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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK
THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

2 October 2024

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 the historical context of the International Day of Non-Violence, which has its roots in the non-violent mass movements for the liberation of India from the United Kingdom’s colonial rule (between 1915 and 1948) led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as the “Mahatma”, (name given to spiritual leaders in India), was the pioneer in the field of non-violence, developing a philosophy and strategy based on two fundamental principles:

- i) rejecting violence, which Gandhi linked [...] to the notion of ‘*ahimsa*’¹, a Sanskrit word meaning ‘*no desire to kill*’ or, better still, ‘*absence of any intention to harm* [...]’ more precisely, ‘*absence of all violence*’². It was the underpinning principle and virtue of ‘non-violence’ and universal respect for life
- ii) the search for a way to fight violence without violence, the novelty of which Gandhi sought to express by coining the term *satyagraha*, ‘a philosophical and political concept based on strict adherence to truth (*satya*) and non-violent resistance (*agraha*) in the face of injustice. This strategy of peaceful struggle seeks to persuade the adversary through moral force rather than physical coercion or threats’³.

Noting that “*the originality of the Gandhian struggle lies rather in its astonishing pragmatism, in what might be called its practical idealism, that is, in its desire to experiment with non-violent methods of resistance*”⁴,

Noting also that on 15 June 2007, a draft resolution for the proclamation of 2 October each year as the International Day of Non-Violence (IDNV)—with reference to the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi—was submitted to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at its 61st

¹ See *Encyclopédie Universalis*, “Non-violence, action non violente et résistance civile” <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/non-violence/>, accessed on 1 October 2024.

² See <https://www.grainesdepaix.org/fr/ressources/dictionnaire/ahimsa>, accessed on 1 October 2024.

³ See, the definition of “*Satyagraha*”, in French <https://www.lalanguefrancaise.com/dictionnaire/definition/satyagraha#0>, accessed on 1 October 2024.

⁴ See *Encyclopédie Universalis*, *op. cit.*

session. At that time, Mr Anand Sharma, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, speaking on behalf of the 140 co-sponsors of the draft resolution, observed that the extensive and diverse range of sponsors reflected a universal respect for Mahatma Gandhi and the enduring relevance of his human philosophy of peaceful conflict resolution *based on non-violence*,

Observing that, to strengthen his case for the establishment of the IDNV, Mr Anand Sharma quoted GANDHI's words that "*non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind*". "[This] *is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man*"⁵ and it has been adopted by several non-violent movements around the world,

Recalling that the UNGA, in its Resolution A/RES/61/271 of 15 June 2007, affirmed that:

the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence", desire "to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence" [and] invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, regional [,] non-governmental organizations and individuals [to seize this opportunity] to disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness⁶,

Reminding that António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his message for the 2024 International Day of Non-Violence, recalled that every year on 2 October, we celebrate:

the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, and reaffirm the values to which he dedicated his life: equality, respect, peace and justice [in our] world today [...] bristling with violence [f]rom Ukraine, to Sudan, the Middle East and far beyond, [due to] inequality and climate chaos [which are] undermining the foundations of peace [and] *hate whipped up online is spilling over onto the streets*⁷,

Considering that the objective of the International Day of Non-Violence is to protect women in homes and civilians, to combat sexual violence in conflicts, and to prevent violations of child rights, [thereby reinforcing] the rule of law including through legal and judicial reforms⁸,

Noting that:

[t]he principle of non-violence also known as non-violent resistance rejects the use of physical violence in order to achieve social or political change [and that,] often described as 'the politics of ordinary people', this form of social struggle has been adopted by mass populations all over the world in campaigns for social justice⁹,

Noting also that professor Gene Sharp, a leading scholar in non-violent resistance, uses the following definition in his publication, *The Politics of Non-violent Action*:

[n]on-violent action is a technique by which people who reject passivity and submission, and who see struggle as essential, can wage their conflict without [resorting to] violence.

⁵ See United Nations, "International Day of Non-Violence", <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-violence-day#:~:text=La%20Journée%20internationale%20de%20la%20non-violence%20est%20célébrée%20le%202024,> accessed on 16 September 2024.

⁶ See UNGA, 61st session, "*International Day of Non-Violence*", 15 June 2007, 61/271, 2 pp., esp. p. 1.

⁷ See United Nations, "Message of the Secretary General (2024)" <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-violence-day/messages>, accessed on 30 September 2024.

⁸ See United Nations, "Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet, protecting human rights", <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/protect-human-rights>, accessed 16 September 2024.

⁹ See United Nations, "International Day of Non-Violence", *op. cit.*

[It] is not an attempt to avoid or ignore conflict [but] one response to the problem of how to act effectively in politics, especially how to wield powers effectively,

Considering the preamble of the Constitution of Cameroon of 18 January 1996, where the people of Cameroon affirm that “*the salvation of Africa lies in forging ever-growing bonds of solidarity among African Peoples, affirm our desire to contribute to the advent of a united and free Africa, while maintaining peaceful and brotherly relations with the other nations of the World*”,

Considering also that the African and universal legal instruments related to peace, ratified by Cameroon or to which it is otherwise bound have not seen significant progress and have been mentioned in the CHRC Statements during previous Human Rights Day celebrations, including the:

- International Day of Peace, 21 September 2024
- International Day to Protect Education from Attack, 9 September 2024
- International Day in Remembrance of and Tribute to Victims of Terrorism, 21 August 2024
- World Refugee Day, 20 June 2024
- International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, 7 April 2024
- International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2024
- International Day against Police Brutality, 15 March 2024
- International Day of Education, 24 January 2024,

Highlighting that, according to Section 3(f) of the *Constitutive Act of the African Union* (AU), adopted in Lomé (Togo) on 11 July 2000, one of the main objectives of the AU is “*to promote peace, security and stability on the [African] continent*”,

Highlighting also that during the India-Africa Army Chief’s Conclave held from 9 to 10 September 2023, in Pune, Indian state of Maharashtra, Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister encouraged African leaders to always adopt non-violent defence strategies and methods, recalling that “*it was on the soil of Africa that Mahatma Gandhi used powerful methods of non-violence and peaceful resistance*,”¹⁰ thus urging them to embrace these non-violent defence strategies and methods,

Recalling that during the 79th session of UNGA to mark the International Day of Peace, held on 13 September 2024 at the UN headquarters in Geneva, Mr Philemon Yang, president of the session stressed the importance of restoring trust and solidarity among members of the international community and urged humanity to “*ring the Peace Bell today and send a message of hope for peace. Let us work towards tolerance and dialogue*”¹¹,

The Commission pays tribute to the efforts of the Government and its partners who are working tirelessly to restore or maintain peace and prioritise dialogue through various activities, in particular:

- the organisation, from 16 to 19 September 2024 at Minkan, Nkol-Éton and Tsinga Government High schools in Yaoundé, by the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education

¹⁰ See *Africacenter*, “*La coopération entre l’Afrique et l’Inde : un point de repère en matière de partenariat*”, <https://africacenter.org/en/spotlight/la-cooperation-entre-lafrique-et-linde-un-point-de-repere-en-matiere-de-partenariat/>, accessed on 16 September 2024.

¹¹ See *United Nations infos*, “*Guterres calls for a culture of peace and global unity, as crises mount*”, <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2024/1148756>, accessed on 17 September 2024.

(MINJEC) in collaboration with the National Gendarmerie, of a campaign to raise awareness among the population on *How to stop violence among young people and promote social cohesion*¹²

- the meeting of the Regional Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the recommendations from the Major National Dialogue in the South-West Region, held in Buea, on 18 September 2024, chaired by the Governor of the Region, focused on *the reconstruction plan for the North-West and South-West: entering a new era for a greater impact of the national dialogue*¹³
- the signing of Order No. 075/CAB/PM by the Prime Minister, Head of Government on 30 July 2024, which outlines the significant role of municipal and regional councils in implementing the *Projects of the Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development (PPRD)* of the North-West and South-West Regions
- the organisation, on 10 July 2024, in Yaoundé by the Minister of Youth and Civic Education (MINJEC), of a session aimed at rallying all relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the *Youth, Peace and Security Agenda* and in drafting the related National action plan¹⁴
- the organisation of training workshops with administrative, security and traditional authorities as well as leaders of the civil society organisation at Mouda Government High School and at the esplanade of the Kougni Lamido at Maroua on 18 June 2024 by the *Civic-Watch* Organisation on the theme *Stop to hate speech: let's cultivate diversity and respect in our community*¹⁵
- the holding of an awareness raising campaign of students and teachers at the Mbalgong Government High School in the Mefou-and-Akono Division, Centre Region by *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* on 7 March 2024 to mark the 39th International women's Day on the theme *Raising awareness of the dangers of small arms and light weapons to reduce violence in schools*,

The Commission notes, with regret, the recurrence of acts of violence including acts of terrorism recorded in our cities between 2 October 2023 and 1 October 2024 in particular:

- the improvised explosive device attack (IED) perpetrated around 11 a.m. at *Mobil Nkwen* in the Mezam Division, North-West Region by secessionist terrorists, killing one woman (Chung Juliet, 30) and injuring six others, including an infant¹⁶
- On 25 August 2024, Nfor Julius Budzi, a civilian, was killed by gunshot by secessionist terrorists at Mile III Nkwen, Bamenda III, Mezam Division, North-West Region. Following the robbery of the sum of 7,000 CFA francs and his mobile phone, the perpetrators fled the scene

¹² See *Mobile Camerounweb*, "Des gendarmes ont sillonné des établissements scolaires à Yaoundé", <https://mobile.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/NewsArchive/Des-gendarmes-ont-sillon-des-tablissements-scolaires-Yaound-770857>, accessed on 17 September 2024.

¹³ See *Tribune de l'info*, "Plan présidentiel de Reconstruction et de Développement, le Sud-Ouest salue l'apport du Grand Dialogue", <https://tribunedelinfo.com/plan-presidentiel-de-reconstruction-et-de-developpement-le-sud-ouest-salue-lapport-du-grand-dialogue-nationale/>, accessed on 19 September 2024.

¹⁴ See MINJEC, "Agenda jeunesse, paix et sécurité", <http://minjec.gov.cm/site/agenda-jeunesse-paix-et-securite/>, assessed on 17 September 2024.

¹⁵ See *Cameroon | ReliefWeb*, "ARDHU : Rapport webinaire de Civic Watch en partenariat avec les OSC de l'Extrême-Nord (Tuesday 18 June 2024)", <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/ardhu-rapport-webinaire-de-civic-watch-en-partenariat-avec-les-oscs-de-lextreme-nord-mardi-18-juin-2024>, assessed on 19 October 2024.

¹⁶ See Press release signed by the Mezam Senior Divisional Officer on 19 September 2024.

- the arson of many taxis and motorcycles by secessionist terrorists in the Ntarikon neighbourhood, *Che Street*, Bamenda II, Mezam Division, North-West Region, on 14 and 23 August 2024, on the pretext that the victims had not respected the new colour policy for taxis (blue and white) required by terrorists¹⁷
- the explosion of a handmade bomb concealed by secessionists terrorists in a tyre used to block the road at a checkpoint on 9 August 2024 in Mile 4 neighbourhood of Nkwen, in Bamenda, North-West Division, leading to the death of two police officers while injuring one civilian who was taken to a medical facility in the town¹⁸
- clashes between Tikar and Bamoun in Magda, Noun Division, West Region, on 8 August 2024 over Tikar opposition to the holding of the Bamoun Festival “*Nguon*” at Magba. Those clashes lead to the death of six people and injured several others. In a press release send to local media, “[t]he Sultan [...], king of the Bamoun, urges the Noun sons and daughters to prioritise over one another’s feeling, peace, so dear [to Cameroon in general] and especially the Noun Division¹⁹”
- the attack, on the night of 23 breaking 24 June 2024, perpetrated in Tourou locality, in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division, Far North Region, by Boko Haram terrorists. During this attack, two people were killed, two others were seriously injured and two children were abducted with significant material damage recorded
- the attack and burning of teaching materials and the national flag at the Mbot Public Primary School on 15 May 2024 in the commune of Ndu, Donga-Mantung Division in the North-West Region²⁰
- the bloody fight between refugees which left 15 people injured on 27 April 2024 in Yémé, a locality of the Mayo-Sava Division, Far North Region
- the murder, on 28 March 2024, of a student in *Form 4A*, named Ekosso, in the playground of the Government Bilingual High School in Bertoua, Lom and Djerem Division, East Region, by his classmate, due to the fact that his absences were recorded by the victim, in his capacity as the class prefect. The perpetrator of the murder is actively sought by the local police authorities²¹
- a stampede of students on 22 January 2024 at the Government Bilingual High School Étoug-Ébé in the Mfoundi Division, Centre Region, following a protest by students against the closure of the school gate by the principal as a punishment for the frequent late arrivals of some students. The resulting stampede caused damage to a number of property items²²

¹⁷ See. *Cameroun Actuel*, « Des taxis incendiés à Bamenda : la nouvelle politique de couleur de taxi des séparatistes en cause », <https://camerounactuel.com/des-taxis-incendies-a-bamenda-la-nouvelle-politique-de-couleur-de-taxi-des-separatistes-en-cause/#:~:text=Un%20acte%20de%20vandalisme%20choquant%20a>, assessed on 19 September 2024.

¹⁸ See CHRC Statement to mark the 6th International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to Victims of Terrorism, published on 21 August 2024, <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2024-08-2113-48-52.pdf>, accessed on 19 September 2024.

¹⁹ See. *Cameroun24.net*, “Cameroun – Sécurité. Au moins 6 morts dans les affrontements entre Bamoun et Tikar à Magba, le sultan appelle à l’apaisement”, https://cameroun24.net/amp/actualite-cameroun-Au_moins_6_morts_dans_les_affrontements_entre_Bamo-1-1-65843.html, assessed on 25 September 2024.

²⁰ See “CHRC Statement to mark the 5th International Day for the Protection of Education from Attack”, published on 8 September 2024., <http://www.cdhc.cm/admin/fichiers/Declarations2024-09-0811-53-07.pdf>, accessed on 19 September 2024.

²¹ See. *Actu Cameroun*, « Un élève poignarde à mort par son camarade de classe à Bertoua », <https://actucameroun.com/2024/03/29/un-eleve-poignarde-a-mort-par-son-camarade-de-classe-a-bertoua/amp/>, on 25 September 2024.

²² See. Canal 2 International, 7:50 p.m. television news, on 22 January 2024.

- the knife attacks recorded on 9 January 2024 at the Government Bilingual High School Nsam, in the Mfoundi Division, Centre Region, during a fight between students over the assault of their classmate. Two students were injured during this fight²³
- the recurrent incursions by secessionist terrorists from the North-West Region into the West Region, in particular the incident that occurred on the morning of 21 November 2023 in Bamenyam community, Bamboutos Division, which resulted in the deaths of nine individuals, the destruction of multiple residential structures and the theft of several motorbikes²⁴,

The Commission welcomes the responses of certain ministries to its previous statement to mark the International Day of Non-Violence, in particular those from:

- the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), which, by letter No. 0001858/L/MINPROFF/SG/DSPF/SDPDF/SPDCF/FJB of 20 October 2022, informed the CHRC "[it] takes note of the recommendations made [to it, while emphasizing that] its competent services [...] will disseminate them widely to [its] target audiences"
- the Ministry of Decentralisation and Local Development (MINDDEVEL), which, by letter No. 006027/L/MINDDEVEL/SG/DSCG/CCG/AK of 8 November 2022, assured the CHRC that it will not fail to "seize every opportunity to spread the message of non-violence to Regional and Local Authorities (RLAs), especially through awareness-raising activities"
- the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), which, by letter No 003544/L/MINAT/SG of 15 November 2022, expressed its appreciation for the relevance of the analyses as well as the recommendations made by the CHRC for the purpose of raising awareness among public authorities, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the population, particularly for the promotion and strengthening the rule of law in Cameroon,

The Commission 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), seven are on the peaceful resolution of conflicts and thus non-violence, and have been distributed by the CHRC to State structures, political parties as well as CSOs, each as far as it is concerned, in the following manner:

- the recommendation to "continue raising public awareness of human rights by including this issue in school curricula", addressed to the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), the Ministry of Justice (MINJUSTICE), the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINSEC), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and the Ministry of Public Health (MINSANTE)

²³ See *Actu Cameroun*, "Lycée bilingue de Nsam à Yaoundé : des élèves utilisent des armes blanches au cours d'une altercation", [https://actucameroun.com/2024/01/10/lycee-bilingue-de-nsam-a-yaounde-des-eleves-utilisent-des-armes-blanches-au-cours-dune-altercation/#:~:text=La%20ministre%20des%20Enseignements%20secondaires%20\(Minsec\)](https://actucameroun.com/2024/01/10/lycee-bilingue-de-nsam-a-yaounde-des-eleves-utilisent-des-armes-blanches-au-cours-dune-altercation/#:~:text=La%20ministre%20des%20Enseignements%20secondaires%20(Minsec),), accessed on 16 September 2024.

²⁴ See CHRC Statement to mark the 6th International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to Victims of Terrorism, *op. cit.*

- the recommendation to “*pursue a peaceful approach to conflict resolution and strengthen transitional justice mechanisms in the country*”, addressed to the Prime Minister, Head of Government’s Office, MINAT, the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), MINJUSTICE, the General Delegation for National Security (GDNS) and the Cameroon Bar Association
- the recommendation to “*continue the dialogue for the definitive restoration of peace in the North-West and South-West Regions*”, addressed to the Prime Minister, Head of Government’s Office, MINAT and the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM)
- the recommendation to “*continue implementing measures aimed at the peaceful resolution of crises in [conflict] stricken areas, giving priority to national reconciliation processes*”, addressed to the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, the Prime Minister, Head of Government’s Office, CSOs, MINAT, MINDDEVEL, the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) and the NCPBM
- the recommendation to “*prioritise the effective participation of young people, women and children, including adolescents, at all levels of peace negotiations, peace-building efforts, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, as well as crisis response plans and reconstruction programmes*”, addressed to CSOs, MINAT, MINAS, MINEDUB, MINSEC, the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), MINJEC, MINEPAT, MINPROFF and political parties,

Noting the words of Ms Elisabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations Peacebuilding Support, according to whom “*by giving priority to peace, it is possible to contribute to reversing the tendency for conflicts to multiply, to offering opportunities to people affected by violence and to reducing the human and economic costs of war*”²⁵,

The Commission reiterates its recommendations made during the International Day of Peace, on 21 September 2024, in particular that:

- *CSOs and traditional authorities* should intensify awareness-raising among the population on the importance of education and the culture of peace in families
- *parents* should increase their efforts to spread and perpetuate the culture of peace by instilling respect for human values in their offspring, from an early age,

The Commission recommends that:

- *the Government*,
 - o should prevent and relentlessly combat all forms of violence against women, including their enslavement through sexual violence, psychological violence, discrimination, cultural violence through harmful cultural practices, and the economic violence of too many husbands who deprive their wives of resources by preventing them from engaging in income-generating activities without providing for their needs or allowing them to express themselves, in particular by:
 - increasing the number of public awareness campaigns - based on an inclusive approach – on tolerance, non-violence and positive masculinity

²⁵ See United Nations, Security Council outline of the new Agenda for Peace, an agenda based on rebuilding trust between and within countries, <https://press.un.org/fr/2024/cs1596.doc.htm>, accessed on 16 September 2024.

- in schools and at home, with an emphasis on the harmful effects of violence against women on the nation's economic development
 - adopting tougher laws to better protect women and girls against violence of all kinds
- should strengthen the population's defences against disinformation and harmful influence campaigns, before, during and after the presidential elections scheduled for 2025, by stepping up information campaigns, including through the media and social networks
- *MINAT and MINDDEVEL* should evict all the drinking establishments surrounding schools and training centres, ensuring that all places of entertainment remain out of sight within a radius of one kilometre of the educational facilities
- *the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINDHU) and MINAT* should build libraries that are accessible free of charge to young people to foster a passion for reading and provide them with constructive activities to engage in,
- the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee (NDDRC) should give priority to the effective participation of young people, women and children, including adolescents, at all levels of peace negotiations, peace-building efforts, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, as well as crisis response plans and reconstruction programmes,

The Commission recommends that CSOs should increase awareness targeting:

- communities regarding the vital importance of education and fostering peace in families;
- students, pupils, and educators about the value of non-violence in school and university environments,

The Commission once again urges all non-state armed groups operating in the Far North, North-West, and South-West Regions to respect a *fortnight* of Non-Violence and a ceasefire for the International Day of Non-Violence 2024,

For its part, **the Commission will spare no effort** to continue to promote and protect human rights in general and combat violence - all forms of violence - through training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy, visits to places where people are deprived of their liberty, investigation missions and handling complaints and self-initiated investigations,

Once again, the Commission calls on anyone who is a victim or witness of human rights violations in general - and cases of violence in particular - to contact it, including via its **toll-free number, 1523** (free calls even without phone credit).

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Yaoundé **2 OCT 2024**

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