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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 62ND AFRICA'S WOMEN'S DAY

31 July 2024

Theme. - Women at the Centre of Strengthening Training, Technology and Innovation for Inclusive and Sustainable Education in Africa

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: “the Commission” or “the CHRC”), 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, as a result of the marginalisation of women in the new dynamics of national construction of the newly independent African states,

African women who had participated in the anti-colonial struggle, helped to liberate their countries and supported the election of the leaders of an independent Africa had, established the Union of African Women in Dar es Salaam, [Tanganyika present day Tanzania], on 31 July 1962¹,

Bearing in mind also that it was at its first congress in Dakar on 31 July 1974 that the Union of African Women, renamed the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO), “proclaimed an African Women's Day, to be celebrated on 31 July of each year in all its member countries”²,

Recalling that through this annual celebration, the PAWO aims to create a space for solidarity and mobilisation at national, African and global levels to “ensure that new government policies [take] on board their expectations for girls' education and female literacy”³,

Considering the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACnHPR) unwavering dedication to advancing and safeguarding human rights in Africa, particularly through the implementation of the 2024 annual theme titled, “Educate an African fit for the

¹ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), African women, Pan-Africanism and African renaissance, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2015, 136 pp., spec. p. 61.

² *Ibid*, p. 64.

³ *Ibid*, p. 62.

*21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa*⁴,

The Commission is pleased that the theme for the celebration of the 62nd Africa's Women's Day in Cameroon in 2024, titled "*Women at the centre of strengthening training, technology and innovation for inclusive and sustainable education in Africa*", contextualises the theme adopted by the ACnHPR for the same year, namely "*Strengthening teacher training, educational infrastructure, technology and innovation for sustainable education in Africa*"⁵,

Noting that the aim of the theme adopted by Cameroon, according to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) is to,

highlight the very important contribution of women to the improvement of education [where they] are both actors and beneficiary [:]

- As actors, they are involved at all levels of education, from the home to higher education [;] at the early childhood level, African women are the primary educators [; at the] primary, secondary and tertiary levels, they are involved as teachers and make a valuable contribution to research and innovation
- As beneficiaries, Cameroonian women and girls are among those for whom education is provided, and they are often the link in the chain for which the State still needs to make efforts to achieve the objectives set by the United Nations and the African Union⁶,

Noting also that according to the same ministry

education is a key element in combating inequalities between men and women [and that] to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and break the cycle of poverty, it is essential to build the [technological, managerial, socio-economic and political/legal] skills of African women and girls to make them key actors in the continent's development process⁷,

Noting as per scholarly principles that

it is unanimously accepted that women [...] are vulnerable persons, referred to as weak persons, who deserve [special legal protection and that it is on the basis of this assertion that] the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have decided to grant them specific rights, [apart from] the general principle of equality between men and women as proclaimed in the relevant legal instruments on the subject⁸,

Considering the preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which states that "*the State shall guarantee the child's right to education* [and assert that] *primary education shall*

⁴ See African Union, Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation -ESTI, *Concept Note on Education as the AU theme of the Year for 2024*, 16 pp., spec. p. 1, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/43425-doc-Note_conceptuelle_avec_feuille_de_route_Thème_de_IUA_2024_FR_VF.pdf, accessed on 26 July 2024.

⁵ See Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), *Concept note on the celebration of the 62 Africa's Women's Day on 31 July 2024*, 6 pp., spec. p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ See Pierre Esaïe MBPILLE, *Les Droits de la femme et de l'enfant, entre universalisme et africanisme*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2012, 231 pp., spec. p. 7.

be compulsory [and that] the organisation and supervision of education at all levels shall be the bounded duty of the State”,

Considering also that Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down guidelines for education in Cameroon stipulates in Article 7 that “*the State shall guarantee equal opportunities for access to education for all, without discrimination on grounds of sex*” and in Article 25 that “*teaching in schools shall take account the evolution of science and technology and in its content and methods, shall be adapted to economic, scientific, technological, social and cultural developments in the country and in the international environment*”,

Considering further that the State of Cameroon is a signatory to a number of African and universal instruments aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights, the provisions of which are in line with the theme of the 62nd Africa's Women's Day, in particular:

- Article 17(1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (AChHPR) and Article 11(1) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which state that everyone, particularly every child and woman, has the right to education
- Article 2(2) and Article 12(2) of the Protocol to the AChHPR on the rights of women, which state that:

States Parties shall commit themselves to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men through public education, information, education and communication strategies, [but also] take specific positive action to [...] promote education and training for women at all levels and in all disciplines, particularly in the fields of science and technology,

- Article 10(c) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which states that:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate [...] any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods,

Considering further that the African Union Commission, through Aspiration 1, “*A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*”, and Aspiration 6, “*An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children*”, of the AU Agenda 2063, urges States to:

[b]uild and expand an African knowledge society through transformation and investments in universities, science, technology, research and innovation; and through the harmonization of education standards and mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications,

The Commission commends Government efforts to promote the rights of women and the girl child to education and to empower them, in particular:

- on 23 June 2024, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) published a *comprehensive guide on legal support for widows* in

observance of the International Widows' Day, which is celebrated in Cameroon on 25 June 2024

- the Inter-ministerial meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, Head of Government, on 13 February 2024 to examine and evaluate the new version of the updated⁹ *National Gender Policy 2021-2030* proposed by MINPROFF,

The Commission is pleased to report that it has taken a number of positive actions in line with its mission to promote and protect human rights and women's rights in particular:

- the *meeting of the Mirror Committee 63 on the standard relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women* that was held at the CHRC Head Office, on 4 July 2024. Ms Martine Obam Ongola, Chairperson of the aforementioned Committee chaired the meeting, and Prof Joyce Endeley, Commissioner and Focal Point for Gender Issues at the CHRC, attended. The meeting, which was equally attended by the representative of the Agency for Standards and Quality (ANOR) and 24 other experts representing various administrative bodies and structures, focused on discussions related to the *Standardisation project for the effectiveness of the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in Cameroon*
- the audience granted by the Chairperson of the CHRC to Prof Marie Pierre Raky Chaupin, Resident Representative of the United Nations Entity for Women (UN-Women), on 20 June 2024. During the course of this audience, some actions were considered, in particular:
 - o the follow-up of the 41 recommendations relating to the rights of women out of the 220 recommendations accepted by Cameroon at the end of the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which took place in Geneva, on 14 November 2023
 - o the fight against femicide in Cameroon
 - o enhancing the quality of life for women in detention facilities through the partial support of two women from the CHRC as part of the capacity building of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture in Geneva in August 2024
 - o the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 28 September 2023 between the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the CHRC, at the NIS Head Office in Yaounde, for the production of most reliable data, including disaggregated statistics on women
- the holding of a workshop at the DUVAAL College in Douala, on 19 April 2024 sponsored by the CHRC. The objective of the workshop was to initiate the *female leadership and mentoring* programme in schools, with a focus on "*Female leadership and responsible use of ICTs and media networks by vulnerable girls in schools*". The event was organised by Ms Isabelle Boufin, Executive Director of the CESLORD Association, and attended by representatives of MINPROFF, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MINPOSTEL), the association Refugees without Borders, expert advisers, mentors and mentored pupils, and several parents
- the audience granted by the Chairperson of the CHRC to Ms Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, the Vice-Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, on 22

⁹ The initial version of the *National Gender Policy* was adopted in January 2014 by MINPROFF.

February 2024. The two authorities discussed ways to enhance the implementation of women's rights in Cameroon and potential areas of cooperation between the two institutions in promoting and protecting women's rights in Cameroon

- CHRC participation in the workshop organised by MINPROFF on the improvement of the *Manual on Women's Political Education*, in Mbalmayo, from 21 to 22 December 2023. The objective of this workshop was to finalise the aforementioned draft manual prepared by the consultant engaged for this purpose
- CHRC participation in the National Forum on the role of digital technologies and innovation in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The MINPOSTEL Women's Association hosted this forum in Yaoundé, from 29 to 30 November 2023, on the theme “*digital innovation for the financial empowerment of women*”
- CHRC participation in the 3rd Plenary Session of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO/PC 337), in Madrid, from 22 to 24 November 2023, on *Technical Guidelines to promote and implement gender equality in all types of organisations, whether public or private, regardless of their size, geographic location and field of activity, for the benefit of women,*

The Commission is pleased to acknowledge the commendable efforts of development partners and civil society organisations (CSOs) in their pursuit of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Africa and in Cameroon in particular through:

- the signing, on 14 February 2024, of a Memorandum of Understanding in Yaoundé between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the African Intellectual Property Organisation (AIPO). The document sets out the milestones of cooperation between the two parties in the empowerment of women and girls through the appropriate use of technological innovation and intellectual property services
- a training seminar on the use of the GERME tool (Better manage your business) held in Edea from 16 to 27 October. The event organised by the International Labour Organisation brought together 26 technical managers (men and women) from the incubation centres of the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA),

The Commission is gratified that certain administrative bodies have implemented the recommendations set forth in its previous statements marking Africa's Women's Day on 31 July 2023 on the theme “*Pooling wisdom and women's potential on peace-building to accelerate the implementation of the African Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*”, in particular:

- the training organised by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts (MINPMEESA)¹⁰ for internally displaced women, in Yaoundé from 15 to 18 November 2023. The event formed part of the *Global Entrepreneurship Week in Cameroon (GECW)*, and was made possible thanks to the support of the *Career Advancement Women's Entrepreneurship Champions Organization (CAWEECO)*
- in its letter No. B1/1464/L/MINEDUB/SG/DAJ of 26 February 2024, addressed to the Chairperson of the CHRC, the Ministry of Basic Education outlined the

¹⁰ See Letter No. 24/00333/L/MINPMEESA/SG/DAG/CELCONT/CEA1 of 5 March 2024 from MINPMEESA addressed to the Chairperson of the CHRC.

objective of the training programmes, which is to promote respect for human rights and the consolidation of peace in line with the international conventions to which Cameroon is a party, and the Education Orientation law

- the gradual implementation of the new higher education policy, as set out in Law No. 2023/007 of 25 July 2023. In a letter No. 24-00266/L-INESUP/IGS/IS1/rao of 12 January 2024, the Minister of Higher Education informed the CHRC that the status of “*student-entrepreneur*” would be enshrined in order to encourage and support the entrepreneurial spirit of young people through the selection of innovative projects by students of public universities and private higher education institutions (IPES),

The Commission welcomes the response from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), which confirmed in its letter No 17/313/L/MINAS/SG/DPPHPA/PFG dated 6 March, and assured the CHRC that its relevant services have taken into account the recommendation to enhance training and capacity-building for inspectors and officials to enable them to identify appropriate indicators for measuring efforts to combat economic violence against women,

Noting that, despite the significant progress made over the last two decades in terms of access to quality education in Africa and particularly in Cameroon, *the Commission continues to observe* acts that violate the right to education and the physical and moral integrity of women and girls. These acts were noted between 31 July 2023 and 30 July 2024, notably in connection with the theme of the Day observed on 31 July. This includes the case of an attack on the physical and moral integrity (caning) and the right to education of a 16-year-old girl named Aicha Ibrahim, a pupil in Form 3 at the Garoua Bilingual Secondary School. The incident involved Mr Ahmadou Ibrahim, her father. The victim’s mother referred the case to the CHRC North Branch on 30 November 2023. The Commission then conducted investigations at the victim's home to establish the facts of the case. As a result of these investigations, the victim, who resides with her father, was absent from school for an extended period. Her classmates expressed concern about this situation, and conducted an unannounced visit to her home. They found that her father had beaten her (as usual), and that he had also forbidden her to continue attending school,

The Commission notes that out of the 291 recommendations made to the State of Cameroon following its fourth Universal Periodic Review, two hundred twenty (220) recommendations were accepted on 3 April 2024. Among them, forty-one (41) were related to women's rights and the fight against gender-based violence, including six (6) that address equal access for women to education and continuous training. These recommendations were addressed to:

- *the Presidency of the Republic and the Prime Minister's Office, MINPROFF, MINAS, the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) and traditional authorities*, inviting them to take new measures to combat sexist stereotypes and harmful traditional practices that prevent women and the girl child from fully enjoying their social, economic and cultural rights
- *the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), MINPROFF and the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education (MINJEC)* to double their efforts to promote equality and non-discrimination in education

- *MINPROFF, MINAS, MINESEC, MINEDUB, MINESUP, MINJEC, the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), the Ministry of Communication (MINCOM) and CSOs* to strengthen the role of women in society, particularly by providing information on female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, supporting girls' education and taking measures to integrate more women into the workforce
- *MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINJEC and MINPROFF* to guarantee adolescents and young people access to quality information and education appropriate to their age, both in and out of school
- *MINEFOP, MINPROFF and MINTSS* to continue efforts to protect women in the labour market and to continue implementing measures to empower women and combat discrimination and violence against them in employment and vocational training
- *MINPROFF and MINAS* to continue to take gender issues into account in the application of laws and policies to ensure women's equal access to all aspects of political and public life,

The Commission further recommends that the Government, in particular:

- *MINEDUB, MINESEC and MINESUP*
 - place particular emphasis on ethics, life skills and the acquisition of moral values by teachers in contact with pupils and students influenced by the world of the Internet and social media
 - improve teacher training and educational infrastructure and promote technology and innovation for Cameroon's effective emergence by 2035
 - create and provide education/training platforms (formal, non-formal, informal, extracurricular) for all social classes and especially to provide support for women,
- *MINPROFF, MINAS and MINEFOP* to organise more training workshops in technical professions related to information and communication technologies and innovation, in favour of women and young girls,

The Commission further recommends that all other stakeholders in the education system, including CSOs and parents, should:

- introduce *tolerance education for young girls and boys in schools and families* to facilitate IDP girls' access to public primary and secondary schools and universities
- increase the number of educational talks in schools on community mechanisms to monitor, denounce and protect women's rights
- raise public awareness of the right of women and the girl child to education,

In line with the advice provided by Ms Janet Ramatoulie SALLAH-NJIE, the Vice-President of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACnHPR) and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, ***the Commission reiterates its recommendation for women and girls*** to familiarise themselves with the provisions of Maputo Protocol, which is available online, to enhance the awareness of their rights and the mechanisms available to them in event of any infringement,

The Commission is committed to continuing its efforts to promote and protect human rights, with a particular focus on the rights of women and the girl child. This will be achieved through a range of initiatives including training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, fact-finding missions, and the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations.

The Commission reiterates its call for individuals who have been subjected to or have witnessed an infringement of human rights, with a particular focus on the violation affecting women and girls, to contact it. This may be done via the Commission's toll-free number 1523 (free call, even without credit).

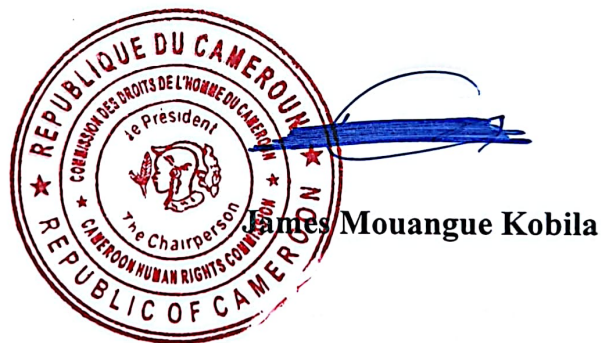
Useful CHRC addresses.-

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Yaoundé, 31 July 2024



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