



CAMEROON



57th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Theme: “ELIMINATION AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS”

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**MINISTER OF WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND FAMILY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

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Mme. Chairperson,

I wish to extend to you the hearty congratulations of the Cameroon delegation for the meticulous organization of this Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. These congratulations are also addressed to your team members for their commitment, dedication and efficiency at work.

Mme. Chairperson,

The theme of the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women is "**Elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls.**" Fighting violence against women and girls is a permanent concern in our Head of State His Excellency Paul BIYA's planning for a sustainable future, within the framework of his "Major Accomplishments" policy.

The 2011 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey recorded the following main results as concerns violence against women:

- Since the age of 15, more than half of women (55%) have experienced physical violence, mainly perpetrated by their current or most recent husbands/partners, but also by their mother/father's wife or their father/mother's husband and/or their sister/brother;
- Among women who have already had sexual intercourse, 20% did so for the first time against their will, especially those who had the intercourse prior to the age of 15 (30%);
- Globally, 34% of women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence; 8% have experienced sexual violence and 21% have experienced both physical and sexual violence;
- Among women who have already been in a union, 60% have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their current or most recent husband;

- Among women who have experienced marital violence, 43% have had injuries as a result of this violence.

Violence against women and girls in Cameroon is perpetrated by several members of the society, including parents, family members, spouses, public authorities and community members. Its causes are numerous: customs and traditions that condone some specific cases of violence against women (husband's right to beating, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation, early marriage, wife inheritance etc.), differentiation in the socialization of boys and girls, poor access to resources and lack of control over these resources, low representation of women in decision-making spheres, poverty, low level of education of women, and ignorance by these women of their rights and existing means of redress.

The impact of this violence against women as concerns physical and mental health is felt through real trauma suffered by the victims. At the economic level, this impact is felt through significant financial costs resulting from induced expenses and work stoppages consequently leading to a decrease in productivity. This violence also prevents women victims to participate in public life and other development activities in the country.

The government, in collaboration with development partners and civil society, has taken a number of steps to effectively fight violence against women and girls.

Regarding the fight against sexual and domestic violence, actions carried out have aimed at building the capacities of stakeholders, disseminating international, regional and national legal instruments and producing and disseminating educational materials. Precisely, these actions include:

- The production of 300 radio programs in local languages and in English and French, with the involvement of local administrative and traditional authorities as well as civil society,
- The organization in 2009 by the National Commission for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of a seminar on the elimination of widowhood rites and other harmful practices against women, intended for traditional rulers,
- The mobilization of youths, by the said National Commission for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in partnership with the Ministry of Youths Affairs and Civic Education and the *Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace* and with support from UN-Women, in view of fighting violence against girls through youth caravans, media-covered debates and distribution of awareness kits,
- The creation of a *national network to fight violence against women* made up of civil society organizations, with support from the French Embassy and UN-Women,
- The initiative of the NGO *Women in Alternative Action (WAA)* dubbed "*Queen for Peace Initiative*" implemented through the organization from November 28 to 30, 2012 of a forum that saw the active participation of 100 queens (wives of traditional rulers) from the 10 Regions of Cameroon. These queens were chosen because of the traditional authority vested in them, their position beside traditional rulers as counselors and conveyers of positive values and also because they are listened to by the kings. This forum helped to highlight the different forms of violence against women and girls across the country. Also, the capacities of the queens were strengthened in the areas of advocacy, the promotion of women's rights and gender, to enable them effectively fight violence against women and girls in their Regions.

- The queens made a commitment to work with their husbands (the traditional rulers);
- The declaration by Imams and Muslim Dignitaries of Cameroon for the for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls,
 - The campaign against rape and incest launched in 2010 for a period of 03 years, to encourage victims to denounce perpetrators so that they can be punished by justice,
 - Cameroon's adherence to the global campaign to fight violence against women, launched by the UN Secretary General and which launching in Cameroon took place on December 7, 2012 under the patronage of the President of the Republic, represented by the Minister of State, Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals, with a climb to the top of Mount Febe, the highest mountain summit in the city of Yaounde. This climb, that was personally led by the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family, the Resident Representative of UNDP, the Coordinator of the Global Campaign to combat violence against women in Africa, saw the participation of about a thousand people from various social strata,
 - The granting of agro-pastoral equipment and funding to associations of excision practitioners to help them reconvert to other income-generating activities,
 - The establishment of 21 functional local committees to fight against FGM in communities which are home to this practice. Material and financial support has been given to the committees. The established local committees, which are made up of administrative, political, traditional and religious authorities, former excision practitioners and some victims, are contributing to the increase of local awareness in the fight against this phenomenon,

- The establishment of a platform to fight gender-based violence involving the forces of law and order, civil society and sector ministries.

With regard to the fight against the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the preparation of a sector plan to promote an environment conducive to respect for women's rights within the framework of the implementation of the National Gender Policy is contributing to the prevention of violence against women and girls.

On February 06 each year, together with the international community, Cameroon celebrates "Zero Tolerance Day" to Female Genital Mutilation with particular emphasis laid these past four years (2009-2012) on awareness and advocacy actions among administrative, political, traditional and religious authorities.

Moreover, the training of community leaders, notably religious and traditional leaders, officials of communication units in administrative services and community outreach agents in focus localities has enabled their greater involvement in raising public awareness on the ill-effects of the practice of FGM. At the end of the training, the various actors issued a statement of undertaking for the implementation of recommendations formulated.

In addition, the Government, with support from technical and financial partners, notably UN-WOMEN and UNFPA, has conducted awareness campaigns in four (04) FGM focus localities. These campaigns led to the symbolic hand-over of knives by converted FGM practitioners in 2007.

Other measures include:

- The establishment of "toll free" telephone lines in the 10 Regions for distress calls, with the objective of reducing, by at least 10% per year, cases of domestic violence,

- The issuance of a Circular-letter, prescribing to magistrates the effective implementation of legal provisions and a better appreciation of facts in cases of rape and incest,
- The existence of support centers for women in distress managed by civil society organizations (Women's life center of the *Association for the Fight against Violence against Women* and other existing centers at the level of Regions) with support from the government and technical and financial partners,
- Capacity building for personnel of the judiciary, court auxiliaries and judicial officers including magistrates, lawyers, bailiffs and notaries on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in order to secure access to justice for women victims of violence,
- Legal assistance for widows in the follow-up of inheritance-related procedures.

Regarding the fight against prostitution, the exploitation of female prostitution is punishable under Article 294 on the criminalization of procuring. The provisions of this Article prescribe the closure of prostitution establishments by the judge. In addition, the minor girl is specially protected from the moral hazard of prostitution under Article 345 of the same Code, which punishes the fact of having a child under 18 years reside or work in a house or establishment where prostitution is practiced.

The Government is raising awareness among girls on immoral and deviant behavior such as infanticide, abortion, alcoholism, drug consumption, indecent dressing and prostitution. It is continuing actions for the socio-economic conversion of prostitutes and 'free women', through their training in Income Generating Activities (IGA) and their organization into Common Initiative Groups (CIG). Some of them have

received funding for their establishment. Many were converted through their recruitment into the public service and the private sector.

The designing of a socio-economic integration project for teenage mothers and 'free girls' who are victims of violence known as the "*Aunties*" project, established in 2009, has enabled the socio-economic integration of at least 400 teenage mothers and 'free girls' after 5 years.

Mme. Chairperson,

Despite their relevance, strategies and actions implemented are witnessing some limitations which the Government intends to address through innovative actions.

At the legal level, we can mention:

- The disparity in various instruments,
- The inadequate dissemination of legal instruments for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children;
- The lack of harmonization of domestic legislation with international legal instruments;
- The mixed application of legal and regulatory provisions by social actors;
- The coexistence of written law and custom;
- The reluctance of some judicial actors;
- The lack of litigation.

At the institutional level, we can mention:

- The inadequate implementation of the collaboration platform between various stakeholders in the fight against gender-based violence;
- The shortage of resource persons, in number and quality, for the management of victims of violence;

- The limited resources allocated to the provision of legal assistance to women;
- The complex nature of legal proceedings and the means of proof;
- The shortage of shelter and management facilities for women in distress;
- The inadequate involvement of traditional and religious authorities as well as other opinion leaders in the fight against gender-based violence.

To this we can add:

- The inadequate capacities of forces of law and order and health personnel, who stand as gateways to cases of violence against women and girls in terms of identification and reporting of such cases,
- The persistence of harmful traditional practices (FGM practices, early and forced marriages, widowhood rites, taboos and dietary restrictions, etc.),
- The discrimination and differentiation in the socialization and education of girls and boys.

Mme. Chairperson,

The situational analysis of violence against women and girls reveals that the situation of these two social groups in Cameroon is yet to reach the expected level. However, with efforts deployed by the Government, development partners and civil society, the set objectives will certainly be achieved.

For this purpose, the following actions are recommended in terms of prospects:

- The reform of the normative framework aimed at harmonizing domestic laws with international and regional legal instruments ratified by Cameroon,

- The implementation of the platform for joint intervention in the fight against gender-based violence,
- The enhancement of the dissemination of the national strategy to fight against gender-based violence;
- The continuation of training for journalists, forces of law and order, health personnel, 'queen-mothers' and traditional rulers, magistrates and all those concerned with the issue of violence against women and girls,

Conscious of the few weaknesses which have just been identified, and also conscious of its potentials, Cameroon is committed to continuing awareness raising, education, training and advocacy actions for the prevention and the elimination of violence against women and girls. We count on the multifaceted support of UN system organizations, and other development partners, to effectively fight against this phenomenon.

Beyond all these actions, the issue of violence against women and young girls should be analyzed in a different and broader perspective.

As a matter of fact, the problem of violence against women and young girls is most present in an environment of poverty.

Although the improvement of the normative and legal framework is relevant, it is also necessary to tackle issues deriving from the economic status of women and young girls in the system of production, which is a structural factor.

Capacity-building through education and employment is, in our viewpoint, the best way to provide to women and young girls with the best tools for their empowerment, hence their emancipation from violence.

Thanks for your kind attention.