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**REPORT OF THE JOINT MISSION OF THE MECHANISMS OF
 THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN
 IN AFRICA AND THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF
 PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, AND THOSE AT RISK,
 VULNERABLE TO, AND AFFECTED BY HIV TO THE
 REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

4 - 14 September 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Commission) is grateful to the Government of the Republic of Cameroon for kindly hosting, from 4 to 14 September 2012, a joint human rights promotion mission undertaken by two of its subsidiary mechanisms: the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, Honourable Commissioner Soyata Maïga, and the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of People Living with HIV, and Those at Risk, Vulnerable to, and Affected by HIV, Honourable Commissioner Lucy Asuagbor.

The Commission extends its sincere thanks to the country's highest authorities for providing the delegation with the necessary facilities and personnel for the smooth conduct of the mission.

The Commission expresses its gratitude to Ms Marie Chantal Mfoula, Africa Director at the Ministry of External Relations of Cameroon (MINREX); Mr Ondoua Christian, Mr Ndi Bitan Alain and Ms Corine Beyala, all staff members of MINREX; Mr Ntopa Tambi Christian Fritz, of the Ministry of Justice (MINJUSTICE); and Mr Makang Jean Pierre, Deputy Director for the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender at the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF); for their important role in organising the various meetings during the mission.

INTRODUCTION

1. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter), adopted on 21 June 1981 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Nairobi, Kenya, became effective on 21 October 1986. Articles 30 et seq. establish that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Commission) remains to date the principal organ of the African Union (AU) for the promotion of human rights.

2. Under Article 45 of the African Charter, the Commission is mandated to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Charter, ensure their protection, ensure the implementation of the Charter, interpret its provisions, and provide legal advice at the request of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. In addition, the Commission is given the task to gather documents, undertake studies and research on African problems in the field of human and peoples' rights, organize seminars, symposia and conferences, disseminate information, encourage national and local institutions concerned with human and peoples' rights and, where appropriate, give advice or make recommendations to governments.

3. With the aim of strengthening its promotion and protection mandate, the Commission established subsidiary mechanisms focusing on specific rights that require special promotion and protection efforts. Such mechanisms include the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Special Rapporteur) and the Committee on the Rights of People Living with HIV, and Those at Risk, Vulnerable to, and Affected by HIV (the Committee). These two mechanisms, under the terms of the resolutions establishing them, have a mandate to, *inter alia*, undertake promotion and fact-finding missions, and where necessary, investigate, verify information, and come up with conclusions and recommendations.¹

4. It is in the context of their respective mandates that the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, Commissioner Soyata Maïga, and the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of People Living with HIV, and Those at Risk, Vulnerable to, and Affected by HIV, Commissioner Lucy Asuagbor, undertook a human rights promotion mission to the Republic of Cameroon from 4 to 14 September 2012. The Honourable Commissioners were accompanied by Mr. Charles Beautrel Nguena, Legal Officer at the Secretariat of the Commission.

5. The mission was also conducted as a follow-up to the previous mission undertaken in February 2011 with the objective to monitor the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, as well as those made by the Commission following Cameroon's submission of its 2003–2008 combined periodic report.

¹ See the resolutions establishing the mechanisms of the Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights in Africa and the Committee on the Rights of People Living with HIV, and those at Risk, Vulnerable to, and Affected by HIV.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE MISSION

6. The objectives of the mission were as follows:

- a) Gather relevant information on the level of enjoyment of the rights of women and girls and the challenges they face in exercising their rights at the legal, political, social, economic and cultural levels;
- b) Inquire about the laws, plans, policies and programmes adopted by the Government of Cameroon to give effect to the provisions of the CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), and identify affirmative action measures which have an impact on the lives of women;
- c) Assess the impact of HIV/AIDS and inquire from the authorities and other stakeholders involved in the fight against the pandemic about the measures and policies put in place to prevent and to protect people living with HIV/AIDS and those at risk;
- d) Inquire about the ongoing programmes and strategies to prevent mother-to-child transmission;
- e) Discuss laws and experiences in the fight against the discrimination and stigmatisation of people living with HIV and those at risk;
- f) Advocate for the ratification of regional and international human rights legal instruments that have not been ratified by Cameroon;
- g) Monitor the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission to Cameroon contained in the Concluding Observations adopted at the 47th Ordinary Session of the Commission held in Banjul, The Gambia, from 12 to 26 May 2010 following the presentation of Cameroon's Combined Periodic Report (2003-2008).

DATES OF THE MISSION

7. The mission was conducted from 4 to 14 September 2012 in Yaoundé, Bamenda and Garoua.

COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATION

8. The African Commission delegation was composed of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, Commissioner Soyata Maïga, the Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of People Living with HIV, and Those at Risk, Vulnerable to, and

Affected by HIV, Commissioner Lucy Asuagbor, and Mr Charles Beautre Nguena, Legal Officer at the Secretariat of the Commission.

9. The mission received the technical support and participation of the aforementioned officials of the MINREX, MINJUSTICE and MINPROFF.

GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON²

10. This report takes into account the fact that the previous mission reports on Cameroon and the country's combined periodic report highlighted Cameroon's geographical, historical, political and socio-cultural background. They also highlighted the legal, administrative and institutional framework, as well as the structure of government and the political system which have not fundamentally changed since the last mission which was undertaken to the country in February 2011.

METHODOLOGY AND CONDUCT OF THE MISSION

11. The mission was conducted in the form of interviews, meetings and visits to socio-economic projects in Yaoundé, which the delegation conducted with the country's highest authorities and various stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of women's rights in Cameroon, as well as stakeholders involved in combating HIV/AIDS and protecting the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, and those at risk, vulnerable to and affected by HIV/AIDS.

12. The delegation also went to the North West and North Regions where it held frank dialogue with regional administrative authorities, traditional and religious leaders, Mbororo communities, regional representatives of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF), CSOs, officials of Centres for Women's Empowerment and the Family, and officials of the Bamenda and Garoua central prisons. The discussions centred on the progress made and the challenges relating to promoting women's rights and protecting the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS at the local and regional levels.

13. During the meetings, the head of the delegation, Commissioner Maiga, commended the fruitful collaboration and constructive dialogue between the Republic of Cameroon and the Commission. She made a brief presentation on the objectives of the mission, underscoring that these objectives include sharing best practices in the relevant areas, identifying the challenges and obstacles and making recommendations towards finding appropriate solutions. She also made a presentation on the Commission, its organisation, composition, mandate, activities and subsidiary mechanisms, focusing on the mechanism of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa.

² See the report of the promotion mission undertaken to the Republic of Cameroon in February 2011 by Commissioner Reine Alapini Gansou and Commissioner Lucy Asuagbor.

14. For her part, Commissioner Lucy Asuagbor made a brief presentation on the rationale for establishing the Committee, its activities and the legal instruments underpinning its mandate, in particular the 2001 Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases.

15. After the exchange of courtesies and a brief presentation on the objectives of the mission and mandate of the subsidiary mechanisms, the discussions between the delegation and the various authorities and stakeholders centred on the general situation of women's rights in Cameroon, as well as the progress made and challenges relating to HIV/AIDS protection in the country.

16. At the end of the meetings, publications and documents of the Commission were disseminated. It should be underscored that the mission was given wide media coverage by the State print and audio-visual media.

MEETINGS HELD DURING THE MISSION

MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUB-REGIONAL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

17. The delegation met with Mr Robert Kotchani, Acting Director of the United Nations Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (the Centre). He was assisted by Ms Gaëlle Demolis and Mr Rostand Banzeu. The discussions focused on collaboration between the UN special mechanisms and those of the Commission, and the role of the Centre in promoting and protecting women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS.

18. The Special Rapporteur commended the fruitful collaboration between the UN special mechanisms and those of the Commission since the adoption of the Addis Ababa roadmap in 2012 which, she said, has been characterized by information exchange, joint human rights promotion missions undertaken by the two institutions (including the mission to Tunisia by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa) and UN participation in the Ordinary Sessions of the Commission. Speaking in a similar vein, Mr Kotchani underscored that the collaboration between the two institutions is an opportunity for promoting and protecting human rights in Africa. In this regard, he highlighted the important role played by the Africa Office of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

19. Regarding the Centre's role in combating discrimination against women, Mr Kotchani began by making a brief distinction between the mandates of UN offices: country mandates and regional mandates. He informed the delegation that the Centre has a regional mandate covering eleven (11) countries in Central Africa³. Its mandate includes promoting and protecting human rights, as well as promoting democracy.

20. He indicated that the Centre has adopted specific policies to combat discrimination against women, including the policy on gender and women's human rights. The policy began at the Centre with the taking into account of a gender dimension in the communications and documentation of the Centre and the training of the personnel of the Centre and staff of other UN agencies on women's rights issues. Through this policy the Centre, in collaboration with the NCHRF, contributed to the drafting of the national gender policy and the capacity building of the Government, the National Assembly and civil society in the area of human rights, in particular women's human rights.

21. The Centre also organised advocacy sessions on the equal and effective participation of women in electoral processes and decision-making institutions. The delegation was also informed of the activities conducted by the Centre to combat child trafficking, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), harmful widowhood rites and the practice of breast ironing.

³ These countries include Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, DRC, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Chad.

22. Referring to the challenges in the fight against gender-based discrimination, the Acting Director of the Centre, while lauding the efforts made by the Cameroonian authorities, raised the issue of the non-domestication of duly ratified international and regional legal instruments. He regretted the mentality of some leaders and people who continue to think that gender equality is illusory.

23. With regard to improving the justice system towards ensuring greater protection of women's rights, an issue raised by the Special Rapporteur, Ms Demolis stated that the Centre lays emphasis on the justice sector through its human rights training programmes, in particular the programme for the Judicial Police Development Centre and magistrates. With regard to prison administration, she noted that there is a yearly human rights training programme and that the Centre has prepared a manual on prisons. She however acknowledged that the Centre needs to increase its activities in the justice sector and train more personnel, in particular investigators, judges and prison administrators.

24. Regarding women's participation in the management of public affairs, Mr Kotchani emphasised that in its mandate to promote democracy, the Centre played an important role in the organisation of the 2011 presidential election, which included the training of political parties on human rights issues. Such training sessions were conducted in collaboration with Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MINATD) and political parties. During these trainings, it was noted that some political party leaders think that women cannot hold certain positions in their parties. Moreover, many women are not interested in politics. As such, the Director of the Centre insisted on the need for a change of mentality through training and education. He also noted that the new Electoral Code does not significantly take into account the gender dimension. In order to address this issue, he suggested the need to motivate political parties, through funding, to include women at the management level. He stated that the Centre will redouble its efforts to that end.

25. Concerning HIV/AIDS, the delegation inquired about the Centre's activities in this area, in particular regarding the management of people living with HIV/AIDS, mother-to-child transmission, discrimination and stigmatisation. In response to these concerns, the Director of the Centre noted that the UN has a zero tolerance policy for stigmatisation. He stated that the Centre has organised training sessions for other UN agencies on the fight against discrimination and stigmatisation. He however acknowledged that the fight against HIV/AIDS among sexual minorities still has challenges given the unwillingness of the authorities to recognise this category of people. He added that the Centre lays special emphasis on the right to health and to employment.

26. Following these fruitful discussions, Commissioner Maïga reiterated that in Africa there is a slow change in mentality and that socio-cultural factors are also a major obstacle. Thus, there is the need to involve traditional rulers in the promotion and protection of the rights of women. She commended the Centre for its key role in promoting and protecting human rights, in particular the rights of women. She also thanked the Centre for participating in popularising the Maputo Protocol in the ten (10) regions of Cameroon.

MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVE OF UNAIDS IN CAMEROON

27. The meeting with the UNAIDS Representative in Cameroon, Dr Mamadou Lamine Sakho, focussed mainly on the collaboration between UNAIDS and the Cameroonian authorities and the role of UNAIDS in promoting and protecting women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS in Cameroon.

28. With regard to the first aspect, the UNAIDS Representative stated that there is fruitful collaboration between UNAIDS and the Cameroonian authorities, in particular the MINPROFF. He said they conduct several joint programmes, such as the UNAIDS/MINPROFF joint programme which is a peer education training programme on HIV and gender balance. Moreover, the two institutions often organise joint meetings on HIV/AIDS-related issues, such as the UNAIDS/MINPROFF joint meeting organised in April 2012. In addition to the activities carried out with the MINPROFF, UNAIDS also works in close collaboration with the MINJUSTICE. In this regard, training workshops were organised for magistrates on HIV/AIDS. The programme has trained magistrates in the Littoral and Centre regions, and will be extended to all regions across the country.

29. Regarding the role of UNAIDS in promoting and protecting women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS, Dr Mamadou Sakho said that his institution is gender sensitive on HIV/AIDS issues. As such, UNAIDS works in collaboration with UN Women in order to better integrate a gender approach into its activities. The agency contributes to the effective implementation of the recommendations of the various UN organs in the areas of human rights and HIV/AIDS in particular. Moreover, in addition to the legal assistance provided by UNAIDS to defend individuals prosecuted for their human rights promotion activities, the agency also encourages the Government of Cameroon to honour its human rights commitments. In this context, UNAIDS organised a working meeting in 2011 for Members of Parliament on HIV and human rights.

30. On the issue of sexual minorities, Dr Sakho indicated that UNAIDS often organises days of discussions with CSOs working to protect the rights of homosexuals with the aim of finding strategies for ARV funding. He however underscored that the Cameroonian Government was not ready to accept or legally recognise homosexuality in Cameroon, and that is why it is dissatisfied with the funds granted by the EU to associations that defend homosexuality. He recommended frank dialogue with the authorities on the issue instead of confrontation, and not to make a great fuss about the issue in relation to HIV/AIDS. He was of the view that AU organs, in particular the Commission, have to play a fundamental role in raising the awareness of the people and government authorities.

31. Still on the issue of homosexuality, Commissioner Maïga noted with regret that it is used by some NGOs as a form of business as a result of poverty and unemployment. She was of the view that the most urgent task includes assisting vulnerable people and rape victims.

32. Responding to the question by Commissioner Asuagbor on what is the Government's policy regarding access to ARV treatment, Dr Sakho stated that the State pays a 50%

subsidy on ARVs. The problem, he said, is at the level of managing resources allocated for the provision of ARVs. Embezzlement, he added, will inevitably result in the suspension of foreign funding. In this regard, Commissioner Asuagbor insisted that emphasis should be laid on good governance and HIV/AIDS training for magistrates and lawyers, towards strengthening the protection of the rights of affected and infected persons.

33. On the issue of stigmatisation and discrimination in having access to ARV treatment raised by the Chairperson of the Committee, the UNAIDS Representative indicated that the problem exists but is not common. He was of the view that there is the need for a second reading of the new Penal Code for it to take into account these new offences. He further suggested that collaboration with partners such as WHO and ILO should be improved towards strengthening the capacity of government institutions; an idea which was shared by the Commission delegation.

34. Dr Sakho indicated that UNAIDS is willing to contribute to popularising the Maputo Protocol, and reaffirmed that his organisation will contribute to implementing the AU HIV/AIDS roadmap.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND THE FAMILY

35. The Commission delegation was received by Mrs Koung A Bissike Jacqueline, Minister of State Property and Land Tenure, acting on behalf of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family. She was accompanied by several advisers of the MINPROFF.

36. As the Government's main institution for promoting the rights of women, the meeting with officials of the MINPROFF focused on several issues including girls' education, employment, maternal and reproductive health, women's situation regarding inheritance, women's access to land, violence against women, women's participation in the management of public affairs and the situation of rural women. Other issues discussed included HIV/AIDS and the measures taken by the Government to protect women and girls against the pandemic.

37. Responding to the aforementioned issues, the Minister began with a brief presentation on the institutional and legislative reforms implemented by Cameroon in promoting and protecting women's rights. At the institutional level, she mentioned Decree No 2011/408 of 9 December 2011 to organise the Government which strengthens the MINPROFF's mandate to promote and protect children's rights; the drafting and technical validation of the National Gender Policy (PNG) and the sectoral plans for implementing the PNG; and the continuous appointment of focal points/gender committees in public, semi-public and private institutions. At the legislative level, she indicated that Cameroon has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 10 December 1984 and the Maputo Protocol whose instruments of ratification will soon be deposited. At the sub-regional level, the Minister mentioned

Cameroon's signing on 11 November 2009 in Libreville, Gabon, of two instruments to combat trade and trafficking in persons.

38. In the area of education, the Minister informed the Commission delegation that measures have been taken to promote girls' education in the formal and informal education sectors. Regarding the formal sector, she cited the preparation and implementation of a sectoral integration strategy which takes into account the gender dimension; the preparation and implementation of the national education gender policy; free public primary education; the cancellation of compulsory fees and provision of minimum packages since 2010; the implementation of the policy of granting education grants to deserving female students; the promotion of the enrolment of girls in science and technical subjects; and the training of gender trainers.

39. Regarding the informal sector, she indicated that emphasis has been laid on vocational training institutions which fall under the various ministries, including the establishment of women's empowerment centres to provide intellectual, moral, civic and vocational education to women, men, girls, boys and underprivileged families; the setting up of support mechanisms for women attending women's empowerment centres; and the opening of several multipurpose empowerment centres for the youth.

40. In the area of employment, several affirmative action measures are being implemented, including the institution of a 30% quota for decision-making positions in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the institution by the Higher Institute of Management of training and refresher programmes for women working in the administration, and the implementation of training programmes for female farmers by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

41. In the area of health, the Commission delegation was informed that the MINPROFF implements activities on the prevention and financial, material and psycho-social support of patients suffering from several endemic diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS-related activities have included raising the awareness of the youth, women, families and communities about abstinence, fidelity to one partner and the proper use of condoms; promoting free screening tests during commemorative events for women and the family; assisting orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS; providing free ARV treatment and making them available in approved health centres; updating the Women and Family Sectoral Plan to Combat HIV/AIDS; providing material and financial medical support to women; and, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, mobilising communities, pregnant women and families for an effective use of services to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission and transmission among girls in fifteen (15) health districts in the country.

42. With regard to maternal and child mortality, the Campaign for the Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) was launched in 2010. The Campaign's strategic plan, the Minister emphasised, was adopted in April 2011 and has resulted in the organisation of general awareness-raising campaigns.

43. The Minister also mentioned the Government's efforts to promote access to land, which include facilitating the process for obtaining land certificates and disseminating legal texts on land tenure; organising campaigns against gender-based discrimination; and advocating against discriminatory traditional practices.

44. Regarding violence against women, she mentioned a Circular calling on magistrates to effectively and efficiently implement the legal provisions in force; the preparation of a national strategy to combat gender-based violence; the preparation of a plan to combat female genital mutilation and the establishment of community committees; Cameroon's observance of the global campaign to combat violence against women that was launched by the UN Secretary-General; and the institution of toll free telephone numbers in the main and regional offices of the MINPROFF for distress calls.

45. With regard to women's participation in the management of public affairs, the Minister mentioned the implementation of an Electoral Code which takes into account the gender dimension; awareness-raising activities for political parties to increase the number of women in elected positions; the preparation of a gender and elections strategic plan; and awareness-raising activities for women to register as voters and candidates in the various polls.

46. Regarding problems faced by rural women, she underscored the women's rights education programme put in place by the MINPROFF; the grant of farming tools and agricultural inputs with the collaboration of partners; the promotion of functional education through centres for women's empowerment and the family; and the celebration every year of the World Rural Women's Day, on October 15, on a given relevant theme.

47. The Minister ended her presentation by highlighting the way forward in strengthening women's rights, which includes the effective implementation of the National Gender Policy, continuous advocacy for the elimination of gender-based discrimination, popularising legal instruments, and providing education on women's rights.

48. The various efforts made by the Government on issues of women's rights and HIV/AIDS were lauded by the Honourable Commissioners. However, they gave some reasons why these efforts have a limited impact on the lives of women, which include the focal points and gender committees. The Special Rapporteur stated that this issue raised women's hopes in some countries, even though in practice the results were not visible. Regarding inheritance, she indicated that the protection of women's rights is ineffective under neutral laws. Concerning women's participation in the management of public affairs, she emphasised the need to adopt a gender equality law as it is the case in Senegal and other African countries. She was sceptical about the impact of circulars on the protection of women's rights, stating that it is more appropriate to enact laws. She also requested clarification on free judicial assistance, strategies to combat FGM and violence against women, and the status of the National Gender Policy.

49. The Minister and her advisers provided clarifications to the concerns raised by the members of the delegation. They indicated that it was necessary to establish permanent institutions dealing with gender issues by setting up gender committees. Unlike the focal points, gender committees are more sustainable and their budgets are included in that of the various administrative services.

50. The Secretary General at the MINPROFF indicated that there are now specific gender training programmes in some Cameroonian universities (University of Yaoundé I and University of Buea).

51. Regarding women's participation in the management of public affairs, the Director of Women's Social Empowerment reiterated the quota policy, explaining that it is a challenge for the Government. He indicated that the first priority is to build women's capacity within political parties, and which is the purpose of the advocacy conducted for parties to comply with the Government's policy. The Secretary General at the MINPROFF affirmed that there is no sector in Cameroon where women are not represented, except in administration. However, the situation has been addressed with the appointment of female administrative officers. On the issue of judicial assistance, the Deputy Director emphasised that a law was passed in 2009 establishing commissions on judicial assistance, which include representatives of the MINPROFF, in all the courts. Such judicial assistance which is supervised by the MINPROFF is provided to the underprivileged, in particular women without income.

52. Regarding the fight against FGM, experts of the MINPROFF noted the establishment of local committees to combat the practice at the local and regional levels. These committees frequently organise knife-collection ceremonies and report on their activities and related cases of violation. Moreover, efforts were made to enact a specific law to incriminate FGM which were later abandoned for a unified document, and as such the new penal code covers such crimes.

53. With regard to violence against women, regional platforms have been established to combat such unacceptable acts. These platforms are located in hospitals, police stations and traditional chiefs' palaces. Police officers have also received training on strategies to handle victims of gender-based violence and the psychological assistance of rape victims; while radio programmes in the national and official languages are broadcast in two regions with a view to raising the awareness of the population about these issues.

54. Regarding the concerns raised by the delegation about the adoption and implementation of the National Gender Policy, the Director of Gender attributed the period required for its drafting to new developments, in particular the increase in the population and the adoption of the electoral code. He however indicated that much has been done and that the Code will soon be adopted. The same situation applies to the Family Code.

55. After the fruitful discussions, the Commission delegation expressed its satisfaction with the ongoing activities and the progress made regarding the protection of women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS in Cameroon. Notwithstanding the socio-cultural obstacles and societal pressure, the delegation underscored the need to popularise the Maputo Protocol.

AUDIENCE WITH THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

56. The Minister of External Relations, H.E. Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, was accompanied by his advisers during the meeting with the Commission delegation. The issues raised by the delegation were in relation to the two main areas covered by the delegation, which included the fact that Cameroon has not deposited its Maputo Protocol instruments of ratification; the need to integrate the provisions of the Protocol into national laws; delays in adopting the National Gender Policy; the limited number of women in the management of public affairs, particularly in diplomacy and administration; and the inadequate financial resources allocated to the ministries in charge of women's empowerment and the family and people living with HIV/AIDS.

57. The Minister commended the excellent relations between Cameroon and the Commission. Concerning Cameroon's policy in regard to promoting women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS, he indicated that the President of the Republic is a democrat who is committed to human rights. He also highlighted the country's cultural, ethnic and geographical diversity which, he emphasised, has led to complexities that are difficult to address. Despite these challenges, he underscored the government's genuine political will to promote and protect women's rights and combat HIV/AIDS.

58. With regard to depositing the instruments of ratification of the Maputo Protocol, the Minister stated that measures have been taken for the instruments to be deposited as soon as possible. He indicated that there are no discriminatory laws against women, adding that the only barriers that exist are those of a social and cultural nature. However, in practice, significant progress has been made such as in the education sector where there are more girls than boys sitting in for competitive entrance examinations into major schools of higher learning, for example the International Relations Institute of Cameroon.

59. On the issue of women's participation in the management of public affairs, he emphasised that this was no longer a major problem in the country. Taking the example of women's representation in the field of diplomacy, he indicated that women occupy strategic positions such as Diplomatic Adviser to the Head of State, United Nations Director and Director for African and European Affairs. This, he added, is a strong signal which reflects the willingness of the country's highest authorities to give the same responsibilities to both men and women.

60. With regard to administrative positions held by women, the Minister emphasised that efforts are being made, adding that there is no salary discrimination in the country's employment sector. Women and men doing the same job earn the same salary. Regarding

the inadequate resources of the ministries with a mandate to empower women, the Minister informed the delegation that the issue of women's rights is not only dealt with by the MINPROFF but is a cross-cutting issue addressed by all the other ministries. The ministries of health and education, for example, also handle issues relating to women's rights. Concluding with the issue of HIV/AIDS, the Minister of External Relations reaffirmed Cameroon's commitment towards combating the illness through several programmes and projects.

61. The delegation commended the political will of the Cameroonian authorities to combat discrimination against women. However, talking on the issue of women's participation in the management of public affairs, the Honourable Commissioners called on the country to follow the examples of Senegal and Rwanda by enacting legislation on gender equality. They further emphasised the importance for Cameroon to ratify the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and to make a declaration under Article 34 (6) accepting the competence of the Court to receive complaints from individuals and NGOs.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND KEEPER OF THE SEALS

62. The meeting with the Minister of State, Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals, Mr Laurent Eso, focused on women's rights in Cameroon and the fight against HIV/AIDS. Assisted by his advisers, the Minister provided answers to the various issues raised by the Commission delegation.

63. The women's rights issues raised were in regard to delays in legislative reforms, gender-based violence, FGM, the situation of widows in the country, gender equality and the situation of female prisoners. HIV/AIDS control issues were also raised such as legislative measures to protect against HIV/AIDS, incrimination of voluntary contamination, combating HIV/AIDS in prisons, and the confidentiality of information.

64. The Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals began by saying that "men have dwelled so much on the subject of women". He indicated that the Cameroonian Penal Code as amended in 1967 already provided measures to strengthen the protection of the rights of women and children. He was of the view that the challenges in protecting women's rights cannot be attributed to delays in legislative reforms.

65. He emphasised that the law is not implemented not because it does not exist but because it does not always reflect the realities of the society. The major problem faced in protecting women's rights is more in regard to the country's ethnic, traditional, tribal and linguistic complexities. As such, the law is not the only solution to combating discrimination against women. According to the Minister, there is the need to increasingly involve sociologists, anthropologists and other experts in social conduct. Moreover, he insisted on the importance of educating and training girls.

66. On the issue of FGM, he indicated that the offence has been taken into account in the amended Penal Code. Talking about politics, the Minister suggested that the quantitative approach should be avoided and that women should be allowed to discover politics themselves. Women should not be forced into politics but should rather be involved in politics out of their own personal conviction.

67. With regard to the situation of widows, he underscored the importance for the association of women lawyers to be more active in assisting women and widows especially when the latter have cases before the courts. He also noted that the Government will make an effort, within the framework of legal aid, to reduce the cost of justice for children and underprivileged women.

68. On the issue of female prisoners, the Minister shared the view expressed by the Director of Penitentiary Administration, that even though there are no specific prisons for women, the law provides for specific sections for women and they are guarded and administered treatment by female personnel. He acknowledged that prison management, in particular with regard to pregnant women, remains a major problem in the country, and stated that measures will be taken to find appropriate solutions, including the rehabilitation of women.

69. In conclusion to the concerns raised by the Commissioners regarding women's rights, the Minister and his advisers reaffirmed the Government's determination to honour its international commitments. Ms Galega Helen, Director of Human Rights at the MINJUSTICE, highlighted the various training sessions organised for magistrates, lawyers and other personnel on the Maputo Protocol, the CEDAW and HIV/AIDS; the preparation by the MINJUSTICE of the report on the human rights situation in Cameroon; and the compilation of all human rights texts in Cameroon.

70. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the Minister of Justice indicated that even though there is no specific law on HIV/AIDS in the country⁴, the Penal Code criminalises all forms of voluntary contamination. The Minister's advisers further stated that the law does not prohibit any movement of persons on the basis of HIV/AIDS status.

71. The Secretary General of the MINJUSTICE, Mr Gwanmesia George, reaffirmed that the programmes to combat HIV/AIDS in prisons contained in Cameroon's last periodic report are still ongoing. He further emphasized that in the Yaoundé and Douala prisons, prisoners with HIV/AIDS take a CD4 test and are not separated from other prisoners. Prisoners, he said, are only separated in the case where there is a contagious disease.

72. On the issue of the confidentiality of the HIV/AIDS status of persons, he stated that the law prohibits the non-compliance with professional obligations, in particular the disclosure of professional secret. He further underscored that all prisoners have an equal right to treatment without discrimination, and that a national education and screening

⁴ The Minister however stated that all international instruments on HIV/AIDS are being implemented.

policy is being implemented. The implementation of this policy is supervised by the National HIV/AIDS Control Committee which also comprises representatives from the MINJUSTICE. Regarding forced marriages, the situation of homosexuals and sex workers, the Minister re-emphasised that forced marriage, homosexuality and prostitution are prohibited under Cameroonian law.

73. Following the observations of the Minister and his advisers, the Commissioners expressed the need for the Government to conduct a nationwide awareness-raising campaign for traditional rulers and to ensure the dissemination of instruments on the rights of women. They recommended that more women should be involved in the management of public affairs, in particular in administrative positions and the magistracy.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS

74. The Commission delegation was received by Mrs Bakang Mbock Ngo Ndebi Catherine Louise Marinette, Minister of Social Affairs (MINAS), accompanied by her advisers. The Minister also invited a group of three (3) Banka pygmy women to be present during the meeting.

75. The two delegations discussed several issues, including delays in legislative reforms, alleviating poverty especially among women, women's participation in the management of public affairs, combating harmful practices, the situation of indigenous women, protecting people living with HIV/AIDS and vulnerable people, and measures to combat stigmatisation and discrimination.

76. The Minister, Mrs Bakang Mbock, emphasised the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) regarding these issues, stating that the ministry is in charge of designing and implementing the Government's policy on prevention, assistance and the protection of socially vulnerable people.⁵ In this regard, she stated that regarding the specific case of women, the ministry is carrying out several activities.

77. She indicated that there is a law to protect people with disabilities and that the country has opened centres for the training of people with disabilities with special emphasis on women (e.g. the Centre Bobine d'Or and the National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Handicapped Persons⁶). Moreover, the MINAS signed a Convention with the Public Contracts Regulatory Agency (ARMP) for the needs of people with disabilities to be taken into account when awarding construction contracts. The Director of Protection of Handicapped Persons at the MINAS, Mr Rodolphe Soh, added that there are also specific programmes for women with disabilities, which include capacity-building programmes on income-generating activities, as well as specific education, transport and employment measures.

⁵ The Minister underscored that this programme is implemented with the support of WFP and CSOs.

⁶ It is the main centre for handicapped persons in Cameroon, and handles all forms of disability.

78. Regarding the fight against gender-based violence, he indicated that the MINAS, in collaboration with the MINPROFF, instituted a toll-free hotline to receive complaints from victims of violence and to immediately alert the police. Regarding the fight against harmful practices such as FGM, there are ongoing awareness-raising campaigns for religious and traditional leaders.

79. Regarding HIV/AIDS control, the Minister indicated that the ministry is working with the Ministry of Health and the Chantal Biya International Reference Centre for Research on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Management (CIRCB). In addition to contributing to the programme on abstinence, fidelity and condoms, the MINAS has helped in implementing protocols on the protection against HIV/AIDS and combating discrimination in health centres. Moreover, the ministry lays special emphasis on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and the Government has identified close to 183,000 OVC and has provided assistance to most of them. This assistance includes providing them education, medical care and building the capacity of their families.

80. Responding to the issue of indigenous populations, the Minister emphasised that given the country's ethnic diversity (over 200 ethnic groups), it is difficult to determine who the indigenous populations in Cameroon are. She however indicated that since 2009, the Government set up a programme to promote vulnerable people. The programme includes empowerment measures for the South, Centre and East regions where the majority of indigenous people live. Regarding their access to national identity cards and birth certificates, the Minister and her advisers stated that national campaigns are conducted to enable them to have these documents.

81. In the area of education, the MINAS signed a partnership agreement with MIPROMALO for the construction of schools and houses in indigenous communities. The Secretary General at the Ministry, Mr Mouhtar Ousmane Mey, emphasised that in the Far-North Region, a system of "mobile teachers" was put in place for children who look after cattle. In the area of health, the MINAS has also conducted vaccination campaigns and distributed medicines.

82. After the discussions with Mrs Bakang Mbock and her advisers, the delegation discussed with the Banka pygmy women invited by the MINAS. The women informed the delegation of their living conditions and challenges, laying emphasis on their exclusion from the redistribution of forest revenues, difficulties in having access to health centres and HIV/AIDS control measures given that HIV is a taboo and a source of stigmatisation among the pygmies. The women also mentioned the limited participation of their communities in the management of public affairs.

83. In conclusion, the head of the Commission delegation expressed her satisfaction with the activities of the MINAS. While recognising the various financial challenges as a result of the global financial crisis, she called on the Government to increase its efforts towards

promoting and protecting women's rights. The Commissioners recommended that the pygmy women should create an effectively functioning NGO to protect their rights.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION

84. The Commission delegation met with the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Yousouf Adjidja Alim. The meeting focused mainly on the Government's policy regarding girls' education and combating HIV/AIDS in schools.

85. On the first issue, the discussions revealed that education is a fundamental right in Cameroon and that the principle of free education is being implemented in both government and private schools.

86. As such, the Government has implemented an education programme for all with the main objective to enable all Cameroonians to have access to education and to be educated. This programme has led to the opening of close to 1,200 schools, including 500 private schools; the recruitment of teachers (about 37,000 teachers since 2007); the implementation of a special programme (construction of houses and special bonuses for teachers) for remote and retroceded areas (the case of Bakassi and border areas with Chad); and a programme for the construction and rehabilitation of schools.

87. With regard to gender issues, the Minister indicated that there is a gender focal point at the ministry, adding that recruitments at the ministry are based on a gender approach and that the majority of the personnel recruited are women. She also underscored that gender issues are taken into account when preparing the ministry's programme budget.

88. Regarding education, a child management programme has been instituted which helps to make children responsible. School programmes and manuals containing aspects that discriminated against girls have also been amended. Henceforth, girls and boys are treated equally.

89. The officials of the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) underscored that the ministry works in collaboration with several technical and financial partners such as UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, as well as other ministries, including the MINAS and MINJUSTICE.

90. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the Inspector General of Education at the MINEDUB, Ms Itoe Mispá, stated that an "AIDS-free School" programme has been established. The programme enjoys the support of several NGOs and its aim is to reduce HIV/AIDS by 50% in schools. It also includes organising yearly and continuous training seminars for teachers on the fight against HIV/AIDS, organising HIV/AIDS screening campaigns and creating health centres in schools. She also indicated that HIV/AIDS discrimination and stigmatisation does not exist in schools.

91. With regard to sectoral plans to combat HIV/AIDS, she emphasised that measures have been adopted to address the shortage of teachers, and that these measures have led to the sensitisation of five million pupils and five thousand teachers, and the management of teachers living with HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the First Lady, through the CIRCB, provides significant support to the HIV/AIDS activities of the MINEDUB.

MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

92. The Commission delegation was received at the head office of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) by the Chairperson, Dr Chemuta Divine Banda. He was accompanied by members of the NCHRF.

93. The discussions focused on the activities of the NCHRF in the promotion and protection of women's rights and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

94. The NCHRF Chairperson made a brief presentation on the institution, its mandate and activities. The NCHRF has five regional offices, and its main mandate is to promote and protect human rights and freedoms in Cameroon. The Commission is supported by its Secretariat and collaborates with UNDP, the UN Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, and several other partners.

95. Regarding the activities of the NCHRF, in particular on women's rights and the fight against HIV/AIDS, Dr Chemuta Banda indicated that several activities are being conducted. He stated that in addition to activities to raise awareness about the Maputo Protocol, the NCHRF has established a partnership with UN Women on the fight against gender-based violence and the integration of a gender perspective into governance. The NCHRF, with the support of UN Women, has implemented a project to promote the civil and political rights of women. Thanks to this project which has been implemented in five regions across the country (Adamawa, Centre, Littoral, North West and South West) studies were conducted on gender-based violence and awareness-raising campaigns were conducted on respect of the civil and political rights of women.

96. The NCHRF Chairperson indicated that his institution plays a significant role on HIV/AIDS issues and works in collaboration with CSOs, adding that the information they have does not reveal any case of discrimination based on HIV/AIDS.

97. The members of the NCHRF, in particular the heads of the sub-commissions on vulnerable people, economic, social and cultural rights, and specific issues, wanted information on the role of the African Commission in protecting the rights of people with disabilities and the African Women's Decade.

98. The Honourable Commissioners commended the work of the NCHRF and provided answers to the concerns raised by the NCHRF members. On the issue of people with

disabilities, Commissioner Maïga indicated that the Commission has established a working group which deals with the issue, and which is working towards the adoption of a Protocol on the rights of people with disabilities. Gender and people with disabilities, she pointed out, are two different issues. On the second issue, she indicated that it is a strategy to lay emphasis on the promotion and protection of the rights of women and that the NCHRF should also adopt such a strategy.

99. The Honourable Commissioners further encouraged the NHRC to strengthen its collaboration with the Government and other stakeholders despite the challenges, and to raise the awareness of religious and traditional leaders about the Maputo Protocol.

WORKING SESSION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND PROTECTION CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE CENTRE REGION

100. After the meeting with the members of the NCHRF, the Commission delegation had a brief working session with human rights promotion and protection CSOs in the Centre Region. The CSOs discussed a number of issues with the Commission, including the situation of sex workers, land ownership, difficulties faced by humanitarian CSOs in importing working materials, reproductive health, violence against women and HIV/AIDS.
101. Regarding the situation of sex workers, the Honourable Commissioners were informed that these workers often get abused and cannot seek remedy. Moreover, they are not allowed to file a complaint, given that prostitution is prohibited in the country. Regarding land ownership, they challenged the legal framework for not taking into account cultural values. With regard to difficulties faced by CSOs in importing working materials, it was noted that it is crucial for humanitarian CSOs to be granted import tax exemption in order to facilitate the shipment of donations and other materials for humanitarian purposes. In the area of reproductive health, the CSOs indicated that there has been an increase in maternal mortality rate as a result of the limited budget allocated for maternal health and poverty among women.
102. Responding to the concerns raised by the CSOs, Commissioner Asuagbor acknowledged that sex workers face difficulties. She however explained that prostitution and homosexuality are criminalised under Cameroonian law and that it is the country's sovereign right to criminalise such acts. She further underscored that at the level of the AU, there is no consensus on prostitution and homosexuality and that it is recommended that African values should be taken into account with regard to human rights issues.
103. On the issue of land ownership, Commissioner Maïga expressed her support in favour of reforms which should take into account the relevant provisions of the Maputo Protocol. Regarding import tax exemption, she recommended that CSOs should work with the MINAS. She indicated that measures to grant import tax exemptions have been taken in

countries such as Mali, Sudan, Somalia and the Central African Republic to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations.

104. The Honourable Commissioners called on CSOs to work more in collaboration with government authorities and to emphasise on the education and sensitisation of religious and traditional leaders. They also called on CSOs to apply for observer status with the Commission.

VISIT TO THE NORTH WEST REGION

MEETING WITH THE GOVERNOR AND ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES OF THE NORTH WEST REGION

105. The Commission delegation was received by the Secretary General at the Governor's Office and his advisers on behalf of the Governor.

106. The Commissioners made a brief presentation on the objectives of the mission, the Commission's mandate and that of their subsidiary mechanisms.

107. On the issue of women's rights, the Secretary General indicated that the Government is implementing several activities and projects to promote the rights of women in the North West Region. In this regard, he underscored the significant role played by the MINPROFF in raising the awareness of women about political issues, the fight against gender-based violence and early marriage.

108. Regarding HIV/AIDS, he stated that a regional HV/AIDS control committee has been established under the leadership of the Governor. He however acknowledged that there are some harmful traditions and customs which make people to doubt the existence of the epidemic despite awareness-raising efforts.

MEETING WITH OFFICIALS OF THE NCHRF NORTH WEST REGIONAL OFFICE, DECENTRALISED GOVERNMENT SERVICES TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND COMBAT HIV/AIDS, AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

109. The meeting was held at the regional head office of the NCHRF and was presided over by its Chairperson, Honourable Chief Paul Nji Tumasang. Regarding the situation of women in the region, the MINPROFF Regional Delegate, Ms Caroline Bi Bongwa, underscored the lack of education for women in this part of the country. This lack of education, coupled with poverty, has made women in the region to be considered as chattels and they do not take up their responsibilities. In order to address this situation, the MINPROFF signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture and

Rural Development which pledged to finance women's associations to the tune of five hundred thousand (500,000) CFAF.

110. Regarding the fight against gender-based violence, the MINPROFF Delegate indicated that priority is given to conciliation, adding that matters are referred to the competent authorities in the event of repeat offences. On the issue of women's participation in the management of public affairs, she noted that there is only one woman out of the twenty MPs in the region. According to Ms Bongwa, other major problems faced by women in the region include difficult access to inheritance and to land, forced marriage, rape, unwanted pregnancy and child trafficking.
111. Responding to the issue of the measures and strategies adopted to address the aforementioned problems, the Secretary General of the NCHRF Regional Office indicated that the NCHRF is providing legal assistance to victims. The representative of the MINAS regional delegate laid emphasis on the psychological support that the ministry provides to victims through social centres. He however mentioned the failure by police authorities to collaborate and delays in judicial procedures. He further indicated that the authorities are making efforts to assist orphans and vulnerable children with the support of Plan Cameroun and UNICEF.
112. The representative of the Imam of Bamenda stated that even though the Muslim community has challenges in overcoming cultural barriers, women have the right, according to religion, to choose their husbands, to divorce and to own their own property. He stated that the majority of children attend school, adding that the problem is at the level of secondary and university education which is very expensive. He also mentioned the problem faced by Muslim girls in socialising with people of different cultures and their unwillingness to go for treatment in hospitals. He also acknowledged that violence against women is a reality in his community, given that the Koran allows husbands to punish their wives.
113. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the RTG-NW Coordinator emphasised that the 2011 HIV prevalence rate in the region was 6.3%; 5.9% for women and 2.9% for men. He indicated that there are eighteen (18) treatment centres in the region, among which seventeen (17) are operational. These centres offer prevention, screening, counselling and care services. Special attention is given to women victims of rape and infected new-born babies. He noted that there is no discrimination or stigmatization based on HIV/AIDS status in the region.
114. He concluded by highlighting the challenges faced, such as the limited stock of ARV drugs, lack of competent personnel in the treatment centres, lack of insurance coverage for doctors and staff, unpaid salaries for some nurses and traditional obstacles.

VISIT TO THE BAMENDA CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND THE FAMILY

115. The Director made a brief presentation on the Centre and its activities. She indicated that it is one of the six government centres for women's empowerment and the family in the North West Region, and is open to women only. The Centre offers training in different areas, including social and family economics, tailoring, hotel management, child care, maternal health and HIV/AIDS control. The objective of the Centre, she added, is to assist women in creating jobs. She further underscored that the Centre has partnerships with private institutions which offer internships for girls. The problems faced by the Centre, she concluded, include inadequate infrastructures and the lack of trainers and the relevant training modules.
116. After the discussions the members of the Commission delegation were invited to visit the various workshops of the Centre and the work done by its students.

VISIT TO THE BAMENDA CENTRAL PRISON

117. The Bamenda Central Prison is the biggest prison in the North West Region and was established in 1958. Today, the prison has 450 inmates, including 234 accused persons, 159 convicted persons, 6 prisoners awaiting appeal, 1 person sentenced to death, 7 persons sentenced to life imprisonment, 6 female prisoners, 23 minors and 4 foreigners.
118. The discussions revealed that the average rate of female prisoners is low. Regarding prison conditions, women, minors and men are kept separate. Female prisoners are guarded by female prison officers. The prison has an infirmary which has limited resources, and offers ARV treatment to the three prisoners living with HIV/AIDS. The food ration of prisoners, even though insufficient, is provided by the government with the support of partners such as the Catholic chaplaincy which provides substantial assistance to the prison.
119. The Director indicated that the Catholic chaplaincy often brings ophthalmologists, dentists and other medical experts. The prison also runs a small juvenile reformatory school, as well as handicraft, tailoring and construction workshops, gardens and poultries. The Honourable Commissioners commended the prison personnel for their efforts and advised that they should bring gynaecologists to examine female prisoners.

VISIT TO THE REGIONAL HEAD OFFICE OF THE NGO MBOSCUDA

120. The NGO Mbororo Social Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) was established in 1992 with the main objective to promote the rights of the Mbororo people and contribute to their development.
121. The officials of the NGO made a brief presentation on the objectives and activities of MBOSCUDA. They indicated that the association is aimed at strengthening unity among

the members of the Mbororo community through dialogue, collaboration, social integration and tolerance; promoting the economic, social and cultural development of the Mbororos, in particular the women. Its main activities include institutional capacity building, access to justice, agro-pastoral activities, and promoting gender, education and health.

122. As part of its programme to promote gender and women's rights, MBOSCUDA has provided loans and subvention to about thirty women, organised training sessions on women's capacity building towards enabling women to contribute to the financial responsibilities of their homes and decision-making. Through the programme, about sixty women are benefiting from a functional literacy programme, and some Mbororo youth have been granted bursaries for their primary and post-primary education. Between 2005 and 2011, a total of 279 children (181 girls and 98 boys) benefited from the programme.
123. Regarding HIV/AIDS control, the NGO organises awareness-raising campaigns and offers voluntary screening and counselling for women and the youth of the community. It also provides medication and food supplements to people living with HIV/AIDS.
124. The women officials however stated that even though the entire Mbororo community suffers discrimination, the case of Mbororo women is even worse. These women are not involved in the making of decisions that affect their lives. In the area of education, priority is given to male children. Mbororo women are victims of forced and early marriages. Their right to inheritance is undermined by the principles of Islam and local traditions. Their economic dependence prevents them from influencing the decisions made in families, and they have limited access to the public service. In fact, less than ten Mbororo girls work in the public service. Mbororo women also face serious problems in having access to health centres. Given the often distant location of health centres, most women give birth at home. Due to their traditions, they are reluctant to consult male doctors and non-Mbororo doctors.
125. The Honourable Commissioners commended the activities undertaken by the MBOCUSDA officials and encouraged them to persevere despite the challenges, promising that their complaints will be forwarded to the competent authorities.

MEETING WITH CSOs OF THE NORTH WEST REGION

126. The Commission delegation had a working session at the NCHRF head office with about ten human rights NGOs of the North West Region. The discussions focused on the situation of women's rights in the region and HIV/AIDS control.
127. The representative of ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) began by highlighting some major human rights violations in the region. She indicated that the major problems include child and women trafficking, and the lack of women in decision-making institutions. She stated that there is inconsistency between the instruments ratified

by Cameroon and the reality on the ground, adding that the laws are not implemented while customary law is predominant. According to her, relations between the government and CSOs are not very fruitful, and the government does not protect human rights defenders.

128. The Coordinator of the NGO Community Education and Development Services (CEDS) laid emphasis on the high poverty and illiteracy rate of women in the region. She stated that poverty has been worsened by the lack of loans for women. She also highlighted violence and discrimination against women, early marriage and harmful traditional practices which undermine women's emancipation.
129. The other speakers also talked about the partial implementation of the Code of Criminal Procedure by the authorities, the lack of a forum for institutional dialogue between the State and CSOs, the lack of compliance by the State with the recommendations made by international human rights institutions, the lack of women's participation in conflict management, problems of access to health services, police abuse, limited access to justice, and the corruption and poor management of some NGOs which has discouraged some partners.
130. The Commission was also criticised by NGOs of the North West Region for its delays in taking decisions on Communications. The delegation attributed the delays to the fact that Commissioners do not work on a full-time basis, the need to ensure the principle of adversary procedure both at the admissibility and merits stages, the limited capacity of the Secretariat and the lack of financial resources. The delegation reassured the NGOs that steps are being taken to address the issue of delays, including an increase in the number of Extraordinary Sessions, the establishment of a Working Group on Communications, and the Commission's decision to refer to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights all decisions which States Parties failed to comply with.
131. Regarding HIV/AIDS control, the NGO PAFAC informed the delegation that there are very few HIV/AIDS control centres and that these centres often lack ARV drugs. Even though the HIV prevalence rate in the region remains high, almost all the NGOs acknowledged the fact that there has been a significant improvement and that people are sensitised more often.
132. The Commission delegation was satisfied with its discussions with the NGOs. The delegation expressed its profound gratitude to the personnel of the NCHRF regional office for organising the meetings. The NGOs were called upon to play an active role in combating violence against women and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

VISIT TO THE NORTH REGION

MEETING WITH THE MBORORO COMMUNITY IN NDIAM BABA, GAROUA III SUB-DIVISION

133. The Commission delegation travelled to the Garoua III Sub-Division where it met with the Mbororo community in Ndiam Baba. The delegation was assisted by two staff members of the MINPROFF Regional Delegation, Ms Issa Hapsatou and Mr Houssa Sadou.
134. The members of the Mbororo community, most of whom were women, informed the delegation of their daily challenges. Regarding education, it was noted that most girls do not continue their education beyond primary school because they have to get married or focus on agriculture (maize cultivation). Concerning women's participation in the management of public affairs, women of the Ndiam Baba Mbororo community indicated that they are not consulted in the making of decisions that affect them.
135. In the area of health, they stated that there is no health centre in the immediate vicinity, and that they have to travel long distances to get treatment. In most cases, women give birth at home which sometimes leads to complications and maternal and child mortality. As a result of the customs and traditions, sororate and levirate marriages continue to thrive. Moreover, women are not entitled to inheritance, given that in the case of death of the husband, the paternal authority of the deceased is transferred to his brothers.
136. Other problems faced by women of the Ndiam Baba Mbororo community in the North Region include inadequate access to drinking water and housing, and difficulties in being issued civil registration documents (birth, marriage and death certificates).
137. After taking note of the problems faced by Mbororo women, the Commission delegation encouraged them to give priority to the education of their children. The delegation underscored the responsibility of parents, both men and women, in building the future of their children, adding that this joint responsibility should be carried out through understanding and dialogue.

VISIT TO THE GAROUA CENTRAL PRISON

138. The Garoua Central Prison is the biggest prison in the North Region. It was established in the 1930's with a capacity of up to 500 people. Today, the prison is host to some 1,354 prisoners, including about twenty women. The delegation met with the Prison Director, Mr Wantoh Francis, and the medical doctor of the prison facility, Dr Kuété T. Jean.
139. Regarding the conditions of detention, the Director indicated that men and women are kept separate, and that there are no special measures in place for minors. However, there is an education programme for minors and the latter also engage in basket-making activities. Unlike other prisons, the Garoua Central Prison does not offer activities to

facilitate women's rehabilitation. With regard to food rations, Mr Wantoh indicated that given the limited budget allocated to the institution, prisoners are only entitled to one meal a day.

140. The prison is supported by PACDET II and religious communities such as the Catholic chaplaincy which provides significant support. Concerning health, Dr Kuété Jean stated that the prison facility has a doctor and a qualified nurse. On the issue of HIV/AIDS, he informed the delegation that heads of prison cells are often sensitised to the use of syringes and razors. However, due to administrative bottlenecks, HIV/AIDS screening campaigns are yet to be conducted. Screening is being done on an ad hoc and case-by-case basis. According to him, it is thus not possible to give a precise number of prisoners living with HIV/AIDS even though two patients are undergoing treatment under the partnership with the NGO Caritas.
141. Responding to another question, he indicated that the prison has never had the presence of a gynaecologist as a result of the lack of financial resources and reservations related to the traditions and cultures of the region. The delegation called on the Prison Director to establish partnerships with associations of pharmacists, gynaecologists and other medical practitioners to be able to request support towards the wellbeing of prisoners. The Commissioners also visited the quarters for women and for minors to have an idea about their living conditions.

COURTESY CALL ON THE GOVERNOR OF THE NORTH REGION

142. The Commission delegation visited the highest authority in the North Region, Governor Otto Wilson Joseph. The discussions focused on the status of women's rights and progress made in combating HIV/AIDS.
143. Regarding the situation of women in the region, Mr Otto Wilson Joseph acknowledged the sad reality of the situation. He however indicated that the Government is making every effort to improve the situation. He informed the delegation that upon assuming duties, he toured the various divisions in the region to advocate for the equal rights of men and women and the importance for girls to be educated. He also promised to establish franc dialogue with traditional and religious leaders, within the framework of administrative coordination meetings, in order to win their support.
144. On the issue of HIV/AIDS, he explained that there is no specific regional HIV/AIDS control policy, and that the region implements the national HIV/AIDS control policy. The North Region has an HIV/AIDS control committee which is chaired by the regional governor. Mr Otto further indicated that the government is assisted in its efforts by several associations that are well organised.

WORKING SESSION WITH OFFICIALS OF GOVERNMENT HUMAN RIGHTS DECENTRALISED SERVICES AND TRADITIONAL RULERS OF THE NORTH REGION

145. The meeting brought together several participants including 3rd class chiefs of Garoua and representatives of the regional delegations of the Ministry of Secondary Education, Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family. The discussions focused on girls' education, access to loans, women's participation in the management of public affairs, FGM, violence against women and HIV/AIDS control.
146. In the area of education, the traditional rulers acknowledged the fact that girls are forced to discontinue their education at a particular stage due to financial and security problems, making parents to give priority to the education of boys. They raised other issues including the limited number of public schools, the compulsory Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fees and the high enrolment fees for training centres for girls. The MINEDUB Regional Delegate however stated that even though primary education is free, it is not the case for nursery education. He indicated that the government has made efforts by increasing the recruitment of teachers, especially female teachers, and constructing new schools.
147. Regarding the management of public affairs, the traditional rulers acknowledged the fact that there is a massive mobilisation of women during elections. However, women are not involved when it comes to important decision-making. The participants also agreed that violence against women is common place. Concerning FGM, they indicated that it is not part of their tradition even though it is practiced by some foreigners. They also indicated that women in the region face a serious problem in having access to loans. In order to address this problem, the participants recommended the opening of banks and credit institutions in remote areas.
148. Regarding HIV/AIDS, Dr Spede Oumarou, a member of the Regional HIV/AIDS Control Committee, indicated that an HIV/AIDS control programme was instituted in the country in 2000 and that the first phase of the programme which has been implemented across the country began in 2001. The North Region Committee is chaired by the Governor. The region's HIV prevalence rate in 2004 was 1.7% which was the lowest in the country. However, according to recent data, the figure has increased to 2.8%, with women and the youth constituting the most affected groups.
149. As part of control measures, the government has put in place several strategies, including the establishment of nine management committees which handle close to 4,000 people, the launch of free screening campaigns, and the involvement of religious and traditional leaders. Dr Spede attributed the high rate of infected women to traditional practices, in particular the practice whereby the husband's cause of death is not disclosed to his widows, and women's unwillingness to go for treatment in hospitals. Regarding orphans and vulnerable children, he indicated that the region has about 2,000 children of this category among whom only 400 are being taken care of.

150. Concerning the issue of confidentiality regarding the HIV status of patients, Dr Spede indicated that professional secrecy is generally respected even though there are some exceptional cases. He agreed with the traditional rulers that there are cases of discrimination and stigmatisation based on HIV/AIDS.

151. Following the discussions, the members of the Commission delegation provided the participants with some useful information on the steps taken by the African Union, in particular the establishment of a fund for HIV/AIDS, as well as a fund for women's empowerment.

VISIT TO THE GAROUA CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND THE FAMILY

152. The Director of the Centre talked briefly about the various ongoing activities and programmes of the Centre. She attributed the violation of women's rights in the region to the customs and traditions, the irresponsibility of parents, the lack of dialogue between parents and their children and poverty. She also indicated that the Centre provides assistance to women victims of violence. However, due to the limited financial resources, the Centre has almost put an end to its assistance programme and awareness-raising activities. She stated that the Centre works in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund.

153. The delegation was invited to visit the facilities of the Centre, including its family planning centre, classrooms and tailoring workshops. During the tour visit, the Director informed the delegation of the various problems faced, in particular the lack of space in classrooms, and the lack of an IT hall and qualified personnel.

154. At the end of the visit, the Honourable Commissioners commended Cameroon's vision in establishing centres for women's empowerment and the family which is an example of best practices in the area of promoting women's rights. They encouraged the personnel to continue to conduct sensitisation campaigns on women's rights in order to promote change in the customs and traditions which delay the well-being of the family and undermine women's potential.

MEETING WITH OFFICIALS OF THE NCHRF REGIONAL OFFICE AND CSOs OF THE NORTH REGION

155. The meeting began with a welcome address by the Chairperson of the NCHRF Regional Office, Mr Hamadou Idrissa. He stated that women in the region are relegated to the background as a result of religion and customs and that the NCHRF is working hard towards an effective protection of the rights of women. During the discussions, participants raised several issues in the region such as forced and early marriages, violence against women, high cost of education, lack of awareness about human rights protection instruments, impunity enjoyed by traditional rulers who are often involved in women's

rights violations, harmful traditional practices which violate the rights of widows and the inability of the NCHRF to visit remote areas.

156. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the participants indicated that the pandemic is still a taboo subject in the North Region. Patients are victims of discrimination and stigmatisation. As such, once aware of their status, patients immediately stop going to hospitals and prefer to consult traditional healers. The participants stated that there are close to ten NGOs working in the area of HIV/AIDS. However, these organisations lack funds to raise awareness and contribute to a change of conduct.
157. Given the aforementioned challenges, the Commissioners called on CSOs to work in partnership with the government and also with international organisations that can help build their material, financial and technical capacity.

THE DELEGATION'S RETURN TO YAOUNDE

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER DELEGATE FOR ADMINISTRATION AND DECENTRALISATION

158. The Commission delegation was received by the Minister Delegate of MINATD, Mr Jules Ndore Ndongo, who talked briefly about the mandate of the ministry. On the issue of the status of women in the country, Mr Jules Ndore Ndongo indicated that there is a genuine political will to promote women's rights in Cameroon, given the major role that women play in the country's development. He indicated that the law does not discriminate against women, and that women are represented in almost all sectors. Responding to the concern that there is no female governor or senior administrative officer, the Minister mentioned the complex nature of the Cameroonian society. He emphasised that a society cannot be changed by a decree, and that there is need for a progressive change in the society's conduct which has been in place for centuries.
159. The delegation informed the Minister of allegations of human rights violations carried out by traditional rulers as reported by CSOs in the North West and North regions. Mr Ndongo underscored that even as auxiliary administrators, traditional rulers are bound to comply with the laws in force, adding that appropriate measures will be taken to address the situation. Regarding FGM, early marriage and other forms of violence suffered by women, the Minister indicated that the courts are playing their role and that improvements will be made.
160. With regard to the activities of the MINATD in combating HIV/AIDS, he stated that the ministry established an HIV/AIDS control committee in 2010, even though the committee's activities have been very limited as a result of inadequate resources.
161. In conclusion, the Minister commended the fruitful collaboration between the Commission and Cameroon, and promised to take into account the concerns raised by the Commission delegation.

MEETING WITH THE COORDINATOR OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME

162. The objective of the meeting with Pr. Dieudonné Oyono, Coordinator of the National Governance Programme (NGP) was to learn about the mandate of the NGP and to be reassured that it takes into account the gender dimension in the governance policy and that affirmative action measures are taken as provided for in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS.
163. Responding to the issues raised by the Commissioners, he indicated that the NGP was established in 1995 even though it was approved by the President of the Republic in 2000. Its main mandate is to establish partnership between the State, the private sector and CSOs.
164. Regarding gender mainstreaming, he indicated that the institution is gender conscious, adding that men and women complement each other and that the complementarity relationship is better expressed in the gender equality policy. He however stated that even though local customs have negative effects on women's rights, women themselves are the cause of women's problems. He was of the view that there is a massive mobilisation of women without concrete results. He recommended that women should be educated and sensitised, adding that the government is willing to approve women's requests that are properly presented.
165. Regarding HIV/AIDS, he stated that the NGP does not have a specific module on HIV/AIDS which is rather taken into account under general governance issues. Except for some consultation fees, he added, treatment is almost free in the country.
166. The Commissioners informed him that in some regions in the country, it was noted that medicines are in limited supply and there is a lack of medical personnel. Pr. Oyono agreed that the problem is as a result of poor functioning and non-compliance with the principles of decentralisation. He concluded that decentralisation has a significant role to play in combating HIV/AIDS, adding that people have to comply with the rules regarding prevention.

AUDIENCE WITH THE SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

167. The delegation met with the Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Cavaye Yeguie Djibril. The discussions focused on the objectives of the mission. He commended the fruitful collaboration between Cameroon and the Commission, and acknowledged that the situation of women in the country is not one of the best as a result of harmful traditional practices against women.

VISIT TO THE CHANTAL BIYA INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

168. The Commission delegation visited the Chantal Biya International Reference Centre for Research on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Management (CIRCB) in order to obtain relevant information regarding the work of the institution and its HIV/AIDS control activities.
169. The Head of General Administration indicated that the CIRCB was established on 17 February 2006 at the initiative of the First Lady of Cameroon, Mrs Chantal Biya. It is a research centre aimed at improving knowledge and the quality of health care and services for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
170. Regarding the functioning of the Centre, he indicated that the facility has four laboratories (immunology, molecular biology, systems biology and medical analysis) and an infirmary. He added that the laboratories are equipped with cutting-edge equipment which enables them to provide quality service.
171. On the issue of the management and confidentiality of results, Dr Judith Torimiro, Head of Molecular Biology Laboratory, underscored that confidentiality of results is strictly respected, and that the Centre has a procedure which must be followed by patients. She emphasised that measures are taken to ensure the protection of patients, personnel and working material. Moreover, there is an emergency protocol in the event of exposure to HIV which must be respected by the personnel concerned who has to rush immediately to the Yaoundé University Teaching Hospital for treatment.
172. Regarding the cost of treatment, the Centre's prices are very competitive. Diagnosis and treatment are free for pregnant women and children. However, there is an 80% subsidy for biological care. On the issue of plans to decentralize the Centre given that it is difficult for people living in remote areas to have access, the delegation was informed that the CIRCB has developed partnerships with health centres in the regions and prisons across the country.
173. As a result of these partnerships, several projects and programmes have been implemented such as the national early diagnosis programme which is available in six of the ten regions, and programmes for preventing mother-to-child transmission. Partnerships have also been established with sub-regional institutions working in the area of HIV/AIDS.
174. Regarding the financial resources of the CIRCB, even though the Centre's budget is provided by the government, it is also supported by the EU, AfDB, UNESCO, the Italian Government and other partners. Despite the various forms of support received, the Centre still faces financial challenges. In addition to the financial problems, there is the lack of qualified personnel across the country, poor orientation received by trainees, lack of basic research material in the country, lack of equipment (such as CD4 machines), lack of

protection for patent rights and the lack of policies to enable patients to benefit from the research conducted.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

175. The delegation was received by the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Public Health (MINSANTE), Mr Alim Hayatou on behalf of the Minister. The discussions focused on health issues in the country, in particular maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS control.
176. The Commissioners informed the Secretary of State of the health challenges faced by the population, in particular children living in the regions visited. He acknowledged the fact that the country faces a major problem in the areas of maternal, child and reproductive health. He attributed the problem to early marriage and early pregnancies brought about by the complex nature of the cultural, ethnic and social environment in the country. The government has adopted several health measures and development programmes to address the problem, including reactivating the training programme for traditional midwives in most regions across the country. The MINSANTE has also implemented awareness-raising programmes for diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, as well as training programmes for health workers.
177. Regarding HIV/AIDS control, Mr Alim Hayatou and his advisers indicated that the Government has put in place a 2011-2015 HIV/AIDS and STIs national strategic plan. The plan contains eight priority areas and its main focus is strengthening the prevention of mother-to-child and STIs transmission. This priority area targets vulnerable people, sex workers, uniformed personnel and prisoners. Moreover, the MINSANTE, in partnership with UNAIDS, the Islamic Bank and other institutions, contributes to organising sensitisation and training campaigns on HIV/AIDS for magistrates, and towards the inclusion of HIV/AIDS modules in university programmes.
178. Concerning HIV/AIDS treatment, Mr Hayatou said there are no specialised HIV/AIDS facilities. The government however provides treatment to thousands of people living with HIV, in particular pregnant women and children. He also indicated that there is a massive mobilisation of efforts towards the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.
179. He indicated that there are several challenges in the area of HIV/AIDS control, such as the lack of financial resources, lack of legislation on HIV/AIDS, discrimination and stigmatisation against people living with HIV/AIDS, harmful customs and traditions, and the limited number of CD4 machines. He concluded by commending the field work conducted by the members of the delegation and promised that the government will put in more effort to improve the health situation across the country.

MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE CAMEROON BAR ASSOCIATION

180. The Commission delegation was received by the President of the Cameroon Bar Association, Mr Francis Sama Asangana, accompanied by members of the bureau of the association. The discussions focused on the activities of the Cameroon Bar Association in the areas of human rights protection and HIV/AIDS control.
181. The President of the Bar Association indicated that for a long time the association was not much involved in human rights issues. He however reaffirmed that the association is conscious of the need to be actively involved in the protection of human rights. It is in this context, he said, that the new management team has decided to establish, as part of the association, a human rights committee having sub-committees to deal with new issues such as the protection of indigenous people and women.
182. With regard to the situation of women's rights, Ms Nana Patyswit indicated that religion and traditional practices are a source of human rights violations in the North Region, adding that most often these violations go unpunished as a result of the high cost of justice and the fact that the majority of the victims are under-educated citizens.
183. The Commissioners commended the willingness of the Bar Association to play a more active role in protecting human rights. However, they regretted the fact that Cameroonian lawyers are not involved in the work of the Commission. They underscored the significant contribution of lawyers to the success of the protective mandate of the Commission and reminded the Bar Association of its duty to advocate for the effective implementation of the instruments ratified by Cameroon.

MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY GENERAL AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

184. The Commission delegation was received by the Secretary General, Mr Baskouda Jean-Baptiste, on behalf of the Minister of Labour and Social Security. Accompanied by his advisers, Mr Baskouda and the Commissioners discussed HIV/AIDS control efforts in the area of employment.
185. Mr Baskouda indicated that a brainstorming exercise was conducted in 1998 on social security in Cameroon, which also took into account issues relating to HIV/AIDS. As a result, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSC) took several steps to protect workers living with HIV/AIDS. In 2005, a broad campaign was organised for big companies to combat discrimination and stigmatisation. The campaign led to the establishment of HIV/AIDS control committees in the various companies.
186. Mr Baskouda noted that in 2010, in collaboration with ILO, the Ministry prepared a programme to combat HIV/AIDS in the work place. Through this programme, several seminars were organised on HIV/AIDS and regional units were set up to monitor the implementation of the programme. Mr Adey Simon Fru, Head of Standards and International Cooperation Department, added that as a result of the ministry's activities,

several companies have signed protocols committing themselves to provide treatment to their workers living with HIV/AIDS.

187. The Secretary General further indicated that the Labour Code is being amended, taking into account women's protection and the fight against deadly diseases. With regard to social insurance, Mr Baskouda informed the delegation that a framework law is being prepared to provide coverage to 45% of workers as against the present rate of 10%.
188. Mr Baskouda pointed out that the ministry has implemented projects to combat the worst forms of child labour. The projects were initiated by ILO and have helped to re-educate close to 5,000 children.
189. The officials of the ministry also acknowledged that there are several instruments ratified by Cameroon which are not being implemented. Mr John Yewoli Forchu, Inspector General at the ministry underscored that out of the 189 International Labour Organisation conventions, Cameroon has ratified 49 of which only 44 are being implemented.
190. As for the reason why the country has not ratified the other conventions, the Secretary General indicated that the major challenges include delays in administrative procedures and lack of financial resources. The Commissioners took note of the challenges raised by Mr Baskouda and promised to make the necessary recommendations.

DEBRIEFING SESSION WITH THE MINPROFF

191. After meeting with almost all the personalities and CSOs involved in women's rights promotion and protection and HIV/AIDS control, the members of the delegation, in keeping with tradition, returned to inform the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family of their preliminary observations. On behalf of the Minister, they were received by Mrs Koung A Bissike Jacqueline, Minister of State Property and Land Tenure, accompanied by her advisers.
192. With regard to best practices in the protection of the rights of women, the Commissioners highlighted the government's efforts in the education of girls through the implementation of education projects in priority areas and the establishment of training centres for women's empowerment and the family. They also underscored the setting up of focal points and gender committees, as well as the organisation of campaigns for the issuance of birth certificates in remote areas.
193. Among the challenges, the Commissioners highlighted the limited number of health centres in remote areas which has led to an increase in child mortality rate, harmful customs and traditions promoted by traditional rulers, ineffective judicial assistance, problems of access to drinking water, violence against women, forced and early marriages, and women's limited participation in the management of public affairs.

194. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the Commissioners commended the achievements made by the government in its awareness-raising efforts through the establishment of local HIV/AIDS control committees. They also commended the several initiatives to provide HIV/AIDS care for orphans and vulnerable children. They welcomed the measures taken to ensure the confidentiality of the status of patients. They however regretted the limited funds which have slowed down sensitisation efforts, the limited number of CD4 machines, the poor working conditions of health workers and the increase in the HIV prevalence rate in the North Region.
195. After the presentation, the Minister commended the Commission for its work. She acknowledged that the challenges are still many, stating that these challenges should not undermine the efforts of the government. She concluded by promising that all the recommendations will be considered in detail.

DEBRIEFING SESSION WITH THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

196. The Honourable Commissioners informed the Minister of the conduct of their mission and expressed their gratitude to the Cameroonian authorities for taking steps to ensure the successful conduct of the mission. They indicated that the policy and programmes adopted by Cameroon on the promotion and protection of the rights of women and HIV/AIDS control are praiseworthy. They however emphasised that there are several challenges to be addressed, and the head of the delegation noted that these challenges will be included in a detailed mission report. She further stated that the report will also include the developments and challenges in the areas of women's rights promotion and HIV/AIDS control in Cameroon, as well as appropriate recommendations.
197. The Minister commended the members of the Commission delegation for their efforts and the Commission's dedication to promoting and protecting human rights in Cameroon. Mr Pierre Mokoko Mbonjo concluded by reassuring the delegation that the Government is looking forward to receiving the Commission's recommendations which will be carefully considered.

MEETING WITH THE MEDIA

198. The debriefing session with the Minister of External Relations was followed by a press conference given by the Honourable Commissioners. The conference was attended by close to a dozen journalists from the print and audio-visual media, and focused on the objectives of the mission, the Commission's mandate and the media's role and duty in human rights promotion. The press release issued at the end of the mission was widely disseminated.

AUDIENCE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

199. The Prime Minister, Mr Philemon Yang, granted an audience to the members of the Commission delegation. The discussions focused on the delegation's observations regarding women's rights protection and HIV/AIDS control.
200. The Commissioners commended the affirmative action measures taken by the government to promote the rights of women and combat HIV/AIDS. They also underscored several challenges, such as: delays in judicial reforms; the instruments of ratification of the Maputo Protocol which have not yet been deposited; delays in adopting some texts including the Personal and Family Code, the new Penal Code and the National Gender Policy; the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights which has not been ratified by Cameroon; and the existence of discriminatory provisions against women in the country's legal system.
201. The members of the Commission delegation regretted women's limited representation in the administration, diplomacy, magistracy and the police. They also highlighted the situation of indigenous populations such as the Mbororo and Pygmy women, and the existence of harmful traditional practices.
202. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the delegation pointed out the various challenges highlighted above with regard to the limited availability of resources, poor working conditions of health workers and the high HIV prevalence rate in the North Region.
203. The delegation commended the fruitful relations between Cameroon and the Commission and informed the Prime Minister that Cameroon is up to date with its periodic reports in accordance with the African Charter.
204. The Prime Minister commended the Commission for its role in promoting and protecting human rights in general, and promised that effective measures will be taken to implement the recommendations of the Commission.

**OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS ON THE SITUATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS
AND THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS, AND THOSE AT RISK,
VULNERABLE TO, AND AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS IN CAMEROON**

205. Through the meetings and working sessions held with stakeholders involved in human rights promotion and protection in Cameroon, in particular the Cameroonian authorities and CSOs, the Commission delegation was able to assess the progress made and the challenges regarding the situation of women's rights and the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, and those at risk, vulnerable to, and affected by HIV / AIDS in Cameroon.
206. An analysis of the meetings and documents available reveals that there is a genuine political will by the Government of Cameroon to promote and strengthen the protection of the rights of Cameroonian women and to make more effort to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Government's determination is evidenced by the implementation of several relevant plans, projects and programmes.
207. Regarding measures taken to promote girls' education, the Commission, in the area of education, notes the preparation and implementation of a sectoral integration strategy which takes into account the gender dimension; free public primary education through the abolition of school fees and the granting of minimum packages since 2010; the preparation and implementation of a national education gender policy; the implementation of a policy to grant bursaries to deserving female students; social mobilisation for girls' education; and the establishment of women's empowerment centres tasked with the intellectual, moral, civic and vocational education of underprivileged women, men, girls, boys and families.
208. The Commission notes with satisfaction the efforts made by the Government to support and build the capacity of pygmy women and commends the Minister of Social Affairs for inviting women of this community to discuss with the delegation.
209. With regard to combating violence against women, the Commission welcomes the concrete measures taken such as Cameroon's observance of the global campaign to combat violence against women, launched by the UN Secretary General; the establishment of a hotline to receive complaints from victims of violence; the preparation of a national strategy to combat gender-based violence; the preparation of a plan to eliminate female genital mutilation; and the establishment of local committees in remote areas.
210. The Commission welcomes the setting up of gender focal points and committees in all ministries, which is part of best practices towards mainstreaming gender in the national policies, plans and programmes.
211. The Cameroonian Government's efforts in the area of HIV/AIDS control are remarkable. Generally, these efforts have included a national HIV/AIDS control plan, awareness-raising activities, HIV/AIDS screening campaigns and treatment for people living with HIV in some parts of the country, as well as AIDS orphans.

212. The Commission commends Cameroon for its efforts to prevent mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission, in particular the Chantal Biya International Reference Centre.
213. In spite of the shortage of drugs as a result of several factors, the Government's policy of providing ARVs to infected persons, including prisoners, needs to be encouraged and commended.
214. However, despite the progress identified, there is still much to be done considering the country's potential.
215. In the area of legislation, Cameroon ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2009, but had not deposited the instruments of ratification at the time of the mission. However, it is worthy to note and commend the Government's promptness in depositing these instruments shortly after the mission was undertaken.
216. Moreover, several important human rights texts such as the Personal and Family Code, the new Penal Code and the National Gender Programme have not been adopted after several years and have been affected by administrative delays.
217. With regard to women's participation in the management of public affairs, the Commission notes that Cameroon is below the 30% quota for women. Women's limited participation is even worse with regard to diplomacy, administration, magistracy, the military, police and gendarmerie which are still the preserve of men. The same situation applies to the National Assembly, the Government and municipal councillors.
218. In the area of health, there is still a limited number of health centres. People living in remote areas have to cover long distances to have access to health care, which results in home births, inadequate follow-up for pregnant women and a high maternal and child mortality rate.
219. Problems of access to loans also constitute a major challenge to women's empowerment. The situation of people living in remote areas, in particular indigenous people, remains delicate as a result of poverty. Women in these communities lack access to drinking water, education, health care, housing, land and public justice services.
220. The Commission also identified the existence of some traditional and religious practices which constitute violations of the rights of women and girls such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, widowhood rites and inheritance practices.
221. It notes with regret the impunity enjoyed by some traditional rulers involved in human rights violations, discrimination against widows, violence against women, and early and forced marriages.

222. The Commission notes that there is overcrowding and a high number of women and children in detention at the Garoua prison.
223. Regarding HIV/AIDS, the Commission identified several examples of best practices and commends the progress made as a result of the concerted efforts of Cameroon and its partners in conducting awareness-raising and screening campaigns, as well as providing ARV drugs.
224. The Commission regrets the limited budget allocated to HIV/AIDS control, limited number of CD4 machines, poor working conditions of health workers, and the increase in HIV prevalence rate in some parts of the country.
225. The Commission also regrets the discrimination and stigmatisation against people living with HIV/AIDS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

226. Following the mission and taking into account the situation of the rights of women in Cameroon, as well as the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CAMEROON

On legislation

- Take legislative measures to domesticate the provisions of the Maputo Protocol;
- Ratify the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and make the declaration under Article 34 (6) of the Protocol;
- Ratify the ILO Convention on human rights which are yet to be ratified and ensure their effective implementation;
- Ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Finalise and adopt without delay the Personal and Family Code, the new Criminal Code and the National Gender Policy;
- Enact a 30% quota law to ensure women's greater representation in elective and administrative positions;
- Amend the Electoral Code to include a gender dimension, in particular by including provisions that promote women's greater participation as candidates;
- Enact specific legislation to criminalise violence against women, including domestic violence;
- Enact legislation on reproductive health;

On education

- Increase the number of primary and secondary schools in remote parts of the country;
- Make the payment of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fees optional;
- Provide additional human and financial resources to centres for women's empowerment and the family;
- Facilitate access to education for indigenous populations, in particular indigenous women, taking into account their lifestyle;

On health

- Increase the number of health centres in remote areas of the country, providing them with qualified personnel and adequate equipment, and ensuring maternal and child health;
- Increase the training of traditional midwives and provide them with first aid kits;

On access to drinking water and housing

- Take appropriate measures to ensure access to drinking water to women living in regions and areas far from the capital;

- Implement a policy to promote the construction of social housing for people living in remote areas in the country in order to strengthen the protection of the health of women and children;
- Adopt affirmative action measures to ensure women's access to land, property and productive resources;

On the fight against harmful traditional and religious practices

- Raise the awareness of religious and traditional leaders by conducting nationwide campaigns on the rights of women, and involve them in programmes to combat violence against women;
- Prosecute locally-elected officials and traditional rulers involved in human rights violations, in particular violations of the rights of women and girls;
- Increase the minimum age of marriage for girls and put in place mechanisms for the prevention and reporting of forced and early marriages;
- Promote the creation of indigenous women's associations and provide them with the necessary resources for training, as well as financial resources to strengthen their human rights promotion activities;
- Adopt and ensure the effective implementation of legislative measures to prohibit female genital mutilation and harmful widowhood practices;
- Adopt the necessary measures to protect the rights of widows;

On women's empowerment

- Establish special credit schemes for women in banks and financial institutions and ensure their availability in the most remote areas of the country;
- Establish women's empowerment funds to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic power;

On conditions of detention

- Build special prisons for women and children;
- Include gynaecologists among medical experts visiting prisons, in order to ensure the reproductive health care of female prisoners;
- Improve the quality of meals and the quantity of food rations;

On relations with the NCHRF and CSOs

- Work in close collaboration with the NCHRF and CSOs;
- Support and build the capacity of the NCHRF and CSOs;

On health and HIV/AIDS

- Increase the number of health centres in remote areas of the country;
- Increase HIV/AIDS awareness-raising campaigns;
- Improve the working and living conditions of health workers;
- Provide health centres with the necessary HIV/AIDS equipment, in particular CD4 machines;

- Ensure the proper management of resources allocated to the fight against HIV/AIDS and the availability of ARVs, in particular in remote parts of the country;
- Train magistrates and uniformed personnel on HIV/AIDS;
- Effectively combat all forms of discrimination and stigmatisation against people living with HIV/AIDS;

Strengthen and increase government programmes and centres to provide care to HIV/AIDS orphans;

TO UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

- Build the capacity of magistrates, uniformed personnel and prison officers in the areas of protecting women's rights and combating HIV/AIDS;
- Implement an advocacy programme, with the participation of civil society organisations, to promote the implementation of human rights recommendations made to the Cameroonian authorities;

TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

- Increase awareness-raising programmes and training activities in the areas of protecting the rights of women and combating HIV/AIDS;
- Work in close collaboration with members of government and CSOs;
- Extend activities to the most remote areas of the country by establishing offices across the country;
- Strengthen partnership with regional and international human rights organisations;

TO THE CAMEROON BAR ASSOCIATION

- Advocate for Cameroonian authorities to ensure that the country ratifies the relevant international and regional women's rights instruments;
- Play an active role in the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular the rights of vulnerable groups such as women;
- Refer to the provisions of regional and international conventions duly ratified by Cameroon when dealing with cases in the national courts;
- Establish constructive dialogue with the Commission and other human rights regional institutions and participate in the activities of the latter;

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN THE AREAS OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS

- Continue to be actively involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of women and the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- Popularise instruments to promote and protect the rights of women and people living with HIV/AIDS;
- Set up networks to effectively implement the activities of CSOs;

- Work in collaboration with the Cameroonian authorities and the NCHRF;
- Work in conformity with the laws in force;
- Increase the capacity of CSOs in project design and fundraising;
- Apply for observer status with the Commission and participate in the activities of the Commission, as well as those of the NGO Forum which meets two times a year on the margins of the Ordinary Sessions of the Commission.