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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION TO MARK THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

1 October 2024

Theme. - Ageing with Dignity: The Importance of Strengthening Care and Support Systems for Older Persons Worldwide

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 it is during the *First World Assembly on Ageing*, organised by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in Vienna from 26 July to 6 August 1982 (Austria) that the *Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing* was adopted. The plan of action called on member States to take appropriate measures regarding population ageing issues such as health, housing, social security and retirement¹,

Bearing in mind also that by resolution No. A/RES/45/106 of 14 December 1990, the UNGA, at the 68th plenary session, proclaimed 1 October as the *International Day of Older Persons (IDOP)*,

Acknowledging that this celebration is an opportunity to mobilise citizens, civil society organisations and public authorities to raise awareness of the living conditions of older persons, who are generally isolated within families and thus marginalised in society, and to shift societal perceptions of ageing so that older persons are better integrated in society,

Acknowledging also that the *United Nations Principles for Older Persons*, adopted by the UNGA during its 74th Plenary session on 16 December 1991, outlines guiding principles relating to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity²,

¹ See United Nations, “Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet” <https://www.un.org/eng/global-issues/ageing>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

² See United Nations, “Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet”, *op. cit.*

Considering the comments of Mr Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations Secretary-General from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2016, in his speech to mark the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2010, where he mentioned that:

it is time for governments everywhere to institute the financial, legal and social protections that will lift millions of older persons out of poverty and ensure their rights to dignified, productive and healthy lives³,

Noting that during *the Second World Assembly on Ageing* held from 8 to 12 April 2002 in Madrid, Spain, member States of the United Nations adopted the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*. The Plan of Action called for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels and across all sectors to harness *the great potential of ageing in the 21st century*⁴,

Recognising that the ageing of the population is becoming one of the most significant social transformations of the 21st century, with implications for almost all sectors of society, especially labour and financial markets, the demand for goods and services, such as housing, transportation and social protection, thus profoundly shaping family structures and ties between generations⁵,

Recalling the *UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)*, proclaimed by the UNGA on 14 December 2020, which seeks to reduce health inequalities and improve the quality of life of older persons, their families, and communities through a global collective action that impacts human behaviour across four key areas:

- changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageism
- developing communities in ways to foster the abilities of older people in various domains
- delivering person-centred integrated care and primary health services responsive to older persons
- providing older persons who are in need with access to quality long-term care⁶,

Echoing the World Health Organization's (WHO) statement on the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2022 "*older persons are often assumed to be frail or dependent and a burden on society*"⁷ and appropriate public policies need to be put in place to support and protect them so that they can age in good health,

Endorsing the theme of the 34th IDOP celebrated this year, *Ageing with Dignity: The Importance of Strengthening Care and Support Systems for Older Persons Worldwide*, through which the United Nations has issued a call to all States to undertake a comprehensive assessment of their legislative and operational frameworks with a view to enhancing the provision of care and support for older adults. There is also a pressing need to expand training and educational opportunities in geriatrics and gerontology, and to

³ See United Nations, "International Day of Older Persons: Ban Ki-moon calls for social protection that guarantees them good health and a dignified and productive life", <https://press.un.org/fr/2010/sgsm13151.doc.htm>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

⁴ See United Nations, "Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet", *op. cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See World Health Organization (WHO), "Ageing and Health", <https://www.who.int/fr/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>, accessed on 1 August 2024.

⁷ *Ibid.*

address the global shortage of healthcare professionals with the requisite expertise to care for older adults⁸,

Highlighting that this year's theme to mark the IDOP also emphasizes the importance of protecting the human rights of both caregivers and care recipients, promoting person-centred approaches to care that respect the dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy of older persons, and for the right to make decisions regarding their care and the quality of their life⁹,

Highlighting also the remarks of Mr António Guterres, the UN Secretary General, in his statement to mark the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October 2024, where he calls on members of the international community to:

strengthen care and support systems that honour the dignity of older persons and caregivers that requires investing in the infrastructure for formal long-term care, ensuring opportunities for decent work, and enabling individuals to transition from informal to formal care¹⁰,

Highlighting further that "Ageing" is defined as:

a process through which a human organism undergoes a series of transformations that lead to the degeneration of certain cells, resulting in the weakening and slowing of vital functions, along with physical, physiological and psychological changes¹¹,

Considering that, according to Article 1 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons, adopted on 31 January 2016, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the 26th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU), and which came into force for Cameroon after being signed on 5 February 2020, and ratified on 28 December 2021, an "older person" is defined as a person [...] aged 60 and above",

Bearing in mind that, the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is commemorated annually on 15 June and that the theme for 2024 is: *Spotlight on older Persons in Emergencies*. In the light of this theme, the United Nations emphasises that older individuals frequently encounter chronic health conditions or social isolation, which can impede their capacity to access assistance or to receive timely medical care and support services¹²,

Bearing in mind also that it is essential to consider the needs of older persons when planning for, and responding to emergencies, through education and the training of specialized practitioners and caregivers to promote a more inclusive and protective environment for the rights of older persons,

Highlighting that the normative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons has changed little since the last celebration of this

⁸ See United Nations, International Day for Older Persons: 1 October 2024, <https://www.un.org/eng/observances/older-persons-day/messages>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Corentine Cabane, *Vieillesse et schéma corporel : intérêt d'un travail de prise de conscience corporelle au sein d'un groupe*, University of Bordeaux, *Mémoire en vue de l'obtention du diplôme d'État de Psychomotricien, juin 2022, pp. 82, spec. p. 9.*

¹² See. United Nations, "World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June", <https://www.un.org/en/observances/elder-abuse-awareness-day#:~:text=Th%C3%A8me%202024%20%3A%20les%20personnes%20%C3%A9es,%C3%A2g%C3%A9es%2C%20exacerbant%20leurs%20vuln%C3%A9rabilit%C3%A9s%20existantes>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

Day and that the relevant provisions are referenced in the statement published to mark the 2023 celebration of this Day¹³,

Highlighting also that, there are very few international instruments devoted to the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons, and that the international society paid insufficient attention to the difficulties that prevent older persons from fully realising their rights,

The Commission observes that older persons play an important role in society as the elderly are most involved in the voluntary sector. They are in the front line when it comes to *lending a helping hand* and most often provide assistance to the sick or persons suffering from loss of autonomy¹⁴,

The Commission notes following the United Nations that the world's population is ageing rapidly in such a way that by 2050, one in every five persons will be over 60 years old and, the number of persons aged 80 or older is expected to triple by rising from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050¹⁵,

The Commission observes that, from 1 January 2023 to 1 January 2024, 5,546 older persons received medical assistance under the public assistance scheme for the elderly run by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), broken down as follows: 1,600 women and 3,946 men¹⁶,

Noting that ageing and old age are generally portrayed as a time of immobility and decline, and that older persons now demand to be part of the movement, which is synonymous with mobility, but also with connections and participation in social life; hence the importance of promoting their mobility within the community¹⁷,

Also noting that the psychological and psychosocial effects of traumatic experiences, combined with poor nutrition and a sedentary lifestyle, can exacerbate health problems in older persons¹⁸,

The Commission commends the efforts of public authorities and their partners to promote and protect the health of older persons and their social inclusion, in particular through:

- the *Seniors' Week* jointly launched by the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Women's empowerment and the Family, in Meyomessi, South Region, on 20 September 2024, as part of the celebration of the 34th IDOP.

¹³ See. "Statement by the CHRC to mark the 33rd International Day of Older Persons", published on 1 October 2023, <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2023-10-0104-25-52.pdf>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

¹⁴ Marguerite Services, "*Journée internationale des personnes âgées*" ("International Day of Older Persons"), <https://www.margueriteservices.fr/blog/journee-internationale-personnes-agees>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

¹⁵ See. United Nations, "WHO launches digital application to improve care for the elderly", <https://www.un.org/en/desa/international-day-of-older-persons-2019>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

¹⁶ See. *Annual performance report 2023 of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)*, 50 pp., spec. p. 31.

¹⁷ See. *La semaine bleue, « Bouger ensemble... pour entretenir la flamme ! »* (Blue Week, "Moving together... to keep the flame alight"), <https://dis-leur.fr/semaine-bleue-loccitanie-face-aux-enjeux-et-promesses-du-grand-age/>, accessed 3 September 2024.

¹⁸ See United Nations High Commission for Refugees (HCR), "Older Persons", https://emergency-unhcr.org.translate.goog/protection/persons-risk/older-persons? x_tr sl=en& x_tr tl=fr& x_tr hl=fr& x_tr pto=rq#:~:text=Overview,over%2060%20years%20of%20age, accessed on 3 September 2024.

The aim of this initiative was to promote the social inclusion of older persons and their healthy ageing

- the organisation of a workshop by the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts (MINPMEESA), from 10 to 11 July 2024, aimed at strengthening the entrepreneurial capacities of seniors, to instil in the latter, particularly in ex-servicemen and retirees, *“the desire to undertake income-generating activities, while offering incentives that will ease their entry into this new professional life”*
- the organisation of activities in Yaoundé by the members of the *“Widows Working Group of the Cameroon National Office of War Veterans, Ex-Servicemen and War Victims” (ONACAM)*, from 3 to 4 July 2024. These activities came as part of celebrating the 14th International Widows Day, under the theme *Fighting against the vulnerability of widows, improving their socio-economic situation*. During the two-day activities these women (most of whom are older persons) distinguished themselves through training in income-generating activities
- the handing of gifts, on 5 March 2024, in the Nkolmesseng quarter, Yaoundé, by women from the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI) to older persons of the third age group residents of the Béthanie VIACAM (Old Invalids and Abandoned Cameroonians) Retirement Home, at the association's headquarters,

The Commission also commends the holding, from 20 to 22 May and on 24 May 2024, in New York (United States of America), of the 14th Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA), at the conclusion of which recommendations were made regarding the identification of potential gaps in the protection of the rights of older persons and ways to address them¹⁹,

The Commission notes that, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) organised on 6 October 2023, a debriefing for African National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) on the Rights of Older Persons under the theme *Opportunities for engagement by NHRI to strengthen the Rights of Older Persons globally and regionally*²⁰,

The Commission welcomes:

- the inauguration of the pioneering Social and Recreational Centre for Older Persons, Refugees and Displaced Persons by the MINAS Director of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities and Older Persons, in Yaoundé, on 16 January 2024. This was an initiative of the non-governmental organisation Living Alternatives for Ageing (LAFTA)²¹

¹⁹ See UNGA, Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n24/135/07/pdf/n2413507.pdf>, accessed on 30 September 2024.

²⁰ See African Commission on Human and People Rights (ACnHPR), “Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Africa”, <https://achpr.au.int/en/intersession-activity-reports/groupe-de-travail-sur-les-droits-des-personnes-agees-et-des-6>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

²¹ See Carine Tsiele, « *Personnes âgées : un centre social et récréatif à Yaoundé* », Cameroon Tribune 16 January 2024. (“Older persons: a social and recreational centre in Yaoundé”) <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/62557/fr.html/personnes-agees-un-centre-social-recreatif-yaounde>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

- the launch of the Cameroonian Start-Up Services for Aged on 1 October 2023. This start-up founded by Ms Olivia Kamga provides customised living assistance to older persons at home. This initiative earned her an award from the mobile phone company Orange Cameroon at the 2023 Orange Award for Social Entrepreneurship in Africa and the Middle East (POESAM) on Thursday 20 July 2023²²,

The Commission deplors the poor cooperation among social protection stakeholders, even though they are called to work in synergy to provide optimal support to older persons,

The Commission remains concerned about:

- the continued presence of risk factors that impede access for older persons to suitable care and support services avenues for redress and remedy, in particular:
 - o ageism, which refers to stereotypes, prejudices and/or policies or practices that discriminate against older people, in addition to other forms of prejudice, with the result of increasing the vulnerability of older persons
 - o marginalisation and isolation of these vulnerable people
 - o negligence, which is defined as “*the inability or unwillingness of the social environment of professional care givers, family members, friends and neighbours to provide older persons with the assistance, care and material goods they need to live in dignity*”
- the inadequacy of measures to ensure healthy, active ageing geared towards improving the health and well-being of older persons,

The Commission also welcomes the response of some ministries to its 2023 Statement on the International Day of Older Persons, including:

- the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), which through its letter No. 000873/L/MINDDEVEL/GS/DSCG/CD/ARO 2 of 18 March 2024, shared with the CHRC that training sessions organised by MINDDEVEL’s Human Resources Department of Regional and Local Authorities (RLAs), highlighted the importance of raising awareness about the rights of older persons and implementing appropriate measures to combat risk factors for abuse against them
- the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), which through its letter No. 0000450/1/MINPROFF/GS/DPFFDE/SDPPF/SPF of 18 March 2024, reminded the CHRC that the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs. However, MINPROFF carries out actions in favour of the families of older persons, including elderly women
- the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education which, through its letter No. 288-2024/L/MINJEC/CAB of 3 April 2024, reassured the CHRC that instructions were

²² See. *Ecofin*, “*La start-up camerounaise Services for Aged fournit une assistance de vie sur mesure aux seniors*” (*Ecofin*, “Cameroonian start-up Services for Aged provides tailor-made assisted living for senior citizens”), <https://www.agenceecofin.com/entreprendre/0102-115752-la-start-up-camerounaise-services-for-aged-fournit-une-assistance-de-vie-sur-mesure-aux-seniors>, accessed on 3 September 2024.

given to its relevant departments to multiply actions for the implementation of intergenerational dialogue

- the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), which through its letter No. 00001512/L/MINAT/SG/DAP/SDDP/SA of 24 May 2024, expressed its appreciation for the actions carried out by the CHRC for the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons,

The Commission also notes with satisfaction that, out of the 220 recommendations accepted by the State during the adoption of the *Report of Cameroon* on 26 March 2024 after undergoing the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), two are in favour of older persons and have been distributed to State structures, each as far as it is concerned, in the following manner:

- the recommendation “to *continue promoting customised social policies to offer the best possible life quality to the population, particularly to the most vulnerable ones*”, addressed to the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic, to the Prime Minister’s Office, to the Ministry of Public Health (MINSANTE), to MINAS and MINPROFF
- the recommendation to “*continue efforts aimed at strengthening health facilities, with a particular emphasis on improving access to quality care to the most vulnerable populations*”, addressed to the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) and MINSANTE,

The Commission reiterates some of its recommendations, particularly those addressed to:

- *the Government*, to implement a genuine policy of training and recruiting volunteers, to integrate them into national programmes for the care of the elderly
- *to MINPROFF*, to increase the number of discussion platforms aiming to share experiences of older women in various socio-economic and cultural fields
- *to MINSANTE*, to implement strategies providing care for the elderly, by subsidising the treatment of degenerative and neurodegenerative diseases, and providing care for elderly women victims of sexual violence, as well as those victims of all other forms of violence that damage their physical and moral integrity
- *to MINAS*, to further involve CSOs working in the field of care for the elderly in search for external funding and in the implementation of projects to promote and protect their rights,

The Commission recommends:

- *to the Government*, to promote the adoption of a law designed to enhance the living conditions of older persons, which includes expanding social security coverage, improving healthcare infrastructure, and streamlining administrative procedures to facilitate their easy access to the resources and services that are due to them
- *to MINAS*, to provide more funding for the budget allocation to social action services in hospitals set aside each year for the care of older persons
- *to MINSANTE*, to arrange for more campaigns and regular free medical consultation sessions, screenings, and monitoring of age-related conditions, supported by the National Social Insurance Fund (NSIF)
- *to MINJEC*, to further publicise the “*Projet Volontariat Sénior*” concerning a voluntary work for aged persons,

The Commission, on its part, will spare no effort to further promote and protect human rights with a particular focus on the rights of older persons. This will be achieved through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, visits to places of detention, fact-finding missions and the handling of complaints and self-initiated investigations,

The Commission, once more, calls on any person victim or witness of human rights violation and particularly violation of the rights of older persons to contact the CHRC via its **toll-free number, 1523** (free calls).

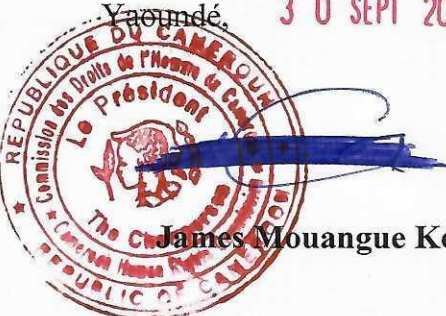
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Yaoundé, 3 0 SEPT 2024



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