

Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, and the Prevention of Torture in Prisons in the North West Region of Cameroon

On Friday 16 February 2023, Cameroon Human Rights Commission organized a concertation workshop at Mondial Hotel conference hall, Bamenda, North West Region with the aim to seek solutions in promoting and protecting human rights, as well as, in preventing the phenomenon of torture experienced within the prisons of North West Region of Cameroon. The attendees included MAHSRA's representative among 27 other participants representing different affiliated Civil Society organisations (CSOs), and 6 representatives from the press.

Mr. Sinsai Victor, the North West regional branch head of CHRC, welcomed the participants and encouraged them to adopt people-centred approach strategies in order to raise awareness on human rights and improve their interference and advocacy monitoring wherever they go. The current acting regional coordinator of the Project to Improve the Conditions for Exercising Freedoms in Cameroon (PICEF), Mr Gaby Ambo, enlightened the participants on the role of the Cameroon Freedom Observatory (CFO) which is to investigate and report cases of violations, and most especially, the North West and South West regional branches that need to report on violations plaguing the on-going armed conflict. Among such violations, he defined categories that fall under the right to life, property, education, freedom, leisure and privacy, and mentioned over 200 reported and unresolved cases of summary killings, torture, kidnappings, abductions, ransom taking, molestations and sexual violence. He also emphasised on the need for improved strategic collaboration and understanding between human rights defenders and government institutions in order not to be perceived as adversaries. Barrister Luma Elvis Brown in turn, highlighted issues regarding the reality of practice in detention centres. He explained that suspects sometimes were held in several unsanitary premises for longer periods without knowing the reason for their custody and without possibility to access legal assistants, and also that, a perpetual abuse of the texts on acts of terrorism under the 2014 law have been deployed to conduct arbitrary arrests and the victims kept within over-crowded prisons. This led to some deliberative conclusions in which the CSOs were advised to develop strategies and programmes to regularly visit and monitor detention centres.

Further within the sessions, the CHRC regional branch head presented an action plan to promote human rights and prevent torture in prison, for the year 2023, which was amended and adopted by the CSO representations. A practical session was additional organised in which the participants, constituted in 4 groups, learned and exchanged techniques of facilitating, monitoring, reporting and collecting data on suspected human right violations across the seven divisions of Northwest Region, with respect to their indentified domains of competence. Developmental partners and strategies to obtain support in North West region and beyond were identified.

Conclusively, participants came up with recommendations which included that:

- CSOs should develop new strategies and create committees to regularly visit the detention centres, monitor and report what they observe in order to drive the change needed.
- CSOs in the North West region should collaborate and work in partnership with each other in order to share information, skills and best practice.
- Cameroon Human Right Commission should train CSOs in the North West region on human rights, and on how to mount projects and obtain funds from donors.
- The North West regional branch office of CHRC needs to organise quarterly meeting with CSOs every last week of the quarter.

The workshop ended at about 5pm with all participants satisfied that the objectives were met and hoping that the recommendations and action plan adopted will be implemented soonest and constantly evaluated to get the best outcome.

By
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