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In behalf of

African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

And

The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

Contribution for the

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Cameroon

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ABOUT THE SUBMITTING ORGANIZATIONS

African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (AAJW) is a public benefit organization registered in South Africa with membership in Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (EAJW) is a charity registered in the United Kingdom (No. 1085157) with membership throughout the member States of the Council of Europe.

These associations work together to promote the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in various parts of the world, particularly when Jehovah's Witnesses face violations of such rights. This submission is prepared and submitted jointly.

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

This submission to the Human Rights Council on Cameroon highlights human rights issues and current failures to implement accepted recommendations by Cameroon during the previous Universal Periodic Review cycle.

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Cameroon and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the Government of Cameroon to:

- (1) Ensure that all children have access to education without discrimination;
- (2) Ensure that access to education for children from minorities is guaranteed and respected without discrimination;
- (3) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Cameroon, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention), and improve children’s access to education without discrimination for all citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been in Cameroon for about 80 years. The first local religious association was legally registered in 1962. In 1969, a national office was opened in Douala, Akwa quarter. Close to 90,000 people currently attend meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses for worship in Cameroon.

II. ISSUES

Restriction of Religious Freedom for Children

2. The Republic of Cameroon acceded to the Covenant on 27 June 1984. Article 18.4 provides:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

Article 27 provides:

“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion.”

3. Cameroon signed the Convention on 25 September 1990 and ratified its signature on 11 January 1993. Article 2 provides:

“1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

“2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.”

Article 14.1 provides:

“States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

Article 28.1 provides:

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, ... on the basis of equal opportunity.”

Article 30 provides:

“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion.”

4. Schoolchildren who are Jehovah's Witnesses continue to face challenges with compulsory singing of the national anthem at school and other activities that offend their conscience, based on sincerely held religious beliefs. Because of obeying the dictates of conscience, numerous young Jehovah's Witnesses have been expelled from school and subsequently have been denied their right to basic education. The following incidents, spanning several years, illustrate the ongoing situation.
5. On 3 November 2015, Onesime Ndouandjie Nsupuh (16), one of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bandjoun, West Region, was expelled from school for refusing to participate in patriotic activities because of his sincere religious beliefs. An application to overturn this decision was denied by the Administrative Court on 17 December 2021, and an appeal to the Supreme Court was filed on 14 January 2022.
6. On 7 November 2016, three young Jehovah's Witness siblings in Ndikinimeki, Centre Region – Ruben (19), Jeannine (16) and Pascaline (16) Nyama – were expelled from school for refusing to participate in patriotic activities because of their sincere religious beliefs. An application to overturn this decision was denied by the Administrative Court on 21 December 2021, and an appeal to the Supreme Court was filed on 3 November 2022.
7. On 7 November 2016, Andree Loraine Monalomou Bagnek (19), one of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ndikinimeki, Centre Region, was expelled from school for refusing to participate in patriotic activities because of her sincere religious beliefs. On 14 June 2022, the Administrative Court of Yaounde rejected an application to overturn the school's decision, and an appeal to the Supreme Court was filed on 3 November 2022.

8. On 19 October 2018, three Jehovah's Witnesses – Suzanne Sunday (12), Louise Falonne Kimogui N'sayi (12) and Bernadette Lois Ngo Mbanga (16) – were expelled from school in Logbadjeck, Littoral Region, for refusing to participate in patriotic activities because of their sincere religious beliefs. On 16 July 2020, the Administrative Court ruled in their favour and cancelled the school's decision, but did not award damages. On 30 June 2021, an application was filed at the Tribunal administratif de Douala, seeking compensation. This is still pending.
9. In December 2018, Chacine Mbeidega (16), one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was expelled from school in Dibombari, Littoral Region, for not singing the national anthem because of her sincere religious beliefs. On 2 December 2021, a court found that the plaintiff had never received the defendant's submissions and the hearing was adjourned. On 16 January 2023, the plaintiff finally received the State's statement of defence, and a response was filed on 30 January 2023. The matter is still pending.
10. In June 2019, three Jehovah's Witnesses – Johann Karl Nyangon (11), Jephthé Awono (16) and Albert Nko'o Scaba (13) – were expelled from school in Campo, South West Region, for refusal to participate in patriotic activities because of their sincere religious beliefs. A complaint was filed with the Administrative Court of Ebolowa on 1 June 2020. The matter is still pending.
11. On 26 February 2021, Adrien N'kunga (17), one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was expelled from school in Bafoussam, Littoral Region, for not singing the national anthem because of his sincere religious beliefs. A complaint was filed with the Administrative Court. The matter is still pending.
12. On 8 February 2021, eight young Jehovah's Witnesses – Josiane Gnougui Akono (15), Ngondoua Akono (15), Louise Rolline Zang Akono (13), Marc Laniel Ella Akono (11), Karel Audrey Easo Onomo (12), Oeustache Phinéas Owono Mbate (15), Jean De Dieu Oyono Amougou (16) and Marceline Adelaïde Oyono Akono (14) – were expelled from high school in Melangue 1 for respectfully declining to participate in a patriotic parade. The students completed the school year but at its conclusion discovered the expulsion decision on their report cards. A complaint was filed with the Administrative Court. The matter is still pending.
13. On 17 November 2021, Julienne Ngo Djal (16), one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was expelled from the Government High School of Bipindi, South Region, for conscientiously refusing to participate in patriotic ceremonies because of her sincere religious beliefs. A complaint was filed with the Administrative Court. The matter is still pending.
14. On 14 February 2022, three young Jehovah's Witnesses – Patience Kentung (19), Mavel Kentung (17) and Merlin Ojong (18) – were expelled from high school in Mabeta for respectfully declining to participate in a patriotic parade. The school principal called the parents of the children to the school. Patience and both of her parents went to see the principal. They also represented Merlin, who is living with her relative, Clara Mosimai. The principal stated that in order to resume classes, these children must sign a pledge to participate in all school activities including the parade and the singing of the national anthem. The children were unable to accept this condition and were expelled immediately. The school principal said that the parents must meet the deputy prefect to obtain authorization for the children to continue to follow the courses. Patience's father sent a letter to the school principal requesting the reasons for expulsion, and the matter is not yet resolved.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Following its previous review in 2018, Cameroon supported numerous specific recommendations made by member States.
16. The following recommendations that were accepted by Cameroon are directly relevant to the discriminatory expulsion and subsequent denial of education to Jehovah’s Witness schoolchildren for their respectfully declining to follow practices that offend their conscience, based on sincerely held religious beliefs:
17. Congo recommended: “Guarantee all children an equal footing in access to free primary education.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.150)
18. Armenia recommended: “Take further measures to improve children’s access to education, without discrimination.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.151)
19. Madagascar recommended: “Set up a national action plan and a strategy aimed at ensuring that minorities have access to appropriate school programmes that respect their way of life and their culture.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.152)
20. Madagascar recommended: “Ensure that access to education for children from minorities is guaranteed and respected, without discrimination.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.153)
21. Serbia recommended: “Take measures to provide free primary education and equal access for all children.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.160)
22. South Africa recommended: “Continue to prioritize child protection as a fundamental priority for the State.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.183)
23. Georgia recommended: “Strengthen its policies towards ensuring full protection for the rights of minorities.” (A/HRC/39/15/Add.1, para. 121.194)
24. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Cameroon have not found that these accepted recommendations have been implemented in such a way as to put an end to discriminatory expulsions and subsequent denial of education to their schoolchildren for respectfully declining to follow practices that strongly offend their conscience, based on sincerely held religious beliefs.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Cameroon and as a worldwide organization express concern for the compulsory singing of the national anthem in schools and other activities that offend their sincere conscientious religious beliefs. They respectfully request the Government of Cameroon to take the necessary steps to:
 - (1) Ensure that all children have access to education without discrimination;
 - (2) Ensure that access to education for children from minorities is guaranteed and respected without discrimination;

- (3) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Cameroon, the Covenant and the Convention, and improve children's access to education without discrimination for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.