



PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT /INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL TRAINING CENTER (PaWED/IATC

**P O Box 12414 Yaoundé Center.
House no. 468, street no. 8556 Mendong.
Telephone: +237677758345
Email: pawedmailing@gmail.com**

STATEMENT

**UPR Pre-session on the Republic of Cameroon
Geneva, Friday September 1st 2023
Delivered by: Wazeh Nicoline Nwenushi Tumasang
The Rights of Women and girls in the shadow of crises**

1- Presentation of the Organisation

This statement is delivered on behalf of Pathways for Women's Empowerment and Development (PaWED) a not-for-profit, independent, non-partisan, research and advocacy organization set up to advance and protect human rights, particularly the rights of women, girls and other social vulnerable groups and persons in Cameroon. We have participated in reviewing specific and general human rights issues on Cameroon since 2018.

2- National consultations for the drafting of the national report

I am not aware of any national consultation for the drafting of the national report.

3- Plan of the Statement

This statement addresses the following issues: (1) Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, (2) Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (3) Discrimination Against Women in Decision-making at all Levels. (women's participation in public life)

4- Statement

I. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

A. Follow-up to the previous review

During the UPR 3rd Cycle in 2018 recommendations regarding different aspects of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against women and girls were made to Cameroon by 12 countries.

We welcome the reaffirmation of gender equality in the National Development Strategy (NDS30) adopted in 2020 and other public sector policies; confirming the necessity of gender-responsive budgeting through MINPROFF and starting the elaboration of a new National Gender Policy Document and Plan of Actions for the implementation of instruments against GBV; and The elaboration of a National Action Plan for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation to intensify awareness to eradicate FGM among all key actors. Despite these admirable efforts to fight against SGBV, the absence of political will, lack of adequate resources and fight against impunity of perpetrators of GBV, failure to disaggregate gender concerns in interventions and projects persist; Hence, violence against women and girls in Cameroon continues in the form of sexual violence (rape) 20%, intimate partner violence 65% physical and emotional violence 28%, economic abuse (denial of resources, services and opportunities) 25%, widowhood rites and widow's rights, early marriages 9%, female genital mutilations and political or institutional violence. In 2022 alone, 979,000 people were estimated in need of protection from GBV resulting from sexual violence as a consequence of ongoing insecurity from Armed conflicts, in North West and South West and Far North regions, food crisis associated with climate change, natural disasters such as floods, outbreaks of diseases such as cholera which continue to weaken the protection of women and girls and exacerbate GBV risks. Negative coping strategies such as forced marriage and survival sex resulting from loss of livelihoods and extremely hard living conditions as well as the targeting of services infrastructures and community-based support networks and services by belligerents has also exacerbated GBV risk. Women and girls are exposed to unprecedented sexual violence including rape and exploitation due to forced displacement. The disruption of GBV services in most of the restive regions has led to a drop of functionality of more than 35% of GBV protection services. The above statistics call for urgent need to fight impunity, strengthen policies and interventions on GBV in Cameroon especially in times of emergencies.

B. Recommendations

We urge that Sexual and Gender-Based Violence are made prominent issues in the upcoming UPR, with focus on impunity, protection and access to psychosocial support services for victims and survivors. We therefore recommend that the Government of the Republic of Cameroon should:

- a. Enact a comprehensive law on the fight against Sexual Gender-Based Violence and consider rape committed by Defense and security forces an aggravating circumstance.

- b. Finalize the long overdue project on the Code of Persons and the Family

II. Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

A. Follow-up to the previous review

During the previous UPR cycle, 12 countries raised concerns on the SRHR of women, girls and non- binary identity and sexual orientation in Cameroon. They recommended the removal of restriction on abortion rights and decriminalisation of same sex marriage among others. Honduras emphasised the need to adopt comprehensive legislative and political measures to ensure access to health services for persons with HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive education for women and girls, particularly in rural areas.

We welcome improved family planning services offered by the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) including supply and security of contraceptive and maternal health products; and move towards universal health coverage

There are persistent high rates of pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmittable diseases especially among Internally Displaced women and girls who have little information about family planning and are scared to go to the hospital due to stigma, language barriers or lack of identity documents and financial constraints. Abortion can only be legal under section 339 (2) of the Penal Code following issuance of a certificate by the prosecutor; and Non-binary sexual orientation or gender identity is criminalised.

B. Recommendations

For SRHR to be guaranteed for all citizens particularly women and girls, we hereby formulate the following recommendations to the government of the Republic of Cameroon:

- a. To Repeal Legislative provisions that restrict and criminalize abortion.
- b. To Repeal legislative provisions that criminalize consensual same-sex conduct between adults.
- c. Develop and expand education on sexuality and reproductive health especially in schools and rural community.

III. Women's Participation in Political and in Public Life.

A. Follow-up to the previous review

Women's participation in decision-making at all Levels is fundamental to democratic governance especially as they constitute a numerical edge. Bulgaria call on Cameroon to take steps for the adequate representation of women in political life, and encourage their economic empowerment. We welcome the project for the

elaboration of the Second Generation National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; the mentioning of gender equality in the National Development Strategy; the development of a women's political participation manual by MINPROFF; and the second generation National Gender Policy. We however regret the absence of a legislated affirmative quota for women in elective and nominated positions, the absence of a women's representation quota in the electoral code.

Discrimination against women in political and public life remains conspicuously high in Cameroon. This is compounded by insecurity from the ongoing political turmoil, lack of political will and absence of a gender quota in the Electoral Code. Only 39 of 360 Mayors, 61 of 180 Parliamentarians, 26 of 100 Senators 11 of 65 Regional councilors and 0 of 14 City Mayors are women. The Judiciary is headed in majority by men, all governors of the 10 regions, all 10 Secretary Generals, 10 Inspector Generals, and 10 Chief of Cabinets are men. Only 2 out of 58 Senior Divisional Officers and 21 of 360 Divisional Officers are women. Women's concerns have been literally ignored in crisis management processes including the 2018 decree instituting the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, 2019 Major National Dialogue, conflict and COVID 19 humanitarian plans.

B. Recommendations

We hereby formulate the following recommendations to the government of the Republic of Cameroon to ensure women's participation in political and in public life:

- a. Introduce gender quotas to bridge the representation gap and inconsistency.
- b. Promote women and girl's participation in humanitarian crisis, conflict mitigation and peacebuilding processes, giving due consideration to the needs of women with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups and persons by mainstreaming gender and disability in humanitarian action plans.