UN Secretary General, “Message to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking” UNIS/SGSM/1411, 21 June 2023, <https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2024/unisgsm1411.html>, accessed on 24 June 2024.

⁴ See UNO, “International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, 2024 on the theme, *The evidence is clear: invest in prevention*”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drugs/index-new.html>, accessed on 24 June 2024.

⁵ *Idem*.

⁶ See *Dictionnaire encyclopédique Encarta*.

⁷ See Michel MASSE, “Drogue”, in : Joël Andriantsimnazovina *et al.* (dir.), *Dictionnaire des Droits de l'homme*, Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2012, pp. 303-305, spec. p. 303.

Emphasising that drug users and people living with drug-related disorders are perpetual victims of drugs themselves, of stigma and discrimination, and of brutal and inhumane responses to the problem, this year's theme reminds us that it is more *effective to break the cycle of suffering by acting upfront*, before drugs gain a foothold, by investing in prevention,

Considering the preamble to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol amending the said Convention, it is evident that: “*drug addiction constitute a serious evil for the individual and is fraught with economic and social danger to mankind and that it is their duty to prevent and combat this evil*”⁸,

Further to the decision of the Heads of State to extend the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2023) until 2025, it is worth noting that this is the fifth strategic framework guiding drug policy development in Africa⁹,

Emphasising that according to the *2023 World Drug Report* published in June 2023 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),

continued recording of illicit drug supply and increasingly agile trafficking networks are compounding intersecting global crises and challenging health services and law enforcement responses¹⁰,

Noting that illicit drug trade has a detrimental impact on communities, undermining their right to security, livelihoods and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment,

Emphasising that the normative and institutional framework to combat drug abuse and trafficking has slightly changed since the last celebration of this day. The relevant provisions are addressed in the statement issued to mark the 2024 celebration¹¹,

In light of the remarks made by Fatou Sow Sarr, the Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which emphasises that:

⁸ See United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, as amended by the 1972 protocol amending the single convention on narcotic drugs, 1961, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1961_en.pdf, accessed on 29 May 2024.

⁹ See International Narcotic Control Board, *Global Report 2023*, https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/uploads/documents/2024-INCB/2325540F_INCB_Annual_Report.pdf, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁰ See UNODC “World Drug Report 2023 warns of converging crises as illicit drug markets continue to expand”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2023/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2023-warns-of-converging-crises-as-illicit-drug-markets-continue-to-expand.html>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹¹ Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), CHRC Statement to mark the 36th International Day of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, published on 26 June 2023, <http://www.cdhc.cm/index.php?page=docs&category=declarations>, accessed on le 29 May 2024.

the heaviest burden of drug consumption falls between the age group of 10 and 29 years old. It is therefore important to invest more in the mental health of young people to protect our children and adolescents from illicit drug use¹²,

Further recalling that according to Waly Ghada, the Executive Director of UNODC,

we need to step up responses against drug trafficking rings that are exploiting conflicts and global crises to expand illicit drug cultivation and production, especially of synthetic drugs, fuelling illicit markets and causing greater harm to people and communities¹³,

Considering that the *2023 World Drug Report* produced by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicates that, “out of 980,000 people who inject drugs in Africa, more than 100,000 (11.3 per cent) are living with HIV”¹⁴,

The Commission observes that social and economic inequalities are a significant driving force behind the challenges posed by drugs, environmental devastation and human rights abuses. Furthermore, these inequalities are themselves shaped by the rising dominance of synthetic drugs¹⁵,

The Commission observes that young people, who are particularly susceptible to drug consumption, are also significantly impacted by mental health disorders related to substance use in several regions. Therefore, in Africa, 70 per cent of individuals undergoing treatment for substance use disorder are under the age of 35,

The Commission equally observes that over the past decade, Central Africa and West Africa, which previously functioned as transit routes for illegal drugs from South America, have undergone a notable transformation into thriving narcotics markets, accompanied by a concerning rise in local consumers¹⁶,

The Commission notes that forcibly displaced populations constitute a marginalised group that is afflicted with a plethora of challenges, including physical and psychological

¹² See Africa Defense Forum "ADF : L'Afrique de l'Ouest enregistre une hausse de consommation de drogue après avoir servi de voie de transit pendant plusieurs années", <https://adf-magazine.com/fr/2023/12/lafrique-de-louest-enregistre-une-hausse-de-consommation-de-drogue-apres-avoir-servi-de-voie-de-transit-pendant-plusieurs-annees/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹³ See UNODC “World Drug Report 2023 warns of converging crises as illicit drugs markets continue to expand”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2023/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2023-warns-of-converging-crises-as-illicit-drug-markets-continue-to-expand.html>, *op. cit.* (note n° 10), accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁴ See. UNODC, *World Drug Report 2023*, https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/Special_points_E.pdf, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁵ See. UNODC “World Drug Report 2023 warns of converging crises as illicit drugs markets continue to expand”, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/fr/press/releases/2023/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2023-warns-of-converging-crises-as-illicit-drug-markets-continue-to-expand.html>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁶ See. *Africa Defense Forum*, « L'Afrique de l'Ouest enregistre une hausse de consommation de drogue après avoir servi de voie de transit pendant plusieurs années », <https://adf-magazine.com/fr/2023/12/lafrique-de-louest-enregistre-une-hausse-de-consommation-de-drogue-apres-avoir-servi-de-voie-de-transit-pendant-plusieurs-annees/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

trauma, as well as significant socio-economic vulnerability. Consequently, they are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues and substance-related disorders,

The Commission commends the endeavours of the public administrative bodies and their partners in combating abuse and illicit trafficking of drug, in particular:

- on 30 May 2024, a consignment of cocaine with a street value of 1.3 billion CFA francs was seized by Cameroonian customs at Douala International Airport. The cocaine, weighing 24.5 kg, had originated from São Paulo, in Brazil. The contraband was concealed within handbags and footwears. On the same day, a Cameroonian citizen aged 60 years or over, who was demonstrably involved in the illicit trade, was apprehended and presented before the State counsel of the High Court of Douala-Bonanjo¹⁷ for investigation in connection with the aforementioned case
- on 16 April 2024, the Kondengui Gendarmerie Brigade seized 339 small seams, seven large packets containing almost 7,425 kg of Indian hemp and apprehended four individuals aged between 19 and 31 years old. The four individuals were accused of being involved in a drug retail network in the Mvog Atangana Mballa quarters of Yaoundé. The operation against narcotics trafficking was named “*Coups de poings*”¹⁸
- on 3 April 2024, the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (CNAM) hosted an online seminar on the theme *Drug policies in Africa: production, consumption, commercialisation, public health, security, lawful and unlawful drugs use*¹⁹
- on 26 February 2024, the Cameroonian customs officers at the Douala International Airport seized a cargo of 15 kg of cocaine with an estimated value of 606 million CFA francs during the boarding of a *Turkish Airlines* flight to Istanbul, by a passenger whose final destination was Sri Lanka in South Asia²⁰
- on 27 December 2023, 13 kg of Indian hemp was seized in Kye-Ossi market in the South Region during excavations carried out by the Gendarmerie Brigade of the aforementioned locality²¹
- on 25 September 2023, the Minister of Higher Education signed Circular No. 23/0007/MINESUP/GS/IGS/DAJ, which concerns the fight against the production, possession, consumption and commercialisation of cannabis and other drugs in university milieus

¹⁷ See *Cameroon tribune*, “*Lutte contre la drogue : 24,5 kg de cocaïne saisis à l’aéroport* », <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/65242/fr.html/lutte-contre-la-drogue-24-5-kg-de-cocaine-saisis>, published on 3 June 2024, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁸ See XINHUA, “*Cameroun : importante saisie de chanvre indien à Yaoundé*”, <https://french.xinhuanet.com/20240418/b7c9a2c2a42e4bd68036f4075f57c443/c.html>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

¹⁹ See VIH.org, “*Le Cnam : séminaire sur les politiques des drogues spéciales en Afrique*” , <https://vih.org/drogues-et-rdr/20240314/le-cnam-seminaire-politiques-des-drogues-special-afrique/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

²⁰ See *Cameroon tribune*, “*L’aéroport international de Douala : 15 kg de cocaïne saisis à l’aéroport*” , <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/63510/fr.html/laeroport-international-de-douala-15-kilos-de-cocaine-saisis-laeroport>, published on 29 February 2024, accessed on 29 May 2024.

²¹ See Ministry of Défense, “*Lutte contre le trafic de drogue et de stupéfiants : 13 kgs de chanvre indien saisis par la brigade de Gendarmerie de Kye-Ossi*”, <https://mindef.gov.cm/gendarmerie-nationale/2023/12/29/lutte-contre-le-traffic-de-drogue-et-de-stupefiants/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

- from 20 to 22 September 2023, a delegation of Cameroon experts was scheduled to participate in a joint activity in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The objective of this activity was to foster confidence, relations and networking, to raise awareness of trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl-type substances and new psychoactive substances in West and Central Africa²²
- in September 2023, 39 countries including Cameroon, enrolled to participate in the *International Narcotics Control Board (INCB Learning)* online training courses. These courses cover a range of topics related to narcotics, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and methods to ensure sufficient availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes²³
- on 5 August 2023, the Kye-Ossi Gendarmerie Brigade seized two bags of 100 kg of Indian hemp and 19 steams at Kono-Fonosi village²⁴
- on 23 August 2023, a training workshop for educators *on making schools safe from drug trafficking consumption* was held at the headquarters of the 'Francophone Young Volunteer' (JVF) located in the 2nd district municipality of Yaoundé,²⁵
- from 4 to 7 July 2023, a joint activity for police, customs and postal security officers from Cameroon and the Congo was held in Yaoundé with the objective of acquiring knowledge and practical skills for the detection and interception of dangerous substances in complete safety. This initiative was undertaken by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), in the framework of its Global Programme for the Rapid Interception of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS Programme)²⁶
- in June 2023, the Mbalmayo Gendarmerie Company in the Centre Region commenced *Clean Mbalmayo* operation. The objective of this initiative was to reduce the prevalence of drug and narcotics trafficking in Mbalmayo and the surrounding area. Six months later, the results were as follows:
 - a total of 62 individuals were apprehended and subsequently presented before the court, on charges related to cultivation, possession, trafficking, handling stolen goods and/or consumption of psychotropic substances
 - approximately 84 kilograms of Indian hemp were confiscated, sealed and submitted as evidence to the relevant judicial authorities
 - a total of 12,000 *diazepam* tablets, 9,440 *tramadol* tablets and 7,900 *ezo* tablets were confiscated and placed under seal

²² See International Narcotic Control Board, *Global Report 2023*, *op. cit.* (note n° 9).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See *Actu Cameroun*, « *Trafic de stupéfiants : deux sacs de 100 kilogrammes de chanvre indien saisis par la Gendarmerie nationale* », <https://actucameroun.com/2023/08/08/trafic-de-stupefiants-deux-sacs-de-100-kilogrammes-de-chanvre-indien-saisis-par-la-gendarmerie-nationale/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

²⁵ See *Koaci*, « *Cameroun : lutte contre la drogue en milieu scolaire, le casse-tête de la société civile et des pouvoirs publics* », https://www.koaci.com/article/2023/08/23/cameroun/politique/cameroun-lutte-contre-la-drogue-en-milieu-scolaire-le-casse-tete-de-la-societe-civile-et-des-pouvoirs-publics_171736.html, accessed on 29 May 2024.

²⁶ See International Narcotic Control Board, *Global Report 2023*, *op. cit.* (note n° 9).

- a total of 1,632 grams of cocaine was seized in various types of packaging including 950 grams of methamphetamine, commonly referred to as "pebbles", 620 grams of cocaine called "taille" and 62 grams of other forms of cocaine. All of the seized cocaine was sealed
- a total of 8,689,500 CFA francs representing the proceeds from the sale of illicit substances seized from traffickers was equally confiscated
- some three seedbeds, several fields of Indian hemp and 13 bottles of 1.5 litre each one of Indian hemp seed destroyed
- a variety of hunting and homemade weapons, along with a substantial quantity of ammunition in different calibres, were also confiscated²⁷,

The Commission notes that the Internet offers a duality of potential outcomes in the context of the conventions adopted in the fight against drugs trafficking. On the one hand, it provides a means of pursuing the objectives of these conventions. On the other, it presents a risk of compromising them. The Internet provides a means of disseminating preventive advice and health warnings concerning drug use to the general public, with a particular focus on young people. It also enables the provision of information on where to seek help and how to find it in the event of problematic use. However, the Internet and particularly social media have the effect of increasing the availability of illicit drugs on the market and making it more challenging for law enforcement agencies to prevent their trafficking,

The Commission notes that statistical data from 19 addiction care, support and prevention centres (CSAPA) operating in Cameroon indicate that in 2023, 1,719 drug users were admitted to these centres. Among these drug users, 81.3 per cent were young people aged between 15 and 34, with a high predominance of those aged between 25 and 29, with 34 per cent having specifically consumed cannabis, which is the most widely used narcotic over the last three years²⁸,

The Commission also notes that according to the Global Organised Crime Index 2023, published on 24 January:

- the mean crime rate in Central Africa is 5.06/10 representing a decline of 0.06 from the previous report in 2021. Similarly, and the mean criminal market is 4.66/10, indicating a decrease of 0.13 compared to the 2021 data
- Cameroon has retained its 10th position in Africa but has dropped to the 37th in the world (28th in the 2021 Report) with a crime score of 6.27/10 (-0.04 compared to 2021)

²⁷ See Ministry of Defence, "Mbalmayo clean : La compagnie de Gendarmerie de céans passe le chef-lieu du Nyong et So'o au peigne fin", <https://mindef.gov.cm/gendarmerie-nationale/2024/01/05/mbamayo-clean-la-compagnie-de-gendarmerie-de-ceans-passe-au-peigne-fin/>, consultée le 29 mai 2024.

²⁸ See Data Cameroon, "Cameroun: la consommation du cannabis gagne du terrain", <https://datacameroon.com/cameroun-la-consommation-du-cannabis-gagne-du-terrain/>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

- the prevalence of heroin, cocaine, cannabis and synthetic drugs remains unchanged (respectively 4. 5; 3.5; 7 and 7 on 10 respectively)²⁹,

The Commission regrettably observes a lack of accessibility to rehabilitation centres for drugs for individuals struggling with drug abuse. This is due to a dearth of such facilities and the exorbitant costs associated with the treatment options currently available,

The Commission notes and expresses its deep concern over:

- the lack of financial and material resources for the effective and optimal implementation of the initiatives aimed at combating drug use
- the inability to guarantee the uninterrupted and consistent provision of data on drug use from databases
- the absence of a reliable and consistent mechanism for collecting, analysing and disseminating data on drug use,

The Commission is still concerned about the fact that adequate control and monitoring measures are not yet put in place to implement certain government decisions taken to date to combat the consumption of psychotropic substances, particularly among young people. This is evidenced by the failure to implement the measure to ban the marketing and consumption of water pipes or chichia throughout the national territory, which was taken by the Minister of Territorial Administration in a decree signed on 8 February 2022,

The Commission commends the implementation by public authorities of the recommendations made to them in the previous Statement to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, in particular:

- the National Strategic Plan for the Fight against Drugs (PSNLD) adopted in Ebolowa on 30 November 2023 at a workshop to finalise the matrix of priority actions and develop the implementation mechanism, organised by the National Committee for the Fight against Drugs (CNLD) from 27 to 30 November 2023 the workshop was attended by approximately 30 representatives from public administrative bodies, including the Prime Minister's Office and the CHRC, as well as representatives from civil society organisations. The objective was to implement new effective measures in the fight against drugs³⁰

²⁹ See “Global Organised Crime Index 2023”, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Indice-mondial-du-crime-organise%CC%81-2023.pdf>, accessed on 29 May 2024.

³⁰ See Letter No. 2561/23/CHRC/V-PDT/SC-PROM/SP/DPP/PROM/DST/AN of 23 August 2023, from the CHRC Chairperson to the Minister of Public Health.

- the finalisation of a draft bill currently being prepared by the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education to promote civic-mindedness in Cameroon, with particular consideration given to the fight against drug use³¹,

The Commission reiterates its recommendations made during the previous International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, in particular to:

- *the defence and security forces (including customs)*, to wage a more relentless war against the entry and exit, production and marketing of drugs in Cameroon, and greater synergy between their various structures, to better respond to the ever-growing threat of drug trafficking and organised crime
- *the Ministries of Territorial Administration and Trade*, to propose that laws and regulations partly concerning the advertising of these illicit substances are tightened, so that they are systematically and compulsorily more explicit about the prohibition of these products
- *the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family*, to speed up the nationwide implementation of the positive parenting programme developed with the support of the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)
- *the Ministries of Public Health, Social Affairs and Youth and Civic Education*, to work towards the availability of holistic and appropriate care services for people, including children, suffering from dependency on psychotropic substances
- *the Ministry of Public Health*, to
 - o pay particular attention to the treatment of patients who use psychoactive substances for medical purposes, and do more to reduce the stigmatisation of drug addicts and discrimination against them. This is because drug addiction is a chronic pathology that needs to be treated in the same way as other illnesses
 - o make appropriate treatment for drug addicts accessible to all, by increasing the number of treatment centres and reducing their cost,

The Commission recommends that the Ministries of Secondary Education, Basic Education, Women's Empowerment and the Family, of Social Affairs, and of Youth and Civic Education should intensify awareness-raising campaigns among young people, on the danger of drug use,

The Commission once again recommends that specialised institutions, development partners and civil society organisations (CSOs) step up their efforts to combat this scourge and stamp it out,

The Commission will continue to dedicate its resources to the promotion and protection of human rights with a particular focus on the right to health and a healthy environment. This will be achieved through This will be achieved *the establishment of*

³¹ See Letter No. 2567/23/CHRC/V-PDT/SC-PROM/SP/DPP/PROM/DST/AN of 23 August 2023, from the CHRC Chairperson to the Minister of Youth and Civic Education.

human rights clubs in secondary schools and universities across the country's 10 regions, through a combination of training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, prison visits, fact-finding missions, the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations,

The Commission therefore requests any individual who has been affected by drug abuse or illicit trafficking, either as a victim or witness, to contact the relevant authorities free of charge. These include the Police on 117, and the Gendarmerie on 113. Furthermore, the Commission requests that any individual who has been subjected to or witnessed any human rights infringement and particularly one affecting their right to health and a healthy environment, to contact it, including via its toll-free number 1523.

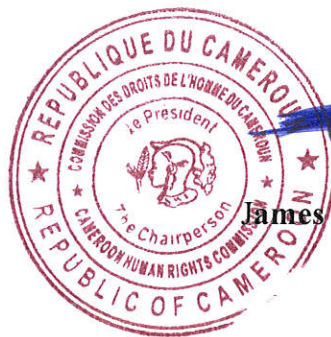
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Yaounde 26 June 2024



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