STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TO MARK THE 30TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

3 December 2021

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: "the Commission"), established by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 and set up on 29 April 2021, following the swearing-in of its members before the Supreme Court sitting in Assembled Chambers,

Bearing in mind the UN General Assembly Resolution 47/3 which in 1992, declared 3 December as the International Day for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) drew to a close,

Appreciating the theme of this year's observance: Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-Covid-19 world,

Noting that everyone's contribution is essential to promote the social participation of persons with disabilities and empower them to flourish and develop in all spheres of life,

Affirming that the rights of persons with disabilities are specially recognised and protected at the national, regional and international levels, especially because of their vulnerability and social difficulties,

Recalling that Cameroon is party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights since its entry into force on 21 October 1989, Article 18(4) of which states that "The aged and the disabled shall also have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs,"

Considering the Preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 which provides that "the nation shall protect [...] persons with disabilities", and recalling that Cameroon signed, on 1 October 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by Resolution A/61/611 of the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006,
Recalling further that the purpose of this Convention is to create the necessary conditions for persons with disabilities to enjoy the same rights as other members of society, in an inclusive approach based on the principles of non-discrimination, participation and accessibility,

Recognising the importance of the full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the development of our society,

Recalling that Cameroon has endorsed the extension of the Continental Plan of Action of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2019), to which it is a signatory and which mandates the African Member States of the African Union to take urgent measures to promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in the development process of the African continent,

Observing that persons with visible or invisible disabilities do not always enjoy the benevolence of other members of society, hence the difficulties they encounter in their daily lives,

Aware of the new challenges facing persons with disabilities in Cameroon following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the security situation in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions,

Determined to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities be promoted, protected and guaranteed to enable them to develop harmoniously in society,

The Commission notes that according to Article 2 of Law No. 2010/003 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, a person with disabilities is defined as "any person who is unable to ensure by himself or herself all or part of the necessities of a normal individual or social life, due to a physical or mental deficiency, whether inherent or not",

The Commission recalls that according to official statistics, 10 per cent of the Cameroonian population lives with a disability, i.e. over two million people. These people have a permanent or temporary disability that prevents them from having a normal social life, for example, a visual or hearing impairment, a mental disorder such as schizophrenia or bipolarity, dyslexia or a chronic disabling disease,

The Commission notes with concern that while persons with disabilities are often confronted with several obstacles, especially inequalities in terms of access to education, health care, decent employment, public and private buildings, or their lack of consideration in the management of public affairs, the Covid-19 pandemic and the security situation in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions still exacerbate these inequalities and generate new constraints on the full enjoyment of their fundamental Rights and Freedoms,

The Commission recalls that Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities commits signatory States, including Cameroon, to take "all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in
situations of risk, including armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters 

The Commission underscores that in this regard, the resilience of persons with disabilities deserves to be supported; it underlines the need for this vulnerable group to be given special attention in managing the above-mentioned health and security situations, especially concerning their access to health infrastructure and basic care,

The Commission commends the efforts of the Government and development partners in this regard in recent years, including those aimed at strengthening the legal and institutional framework on the rights of persons with disabilities in Cameroon and improving their conditions, such as:

- implementing the capacity building and integrated rehabilitation project through the construction of a reception facility in Mbalmayo, a showcase for the implementation of the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) strategy
- constructing the Rehabilitation Centre for persons with disabilities in Maroua with the support of the Italian Cooperation
- Decree No. 2018 / 6233 / PM of 26 July 2018 fixing the modalities of Law No. 2010 / 002 of 13 April 2010, on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities
- Decree No. 2018 / 6234 / PM on the re-organization of the National Committee for Rehabilitation and Socio-Economic Reintegration of Persons with Disabilities (Conrha)
- Joint Decision No. 0001/Minsanté/Minas of 13 August 2018 on the procedures for the issuance and delivery of the special medical certificate for persons with disabilities
- Order No. 0017/Minas of 14 August 2018 to set the terms for the issuance of a national disability card
- The partnership "IAI-CAMEROUN-OIC-KRIBI" for the construction of ICT training rooms for women, the elderly, youth and persons with disabilities.

The Commission also applauds measures taken by the Government to make information accessible and available to people with visual and hearing impairments, especially in the context of raising awareness about compliance with the barrier measures against Covid-19 and information on this pandemic,

The Commission commends the determination of public authorities to improve the living conditions of this vulnerable group by introducing, in the parliamentary session of November 2021, the bill authorizing the President of the Republic to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

The Commission also encourages the multi-sector efforts of the Government, development partners and civil society organizations that work relentlessly to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in Cameroon,
The Commission reiterates that the Preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon proclaims that "all persons shall have equal rights and obligations", and recalls paragraph 3 of Article 38 of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010, on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, which prohibits discrimination based on disability by stating that: "[d]isability shall not be a ground for rejection [...] or discrimination", while prescribing in paragraph 2 of Article 27 affirmative measures in favour of persons with disabilities, including their access to inclusive education, quality and affordable health care, decent employment, public facilities and governance,

With this in mind, and to address the health risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities,

the Commission recommends that public authorities take exceptional measures to provide free care for patients with disabilities having pre-existing chronic diseases (hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, liver diseases, respiratory diseases, HIV-AIDS, etc.),

The Commission emphasizes the need to respect all the rights of persons with disabilities who, as full citizens with a certain potential, must contribute to the development of a more inclusive and prosperous society.

For its part, the Commission will spare no effort to continue to promote and protect the rights of all victims of discrimination and stigmatization through training workshops, awareness campaigns, advocacy, visits to detention facilities, fact-finding missions, and through handling complaints and self-initiated investigations.