



REFERENCE: DB/follow-up/Cameroon/66

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Excellency,

In my capacity as Rapporteur for Follow-up on Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), I have the honour to refer to the examination of the combined fourth and fifth periodic report of the Republic of Cameroon at the Committee's fifty-seventh session, held in February 2014. At the end of that session, the Committee's concluding observations were transmitted to your Permanent Mission (CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5). You may recall that in the concluding observations, the Committee requested the Republic of Cameroon to provide, within two years, written information on the steps undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 17 and 19 of the concluding observations.

The Committee welcomes the follow-up report received with 10-month delay in December 2016 (CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5/Add.1) under the CEDAW follow-up procedure. At its sixty-sixth session, held in March 2017 in Geneva, the Committee examined this follow-up report and adopted the following assessment.

Regarding the recommendation made in **paragraph 17** of the concluding observations, recommending that the State party “put in place, without delay and within a clear time frame, a comprehensive strategy, in conformity with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention, to eliminate stereotypes and harmful practices that discriminate against women, such as child and forced marriages; female genital mutilation; breast ironing; the stigmatization of widows and widowhood rites; and the kidnapping of children, especially young girls, for the sale of organs or magic/religious practices; and, in collaboration with civil society, the media, health, education and social systems and other relevant professional groups, and traditional leaders, raise awareness about the adverse effects of harmful practices, targeting women and girls as well as men and boys at all levels of society”: The State party referred to the existence of a global strategy to combat stereotypes, harmful practices and discrimination, which is focused on prevention, victim assistance and institutional development. It also informed on corresponding implementation frameworks, such as the National Plan of Action to Combat Female Genital Mutilation and the National Strategy on Fighting Gender-Based Violence.

With regards to awareness raising, the State party referred to the dissemination of the aforementioned implementation frameworks, as well as of a number of legal instruments on women's rights aimed at the legislative branch of the government. The State party moreover

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reported on two awareness-raising campaigns, the “16 Days of Activism Campaign to end violence against women and children” and the “Zero Tolerance on Female Genital Mutilation” aimed at general public. It moreover referred to capacity building sessions for community leaders, members of women’s and men’s associations, as well as radio programmes in local languages on women’s rights, which tackle sexist discrimination and aim to combat widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, early and/or forced marriage and other harmful practices. It further referred to 500 socio-legal clinics, aimed at raising awareness of men and local communities on legislation and existing judicial remedies. It further reported on capacity building of police officers on the assistance of survivors of violence in a humanitarian context, an initiative which will be followed-up on and extended to judges. The State party also indicated that it is currently promoting the engagement of men for the elimination of discrimination against women, as well as the establishment of men’s organizations to advocate for women’s rights. In addition, the State party indicated it uses the International day of the girl child to sensitize communities on harmful practices, such as early and forced marriage. It also informed that studies are currently being conducted to evaluate the root causes for the persistence of harmful practices.

The Committee welcomes the numerous awareness raising and capacity building initiatives taken in the context of the global strategy to combat stereotypes, harmful practices and discrimination, in collaboration with the media and addressed at the legislative branch of government, law enforcement personnel and communities. It also notes the conduct of a study on the root causes of the persistence of harmful practices. It however regrets that some harmful practices are not targeted, such as breast ironing and the kidnapping of children for the sale of organs. The Committee moreover regrets the lack of information on the involvement of the health and social systems in these activities. The Committee considers that the State party took significant steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been implemented**.

In relation to the recommendation that the State party “undertake an assessment of the impact of the measures taken in order to identify shortcomings and improve them in a clear time frame”: The Committee **did not receive any information** to assess whether the recommendation has been implemented.

With regards to the recommendation that the State party “ensure the effective implementation of article 356 of the Penal Code criminalizing perpetrators of forced or early marriages; adopt legal provisions specifically criminalizing female genital mutilation, breast ironing and discriminatory widowhood rites; and include adequate sanctions for perpetrators of such acts”: The State party informed that the new Penal Code raises the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years, thereby harmonising it with the legal marriage age of boys. It moreover indicated that continuous judicial control of the legal nature of marriage allows the implementation of this legal age. The State party also indicated that article 277-1 of the new Penal Code explicitly criminalizes genital mutilation, and that breast-ironing is criminalized under article 277-2 (on impairment of organ development). Regarding the criminalization of discriminatory widowhood rites, the State party indicated that article 180-1 criminalizes the withholding of the reversal pension from the surviving partner, and that article 358-1 criminalizes the expulsion of a spouse from the conjugal home either by the other spouse or another person, which according to the State party would apply to the expulsion of a widow. The State party also indicated that when widowhood rites are harmful to the physical integrity of the victims, perpetrators can be prosecuted under the criminal provisions on violence.

The Committee welcomes the criminalization with adequate sanctions for forced and early marriage, female genital mutilation, breast ironing, as well as, expelling widows from the conjugal home and withholding of reversal pension from widows. The Committee also notes that perpetrators of widowhood rites harmful to the physical integrity can be prosecuted under criminal provisions on violence. It is concerned, however, that insufficient information is provided on the criminalization of discriminatory widowhood rites and on corresponding sanctions. The

Committee considers that the State party took significant steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been implemented**.

In relation to the recommendation that the State party “arrest, prosecute and punish perpetrators of kidnapping of children, including young girls, for the sale of organs or magic/religious practices”: The State party indicated that cases of kidnapping of children for the magic / religious practices brought to the attention of the authorities are investigated and result in convictions if perpetrators are found guilty. The State party further indicated that currently, two cases of kidnapping for magic/religious practices are pending before the High Court of Dschang (in the West of the Country).

The Committee welcomes the State party’s will to prosecute cases of kidnapping of children for magic / religious practices. It however regrets the lack of information on intervention in cases of kidnapping of children for the sale of organs in the report, as well as insufficient proactiveness in the investigation of such offences. The Committee considers that the State party took some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

The Committee recommends that, in relation to paragraph 17 of the concluding observations, the State party provide, **in its next periodic report**, information on further actions taken to:

1. Undertake an assessment of the impact of the measures taken to eliminate stereotypes and harmful practices that discriminate against women, in order to identify shortcomings and improve them in a clear time frame.
2. Step up the criminalization of discriminatory widowhood rites; and include adequate sanctions for perpetrators of such acts.
3. Proactively investigate cases of kidnapping of children for sale of organ or magic / religious practices and arrest, prosecute and punish perpetrators of kidnapping of children, including young girls, for the sale of organs.

In regards to the recommendation made in **paragraph 19** of the concluding observations “to ensure the effective implementation of the national strategy to prevent and combat violence against women “: The State party reported, inter alia, on implemented awareness-raising activities listed under implementation measures to paragraph 17 in order to show efforts made for the implementation of the National Strategy on Fighting Gender-Based Violence. The State party also reported on measures taken to tackle discrimination in employment, such as subsidies, assistance and counselling services for women, capacity building workshops and efforts made to popularize women’s rights in communities. In regards to victim assistance, the State party referred to services granted survivors of gender-based violence against women through reception centers, as well as counselling in socio-legal clinics. Regarding the pillar on institutional development of this strategy, the State party indicated that it has established gender clubs, gender desks and call centres in schools, universities, police stations, as well as Centers for the Promotion of Women and Family in order to track violations of women’s rights and collaborate with the relevant administrations to find solutions. The State party furthermore informed that a network of professionals has been created to raise awareness on women’s rights, and that 30 new civil society organisations working on the elimination of gender-based violence, as well as a sub-group working on the elimination of gender-based violence in a humanitarian context have been established. The State party acknowledged that additional resources will be needed for the implementation and strengthening of the strategy, especially in the light of the humanitarian crisis following the conflicts in neighbouring states and terrorist violence, leading to the displacement of many families, in particular women and girls. In this regard, the State party referred to the recently

established programme to accelerate the prevention of gender-based violence against women and care for victims in particularly affected regions, as well as in refugee camps. The State party also added that it will address domestic violence and violence within the community through this programme.

The Committee welcomes the various outcomes of the national strategy to prevent violence against women and assist victims, and the signature of a new programme to accelerate the prevention of gender-based violence against women. It considers that the recommendation **has been implemented**.

Regarding the recommendation “to effectively investigate all cases of violence against women and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators”: The State party indicated that legal and procedural measures are in place to adequately prosecute cases of violence against women. It provides data on prosecution and conviction of cases of sexual violence (157 condemnations for 485 cases opened). The State party also provided data on other forms of physical violence against women and indicates that these have also led to convictions and prosecutions, but without providing concrete data on their conviction and prosecution.

The Committee welcomes that cases of violence against women are prosecuted and convicted in the State party. It however regrets the limited number of convictions with regard to sexual violence, as well as that the lack of data on conviction and prosecution for the other forms of physical violence. The Committee considers that the State party took some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

In regards to the recommendation that the State party “adopt a comprehensive law on violence against women; ensure that domestic violence, including marital rape, is criminalized; prohibit sexual harassment at school and in the workplace and provide for adequate sanctions; and repeal the legal provision exempting rapists from punishment if they subsequently marry the victim”: The State party indicated that it has not adopted a specific law on gender-based violence against women, but that it has integrated all provisions on gender-based violence against women in the penal code. The State party further elaborated on the criminalization of and sanctions for sexual harassment, provided by article 302-1 of the Penal Code. It also indicated that the provision exempting rapists from punishment if they subsequently marry the victim has been repealed.

The Committee welcomes the criminalization of sexual harassment and the abolishment of the provision acquitting perpetrators of rape if they marry the victim. The Committee however regrets the lack of information on the criminalization of domestic violence, including marital rape, and information on specific prohibition of sexual harassment at school or at the workplace. The Committee considers that the State party took some steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been partially implemented**.

Regarding the recommendation “to ensure that women victims of domestic violence have full access to protection orders and legal remedies instead of mediation”: The Committee **did not receive any information** to assess whether the recommendation has been implemented.

In relation to the recommendation that the State party “provide assistance to victims of gender-based violence, including medical and psychological support, as well as shelter, counselling and rehabilitation services, throughout the territory of the State party”: The State party indicated that it has put in place reception and care centers (some of which dispose of a hotline) for women in distress / victims of violence in some regions of the State party, which as the State party indicated provide victims with all services required through the recommendation.

The Committee welcomes the establishment of reception and care centers for women in distress/victims of violence. It regrets, however, that they have been established in a few regions only. The Committee nevertheless considers that the State party took significant steps to implement the recommendation. It considers that the recommendation **has been implemented**.

In regards to the recommendation “to remove the policy on ‘indecent dressing’”: The State party indicated that it has never adopted a law prohibiting a certain form of clothing. It acknowledges that an information campaign on private indecency (*Atteinte à l'outrage privé et à la pudeur*, Article 295 of the Penal Code) has been conducted, which the State party claims should protect young people in general, and young girls in particular against rape. It indicated however that no young person has been prosecuted or threatened because of their clothing.

The Committee notes that so-called “indecent dressing” has not led to any forms of prosecution. It however regrets the lack of information on plans to ensure the cessation of the campaign. It considers that the recommendation **has not been implemented**.

Regarding the recommendation that the State party “provide training for the police and other law enforcement officials, health and social workers, and the judiciary on the application of legal provisions aimed at combating violence against women”: The State party informed about the training of 150 police officers on the assistance of survivors of violence, and on plans to repeat such training and extend them to judges. It also informed about the dissemination of the provisions of the penal code providing for women’s rights, through sessions aimed at law enforcement officers, health personnel, lawyers, members of Parliament, academics, teachers, community and traditional leaders, politicians and the Ministry of Culture in different regions. The State party however acknowledged persistent financial restraints, which limit the implementation of its policies in this field.

The Committee welcomes the training provided to police and other law enforcement officials, health officials and the judiciary on the penal code, which according to the information by the State party is the relevant piece of legislation regarding gender-based violence against women. It considers that the recommendation **has been implemented**.

The Committee recommends that, in relation to paragraph 19 of the concluding observations, the State party provide, **in its next periodic report**, information on further actions taken to:

1. Effectively investigate all cases of violence against women and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators.
2. Prohibit sexual harassment at school and in the workplace and provide for adequate sanctions.
3. Criminalize domestic violence, including marital rape, and ensure that women victims of domestic violence have full access to protection orders and legal remedies instead of mediation.
4. Extend medical and psychological support, as well as shelter, counselling and rehabilitation services, for women in distress / victims of violence provide throughout the territory of the State party.
5. Ensure that no campaign on “indecent dressing” is carried out in future.



Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Gbedemah'.

Hilary Gbedemah
Rapporteur on follow-up
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women