

Cameroon Civil Society

Declaration of Cameroonian Civil Society of 10 December 2024.

International Human Rights Day 2024

"No to the restriction of our fundamental freedoms: No suspension of CSOs".

Cameroon is currently going through a decisive stage in its history. On the eve of a presidential election predicted by most analysts to be "high-risk", Cameroon has just had a very tumultuous appearance before the United Nations Committee against Torture in November 2024. Cameroon will again appear before the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2025 to answer for the implementation of the duly ratified International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The experts on these two committees were briefed on the situation in Cameroon through alternative reports provided by human rights organisations such as Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme, Mandela Center International, the Central African Human Rights Defenders Network (REDHAC) and others.

It is in this context that we learned with surprise and dismay, through social networks, of the suspension by the Minister of Territorial Administration (MINAT) of civil society organisations working mainly in the field of human rights protection, in particular REDHAC.

For REDHAC, these are Order no. 000121 of 06 December 2024 suspending the organisation for 03 months and Order no. 000122 of 06 December 2024 declaring REDHAC null and void and banning its activities.

Concerning REACH OUT, this is Order no. 000120 of 06 December 2024 suspending it for a period of 03 months.

- Whereas the right to freedom of association, like all fundamental freedoms, is guaranteed by the Constitution of Cameroon and the legal provisions in force,
- **Considering** that these rights are also guaranteed by international texts duly ratified by Cameroon, in particular the ICCPR,
- **Noting that** Reach Out is a humanitarian organisation that has been working tirelessly for peace in the South West and North West regions since the start of the Anglophone crisis in 2017. Thanks to Reach Out, thousands of families in these regions have been able to access essential goods and services, with Reach Out braving the highly dangerous and insecure environment to deliver food and other goods to victims of the crisis. Reach Out is working with the United Nations and numerous bilateral organisations to provide these services.
- **Recalling** that REDHAC is one of the best known human rights organisations, not only in Cameroon but also in eight (08) Central African countries, namely the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Chad, Central African Republic and Cameroon. It is a non-political, non-profit organisation based in Douala, Bali, at 17 Rue 1108;
- **Pointing out that** the credibility of REDHAC's work has enabled it to be granted observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of the African Union under No. OBS/424 in accordance with Resolution CADHP/Res/33/XXv/99;
- **Noting** that the reasons given for suspending REDHAC are unfounded and fanciful. In particular
 - *Illicit and exorbitant funding and mismatch with business profile*
 - *Activities likely to undermine the integrity of the national financial system*
 - *Failure to comply with the legal provisions governing the operation of a non-profit organisation*
 - *Lack of justification and destination of funding received*

- **Noting** that, without notifying REDHAC of the said decrees, MINAT has committed yet another flagrant violation of the law by ordering its decentralised services to seal REDHAC's headquarters
- **Noting** that, in an Ubuesque confusion, MINAT would like to position itself as master of the basis or ceiling of funding for the activities of human rights organisations, and moreover, master of the regularisation of the financial operations of human rights organisations which are approved by their board of directors and their general assembly in accordance with the law.
- **Noting** that MINAT would like to take the place of COBAC (the Central African Financial Regulator) in declaring peremptorily that REDHAC's activities are likely to undermine the integrity of the national financial system
- **Recalling** that Regulation No. 01/CEMAC/UMAC/CMC of 11 April 2016 on the prevention and suppression of money laundering and terrorist financing and proliferation in Central Africa does not in any way give the Minister of Territorial Administration the power to initiate any proceedings against offenders (the A.N.I.F, the monetary and financial authorities and the judicial authorities being the only authorities able to do so);
- **Recalling further** that MINAT's assertions against REDHAC are a flagrant violation of the **FATF Recommendations** (International Standards on Combating Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Proliferation adopted in February 2012) which, in Recommendation 8 invites countries to "*...have targeted, proportionate and risk-based measures in place, without unduly disrupting or discouraging the legitimate activities of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), in accordance with the risk-based approach, it being understood that, for the FATF, , these organisations contribute to the well-being of populations by making up for the failings of public authorities...*"
- **Noting** that MINAT, in its Order No 000121/A/MINAT of 06 December 2024, refers to *REDHAC's "failure to comply with the legal provisions relating to the operation of a non-profit-making organisation"*, without however fixing REDHAC on the said provisions;
- **Noting** that MINAT also refers to "*the lack of justification for the use of the funding received*", without however having questioned REDHAC
- **Noting** that REDHAC's various activity reports, which are regularly sent to the Cameroonian authorities, provide sufficient information on the use of its funds and whether this use is in line with REDHAC's legal objectives.
- **Stressing that** the press release makes a totally unfounded allegation which it did not take the trouble to submit to the REDHAC's contradiction in order to request its explanations, and that at no time did MINAT carry out a verification in compliance with the adversarial principle which is required in all matters when an individual decision is likely to give rise to a grievance
- **Recalling** that a few years ago MINAT had already announced its opposition to REDHAC in a public statement, speaking of hidden funding to destabilise Cameroon,
- **Noting** therefore that the decrees of 06 December 2024 are the materialization of a relentless assault on civil society and all organizations engaged in the defence of human rights in Cameroon,
- **Recalling** that, as a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the one hand, and to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance on the other, Cameroon must comply with the *Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Commission) adopted at its 60th Ordinary Session held in Niamey, Niger, from 8 to 22 May 2017.*
- **Recalling the Bamako Declaration** of 03 November 2000, in which the States of the OIF undertake to recognise the place and facilitate the involvement of civil society, in order to enable them to play their role as actors in a balanced political life, in the collective interest.

- **Noting** that these latest actions by MINAT add to a long list of infringements of freedoms, as illustrated by the episcopal attempts to control political parties (UPC, CPP, PCRN, etc.).
- **Considering** that these actions plunge Cameroon into a dynamic of shrinking civic space and the installation of dictatorship,
- **Recalling** that MINAT's actions constitute genuine threats to peace and stability in Cameroon
- **Noting** that these situations, which arise just a few months before the presidential elections that Cameroonians are eagerly awaiting, are undeniable indicators of a desire to neutralise civil society committed to human rights before these crucial elections,

Cameroonian Civil Society (Organisations and Personalities), on this International Human Rights Day 2024,

- **Recalls** that the suspension and banning orders issued against these organisations are a flagrant and blatant violation of the right to freedom of association in Cameroon.
- **Reminds** MINAT that it has a duty to protect and not to restrict hard-won constitutional freedoms, still less to create rules that are contrary to the laws of the Republic;
- **Condemns** in the strongest terms this umpteenth attack on civil liberties in Cameroon;
- **Condemns** these recurrent attempts to restrict civic space;
- **Demands** the immediate lifting of these measures, which do no honour to the democratic process regularly presented as an asset for Cameroon
- **Reiterates** its commitment to respect for human rights, and therefore reassures you of its determination to fight for the protection of an open civic space.
- **Reiterates** its determination to combat all acts by the public authorities that infringe fundamental freedoms,
- **Calls** on all human rights organisations to join the mobilisation to demand the restoration of the rights of suspended CSOs
- **Calls** on Cameroonians not to make any concessions on their rights;
- **Reassures** the public of its determination to make use of the provisions of our criminal code to resist attempts by any authority to take away citizens' rights.
- **Calls** on the international community to pay particular attention to the situation of fundamental freedoms and to exert greater pressure on Cameroon to respect the commitments it has made through the ratification of international human rights instruments.
- From 10 December 2024, launches a *strategic unit to monitor fundamental freedoms*.
- Finally, Cameroonian Civil Society condemns in the strongest terms this restrictive approach to civic space at a time when Cameroon is about to embark on a new high-risk electoral cycle in 2025, which requires a more visible climate of appeasement.

Cameroonian Civil Society calls on the Government of Cameroon to rescind these decisions, which are incompatible with democracy.

Signed in Yaoundé on 10 December 2024

Signed :

- 1- Me Alice Nkom, Co-PCA of REDHAC
- 2- Prof ABA'A OYONO Jean Calvin, Academic
- 3- Prof Nadine Machikou, Academic
- 4- Me MBAH Eric MBAH, Lawyer President of the Cameroon Bar Association

- 5- Me AKERE MUNA, Lawyer, Former Head of the Bar Association
- 6- Ms Cyrille Rolande Bechon, Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme
- 7- Dr Hilaire Kamga, Civil Society Platform for Democracy
- 8- Mr Jean Claude FOGNO, Mandela Center International
- 9- Mr Philippe NANGA, Un Monde Avenir
- 10- Mr Amadu Tarnteh, Coalition for Human Rights and Peace in the NOSO and affected regions
- 11- Mr Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla, CHRDA
- 12- Mr Paul Joel KAMTCHANG , ADISI -Cameroon
- 13- Mr Flaubert Djateng, Coordinator of Zenü Network
- 14- Mr Jean Marc BIKOKO, CSP and Tournons La Page
- 15- Claude Assira , Lawyer
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- 20- Me Simh Emmanue, Lawyer
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- 22- Me Dorcas Nkongme , Lawyer
- 23- Sadrack Woappi , Avaocat
- 24- Dr Richard Makon , University
- 25- Dr David Eboutou , University
- 26- Mr Jean Takougang , Teacher / Trade Unionist
- 27- Mr Fogueü FOGUITO , Positive GENERATION
- 28- Mr Joseph POUAGAM , Goodwill Cameroun
- 29- Mr Charlie TCHIKANDA , Ligue des droits et Libertés
- 30- Mr Marcel OMAN , Dynamique Citoyenne
- 31- Mr Alex Gustave AZEBAZE , Journalist
- 32- Dr Samuel Mathieu TANG , Lawyer
- 33- Me Tamfu Richard, Lawyer
- 34- Me Ndoki Michelle, Lawyer
- 35- Fabrice Lena, Activist
- 36- Fabien Kengne, Lawyer
- 37- Me Oum, Lawyer
- 38- Augusta EPANYA, Feminist
- 39- Charlotte Tchakounté, Lawyer
- 40- Mbengan Nkai Njee, Journalist
- 41- Me Assirou, Lawyer
- 42- Roger Kaffo Fokou, Writer
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- 44- Jean Genestar Priso, Cameroon patriotic Diaspora
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- 47- Mr BOUENZE MENGANG Stéphane , Association pour l'Epanouissement des Jeunes Femmes (Association for the Development of Young Women)
- 48- Mr Clovis KOAGNE , FIDEPE
- 49- Mr Arnaud DZOKOU TENE; FIPDDH
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- 52- Mamadou Boba Dodo, Cameroun O'bosso

- 53- Mme Bergeline Domou, Activist
- 54- Franck Essi, Stant Up for Cameroun
- 55- Remi Tassing, Activist
- 56- Père Ludovic Lado
- 57- Michel Noulowe
- 58- Dr Rose Ndengue
- 59- Dr Kuate Edi Donal, Academic
- 60- Rodrigue Soffo, Journalist
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- 96- M MAGOUA Samuel, Solutions Cameroun
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- 98- Mme Alice SADIO , Activiste
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