



Submission in view of the Universal Periodic Review of Cameroon Women and girls' rights in crises areas

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¹ A description of the submitting organisations is attached in annex 1

Introduction: Background information

1. Over ten years ago, the government of Cameroon pledged for the country to become an emerging economy by 2035.² Yet, as outlined in key documents such as its development strategy 2020-2030, the State continues to face key challenges.³ Cameroon is indeed facing multiple, complex and protracted security crises, as well as an important refugee influx in 9 out of 10 regions of the country.⁴ Since 2014, the Far North is affected by the presence of Boko Haram, which continues to periodically engage in attacks against civilians, hamper humanitarian access and attempt to recruit the local population.⁵ Tensions continue also in the North-West and South-West Regions, where the so-called "Anglophone crisis" has been undergoing since 2016 and where identity grievances continue to feed into separatist groups.⁶
2. All the above-mentioned crises worsen the vulnerabilities of parts of the population, such as women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, gender-based violence, lack of access to education and persistence of traditional harmful practices such as child early and forced marriages. The government often expresses its will to place gender equality as a top priority and has ratified several international human rights instrument to promote and protect women and girl's rights such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Nevertheless, the political and legal commitments are not yet matched in practice, as the country ranked 141 out of 189 countries in the gender inequality index (GII) in 2019.⁷ In view of Cameroon's fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, this report addresses remaining gaps to women and girls' rights in crises areas and suggests recommendations to the government of Cameroon, so that it can make progress towards the realisation of gender equality.
3. The present report focuses on some of the key areas that perpetuate women's inequalities and discrimination in crises areas. It was the result of a close cooperation

²The World Bank. 2022. *Cameroon: Systematic Country Diagnostic - An Update*. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/446021657067054458/cameroon-systematic-country-diagnostic-an-update>.

³Republic of Cameroon. 2020. *National Development Strategy 2020-2030*. <https://effectivecooperation.org/content/cameroon-national-development-strategy-2020-2030>.

⁴UNICEF. 2023. *Humanitarian Action for Children - Cameroon*. <https://www.unicef.org/media/132001/file/2023-HAC-Cameroon.pdf>.

⁵ The World Bank. 2022. *Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

⁶ The World Bank. 2022. *Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

⁷Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*. IASC. https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/data_on_gender_equality_in_cameroon-hno_2020-17_oct_19.pdf.

process between 14 civil society organisations, which reunited on multiple occasions to exchange on the main conclusions of the report.

Implementation of recommendations from the previous cycle and remaining gaps

4. In the last UPR cycle, Cameroon received 196 recommendations by States, of which 51 on women and/or girls. The State supported all of them except eight, it noted seven and rejected a recommendation on revising discriminatory laws on the management of family goods (Articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code) (see Annex 2).⁸
5. In the five years since last review, Cameroon's strategy for the promotion of gender equality, the so-called "Politique Genre 2011-2020" timelapse concluded and, at the time of writing, its renewal process is being finalised. On the other hand, the State adopted its National Development Strategy 2020-2030. While it is regrettable that women and girls were not mainstreamed in the document, section 4.5.4 clearly outlines Cameroon's priorities for the promotion of gender equality until 2030, for which the government strives to: (1) continue its efforts to guarantee equal access to education and information, (2) reinforce programs favouring women entrepreneurship, (3) intensify negotiations with the banking sector to ensure women's access to loans, (4) intensify efforts to combat gender-based violence, (5) establish principles to ensure better representations of women and girls in political life, (6) continue strengthening the institutional frame for the promotion and protection of women's rights.⁹
6. All six chapters below are directly linked to Cameroon's 6 main objectives. They seek to reflect on the remaining gaps since the last review, with a focus on crises areas and suggest recommendations to bolster Cameroon's achievement of its 2030 objectives, both nationally and internationally.

1. Gender-based violence: general considerations

7. Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Yet, it goes widely unpunished due to lack of reporting and adequate remedy. In international law, the duty of states to

⁸ See Matrix of recommendations

⁹ Republic of Cameroon. 2020. *National Development Strategy*.

protect women from violence can be found in multiple instruments that Cameroon ratified: from the ICCPR, which clearly states that no one shall be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment (Art. 7) to more specific instruments such as CEDAW, which committee recognised, through general recommendations 12 and 19, that violence against women is a severe form of discrimination against women that is prohibited under international law.¹⁰ The Beijing Declaration also recognised that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of gender equality and called on States to take full measures to eliminate it. Lastly, girls are specifically protected from all forms of physical or mental violence in Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

8. Cameroon adheres to the gender-based violence definition set forth in international instruments and has acknowledged the multiple challenges it faces domestically on multiple occasions. At its last review, Cameroon accepted all 7 recommendations directly related to GBV, from adopting a specific law, to intensifying its efforts on the matter. It also committed to take measures to protect displaced and refugee women and girls against all forms of exploitation (through recommendation 121.195).
9. While it is true that the 2016 Penal Code reinforced the national legislation on gender - based violence, legislative gaps persist on this issue. For example, the country still lacks provisions on spousal rape. Recognising the need for more effective actions against GBV, the authorities recently adopted the National Strategy and Action Plan against gender-based violence (2022-2026).¹¹ Its main, ambitious, objective is to contribute to the reduction of at least half of the GBV cases by 2026 through the reinforcement of prevention mechanism, a holistic approach to survivors, better data collection and collaboration between the different actors involved.¹² Nevertheless, legislative loopholes on violence against women persist.
10. While the National Strategy must be welcomed, important gaps remain in crises areas, where violence is omnipresent. Cameroon in fact continues to have a complex humanitarian situation, especially in the North-West, South-West, East and Far North. While the Strategy acknowledges this, there is a lack of targeted objectives for the concerned regions. In fact, crises see an aggravation of the vulnerabilities to GBV due to: (1) the splitting of families, with the subsequent disappearance of support systems at the community level, (2) the lack of or fragility of the institutions present on the territory, (3) the climate of impunity, (4) the necessary dependence of displaced population.¹³

¹⁰ OHCHR. "Using the International and Regional Legal Framework to Stop All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls." March 8, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/03/using-international-and-regional-legal-framework-stop-all-forms-violenceagainst#:~:text=Though%20violence%20against%20women%20was,is%20prohibited%20under%20international%20law.>

¹¹ Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Stratégie Nationale De Lutte Contre Les Violences Basées Sur Le Genre (2022-2026)*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

11. Gender-based violence can be used as a weapon in conflicts, a tool to torture and humiliate a person, a group, or a community.¹⁴ This is the case in crises situations in Cameroon as women in the Far North, South-West and North-West are more likely to be subjected to physical abuse and rape, denial of resources and opportunities, as well as traditional harmful practices.¹⁵ While the National Strategy identified intimate partners as the first cause of violence (in 64% of cases), a study conducted by ALDEPA showed that 66% of women identified Boko Haram members as their perpetrators.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in the majority of cases, survivors still stressed that the perpetrators were persons who were supposed to make their lives “safer.” This trend is also present in the North-West, South-West regions, where there has been an increase in domestic violence, which can be attributed to the reversal in gender roles and men’s restrictions on freedom of movement due to the security situation.¹⁷ In order to reaffirm their “superiority,” some men resort to economic violence by keeping women’s IDs and passports, in an attempt to restrict their freedom of movement.¹⁸
12. While the authorities’ commitments are noteworthy, there is still too little implication of the State in preventing, addressing, and providing accountability for gender-based violence. Despite the existence of structures to respond to the needs of survivors, those are either absent in most crises’ areas, dysfunctional, inaccessible due to insecurity, or underfunded. Their effectiveness is then worsened by the fact that a large number of women affected by crises are not aware of their existence or refuse to reach out for help due to fear of stigmatisation.¹⁹ Stigmatisation is indeed still a reality, as 40% of survivors in the Far North continue to face discrimination and rejection from their communities.²⁰ More is therefore still to be done in order to combat social stigma and the perceptions of survivors in communities.
13. Lastly, the National Strategy to combat gender-based violence does not include special measures for IDPs and refugees, although they are at even greater risk of sexual violence, as they share shelter, water points, latrines, and showers with others, thus reducing their privacy. In some areas, the water supply is insufficient and those in charge of collecting waters ought to walk long distances, with further risks for their safety.²¹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram Dans La Region De L'extreme-nord: Diagnostic, Defis Et Recommandations*.

¹⁶ ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*.

¹⁷ Nyangono, Ernestine J. 2021. *Evaluation Des Mecanismes. De Lutte Contre Les Violences Basees Sur Le Genre Dans Le Grand-nord*. NKFU Policy Institute. <https://nkafu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/EVALUATION-DES-MECANISMES-DE-LUTTE-CONTRE-LES-VIOLENCES-BASEES-SUR-LE-GENRE-DANS-LE-GRAND-NORD-DU-CAMEROUN.pdf>.

¹⁸ Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Stratégie Nationale De Lutte Contre Les VBG*.

¹⁹ ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*.

2. Traditional harmful practices: female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage

14. Traditional harmful practices are some of the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, these include female genital mutilation (FGM), child early and forced marriage (CEFM) and practices such as honour killings. Cameroon recognises harmful traditional practices as one of the main forms of gender-based violence in the country.²²

Female Genital Mutilation

15. FGM infringes on the rights to life and to physical integrity set forth in Article 9 of the ICCPR, Article 19 of the CRC as well as the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as set forth in Article 12 of the ICESCR. In addition, as a State party to CEDAW, Cameroon is bound to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation, or enterprise, and to repeal all national provisions which constitute discrimination against women (Art.2). Consequently, Cameroon is also bound to take all measures to end FGM in the country.

16. At the last review, Cameroon received 3 recommendations directly pertaining to FGM, which invited the State to fully implement art. 356 of the Penal Code of 2016, which penalizes anyone performing FGM and ensure that the necessary resources be allocated for the implementation of its strategic plan to end FGM. The authorities accepted all of them.

17. Since the last review, no new data was collected at the national level on the incidence of FGM in the country. The latest numbers date back to 2011, when 1.4% women in Cameroon were estimated to have been cut, the highest proportion of which in the Far North, with 5%.²³ The most prevalent type of FGM was the excision of the clitoris (type 1).²⁴

18. In 2022, the government adopted a new National Plan for the elimination of FGM, with the objective to improve the level of awareness, both in formal and informal settings, on the illegality of the practice while guaranteeing better care of affected populations and better implementation of the 2016 legislation. In the strategy, the authorities recognise that rates of FGM are higher in crises areas, but the lack of updated data at the national

²² Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Stratégie Nationale De Lutte Contre Les VBG*.

²³ Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Stratégie Nationale De Lutte Contre Les VBG*.

²⁴ Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Plan D'action National Pour L'Elimination Des Mutilations Genitales Feminines Au Cameroun (2022-2026)*.

level, which was last collected before the beginning of the multiple security crises in the country, is an obstacle to designing better programmes to tackle the issue. Data collection should therefore be a priority.

19. In addition, it is acknowledged in the National Action Plan that FGM is more prevalent in rural areas than urban areas and that refugee populations have continued to carry out the practice. As such, the vulgarisation of all documents as well as their translation into a multiplicity of languages, is urgent and necessary to improve Cameroon's battle against FGM. So far, the response has also centred on a top-down approach to FGM, with little engagement of the communities concerned, which has proven to be a more effective. In order to fully eradicate FGM, the government should favour trust-building, community-centred approaches.

Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)

20. Child marriage refers to any formal or informal union between a child under the age of 18, either with another child or with an adult.²⁵ It disproportionately affects girls, robbing them of their childhood and impacting all their human rights, from the right of education to their right to health. In International law, CEFM is prohibited by CEDAW Article 16 and is also a breach of article 10 of the ICESCR, as well as article 23 of the ICCPR which state clearly that marriage must be entered with the free consent of spouses.
21. In Cameroon, the legislation on CEFM is still incoherent. Article 356 of the Penal Code upholds the international standard and bans marriage before the age of 18. However, Article 144 and 145 of the Civil Code allow marriage for girls at the age of 15 and even less in some circumstances considered as compelling for marriage.²⁶ Because of this, Cameroon had received eight recommendations related to child marriage, of which it noted one, from Zimbabwe, which requested the authorities to end the drafting of the new national policy on the family in order to once and for all clarify the question of CEFM (121.167).
22. Due to the legal inconsistency, the situation of CEFM in Cameroon, remains worrying. The last population census in 2018 reported that 11% of women in Cameroon were married before the age of 15 and 30% before the age of 18.²⁷ The authorities also noted the existing correlation between low education levels and the rate of CEFM, as well as a wide gap between rural and urban areas.²⁸

²⁵ UNICEF. 2022. *Child Marriage*. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>.

²⁶ Ayuk, Bessem. "IHRDA, APDEL Sue Cameroon for Upholding Laws that Enable Child Marriage." IHRDA, December 9, 2021. <https://www.ihrda.org/2021/12/ihrda-apdel-sue-cameroon-for-upholding-laws-that-enable-child-marriage/>.

²⁷ Republic of Cameroon. 2020. *National Development Strategy*.

²⁸ Ibid.

23. In crises areas, CEFM is even more prevalent, often due to (1) Fear of kidnapping or sexual assault by terrorist groups. (2) Fear of early pregnancies which could impact the family's reputation. (3) Puberty coupled with a lack of education, which triggers communities into considering that a girl will be "ready for marriage" if she has a rapid physical development.²⁹ When insecurity is rampant and girls are internally displaced, their protection systems are dismantled, which therefore trigger families into seeking marriage as a form of protection. Civil Society organisations have been at the forefront of preventing CEFM in those areas, but more efforts are required by the State to vulgarise important documents on the matter and align its legislation with international law.

3. Access to justice and mental health services

24. The right to a remedy for victims of human rights violations is enshrined in multiple documents ratified by Cameroon, such as article 2 of the ICCPR and article 39 of the CRC. When it comes to survivors of GBV, assistance is a necessity to ensure that their other human rights are upheld. Despite non-binding, the protection, prevention and recovery pillars of the UNSCR 1325 also stress the importance of access to justice in conflict areas. In the third UPR cycle, Cameroon received one recommendation in this regard, focusing on its need to improve women's access to justice as well as medical and psychosocial assistance.

25. Cameroon recognises that a survivors-centred holistic and human rights based approach is fundamental.³⁰ The National Strategy to end GBV 2022-2026 seeks to implement a holistic response, including: healthcare services, mental health services, access to justice and economic assistance.³¹ Despite the political will, and the existence of structures to respond to the needs of survivors, the majority does not look for help or speak about the harm suffered for the reasons outlined in the section above.³² Those who dare to speak, usually first ask their families for help, who, when not discriminatory, are seldom informed about the procedure to follow or suggest to stay silent.³³ Even when women are informed about their rights, and willing to report, the structures in crises areas are seldom equipped with qualified personnel who could provide them with the adequate assistance and resources.³⁴ Mental health is completely overlooked, and judicial assistance is lacking. Sometimes, those supposed to provide survivors with assistance become perpetrators themselves, by harassing those seeking help.³⁵ In addition, in crises and rural areas the coexisting of national and customary laws as well as the inaccessibility of tribunals due to

²⁹ Republic of Cameroon. 2022. *Stratégie Nationale De Lutte Contre Les VBG*.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*.

security reasons maintains alive harmful stereotypes and is a real obstacle to justice.³⁶

26. Due to these shortcomings, very few perpetrators are brought to justice and impunity remains the norm. It is fundamental for multiple actions to be undertaken by the State, with the participation of men and community leaders and more training for the personnel in charge of survivors' response, for change to occur.

4. Access to education and training

27. The right to education is recognised in the ICESCR, ICERD, CEDAW, CRC and CRPD. As such, Cameroon needs to guarantee the right of education for all, including women and girls. At the last review, Cameroon received seven recommendations directly linked to girls' education and accepted to redouble its efforts to increase girls' enrolment rate. On the other hand, it noted one recommendation on the prevention of sexual harassment by teachers in school (121.157).
28. In 2022, Cameroon took steps to protect the right of education of pregnant and adolescent mothers by disseminating a ministerial circular to introduce the so-called "re-entry policy." Contrary to a previous recommendations imposed since 1980, which provided that all pregnant girls must have immediately be suspended from school, the "re-entry policy" provides that all pregnant students will be able to stay in school until the 26th week of their pregnancy and will be allowed back in school after birth.³⁷ To be truly effective, this circular should be adopted as proper policy, and would need to be vulgarised and widely divulgated in schools. Mothers and families also need to be provided with the necessary assistance, for the girl to go back to school.
29. Nevertheless, the gaps, especially in crises areas, remain concerning. In 2018, an estimated 76.7% of Cameroonian children would complete primary education. In the past years however, and even more so since the Anglophone crisis and the COVID pandemic, disparities between rural and urban areas in terms of access to education have widened. Currently, UNICEF estimates that 1.5 million children are in need of education support in Cameroon.³⁸ These needs are even wider when looking at gender disaggregated data, as fewer than 15% of women have completed secondary education and 20% have never

³⁶ Republique du Cameroun. 2021. *Profil Genre*.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch. 2023. *World Report : Cameroon*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/cameroon>.

³⁸ UNICEF. 2023. *Humanitarian Action for Children*.

attended school.³⁹

30. In the North-West and South-West region, forced closure and attacks to school facilities by separatist forces have been key drivers of the crisis.⁴⁰ Children and teachers have been harassed, threatened, kidnapped, or even killed for going to school. There were nearly 40 attacks to educational facilities from January to September 2022 only, including the burning of eight schools, and the abduction of 65 persons.⁴¹ Formal education centres are considered safe only in certain parts of the main urban centres under government control, thus leaving thousands of children without access to school. Where school can be attended, basic material and qualified teachers are often missing.⁴² Low school attendance is associated with greater risk for child abuse and gender-based violence.⁴³ In the long term, it restricts girls' abilities to access the world of work and perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes. Only by achieving a political solution to the conflict, will the full educational needs of the region be met. While milder, the situation in the Far North and the risk of attacks and kidnappings from Boko Haram have also kept numerous children out of school.⁴⁴
31. These regional situations were not improved by the COVID-pandemic, during which, the government closed all schools during seven months. While e-Learning and television-learning was provided, it further widened the disparities between children in urban areas, who were more likely to have access to required devices, and those in rural and crises areas, who were more likely to not have access to education at due to lack of electricity access.⁴⁵
32. Besides preventing their children from going to school due to fear of attacks, many parents in crises areas are still ill-informed about the benefits of girls' education and especially in insecure times, they prefer to not send their daughters to school.⁴⁶ More actions therefore need to be undertaken, with the collaboration of community leaders, to change such harmful beliefs.

³⁹ The World Bank. 2022. *Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

⁴⁰ ACAPS. 2021. *The Education Crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/acaps-thematic-report-cameroon-education-crisis-northwest-and-southwest-regions-19>.

⁴¹ UNICEF. 2023. *Humanitarian Action for Children*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*.

⁴⁵ Republique du Cameroun. 2020. *Rapport Du Ministere De La Justice Sur L'Etat Des Droits De L'homme Au Cameroun En 2020*.

⁴⁶ Plan International . 2021. *Listen to Us: Adolescent Girls in North West South West Cameroon on Conflict and COVID-19*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/listen-us-adolescent-girls-north-west-south-west-cameroon-conflict-and-covid-19>.

5. Equal opportunities and access to the world of work

33. Article 11 of the CEDAW states that States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure the right to work for all human beings, as enshrined in the ICCPR (Art.6). In addition, Article 13 also provides that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate any form of discrimination against women in economic and social life, including the right to bank loans.
34. At its last review, Cameroon received 6 recommendations related to women's economic empowerment and their right to work. The authorities supported 5 of them, thus pledging to redouble their efforts to promote women's access to employment and take all necessary measures to ensure their economic empowerment. Nevertheless, it rejected recommendation 121.85 which invited the government to review discriminatory articles of the civil code on the gestion of family goods.
35. Five years later, women are still overrepresented in the most vulnerable employment sectors. Country-wise, around 40% of women work in agriculture and only 2% of those working hold managerial positions.⁴⁷ It is estimated that 79.2% of Cameroonian women are underemployed. In addition, women continue to face exclusion from accessing credit and land ownership, as they are unable to meet all legal requirements. Only 1.6% women in fact own a property title.⁴⁸ This trend is worsened by harmful stereotypes and cultural norms preventing women from accessing the economic sphere.⁴⁹ In some regions and especially in rural areas, women do not have any right to inheritance and land property, despite being provided by the law.⁵⁰
36. The updated national development strategy recognised that the goal of the previous strategy to generate tens of thousands of jobs in the formal sector was not achieved and therefore committed to new actions, such as an intensification of dialogues with the banking sector to break all barriers to credit and land ownership of women, as outlined in its revised national development strategy.⁵¹
37. In crises areas, the economic activities of women are especially precarious. Most of them are housekeepers; work in agriculture or sell wood.⁵² Since the crises, many of them see their workload increasing as they become the sole breadwinner of their household and

⁴⁷ The World Bank. 2022. *Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

⁴⁸ Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*.

⁴⁹ The World Bank. 2022. *Systematic Country Diagnostic*.

⁵⁰ Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*.

⁵¹ Republic of Cameroon. 2020. *National Development Strategy*.

⁵² ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*.

are responsible for the survival of their families.⁵³ In the last years, the government and civil society organisations have redoubled their efforts to offer them tailored services and training such as the distribution of seeds and sewing kits in the Far North Region.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, more needs to be done, especially when it comes land ownership and microcredits.⁵⁵ Bolstering efforts to ensure women's access to work is necessary for Cameroon to achieve its development and human rights commitments.

6. Women's participation in peace and security processes

38. By ratifying the CEDAW Convention, Cameroon pledged to take all appropriate measures in all fields, including the political field, to ensure the full development and advancement of women (Art.3). In particular, it committed to ensure that women enjoy their right to participate in the formulation of government policies on equal terms to men (Art.7). In 2000, the Security Council, through the adoption of resolution 1325, which importance was recognised by Cameroon on multiple occasions, clarified that the scope of CEDAW extends to humanitarian context and stressed the importance of women at all levels of decision-making.
39. At the last UPR review, Cameroon received two recommendations, which enjoyed support, on strengthening the participation of women in the country's political life. None of them referred specifically to decision-making in crises areas.
40. Since last review, Cameroon strived to increase the amount of women in decision-making and began the implementation of its first National Action Plan for the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda, adopted in 2017.⁵⁶ It involved women by, among others, organising trainings for women conflict mediators in 2020.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the political space of the country remains incredibly patriarchal.⁵⁸ While women's representation in parliament increased to 33% in the last years, their participation remains more symbolic than substantive.⁵⁹ At the local level, Cameroon still counted only 39 women mayors in 2020, against 321 men.⁶⁰ The voices of adolescent girls on the other hand, remain non-existent.

⁵³ Brun, Delphine. 2019. *Data on Gender Equality in Cameroon*.

⁵⁴ Republique du Cameroun. 2020. *Rapport Du Ministère De La Justice*.

⁵⁵ ALDEPA & CARITAS. 2021. *Femmes/Filles Dans La Crise Securitaire De Boko Haram*.

⁵⁶ Moussi, C.A. 2020. *Women, Peace and Security in Cameroon: the missing voices of the Anglophone crisis. Women, Peace and Security*

⁵⁷ Republique du Cameroun. 2020. *Rapport Du Ministere*.

⁵⁸ Atanga, Lilian. "Gender Ideologies, Leadership, and Development in Cameroon." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*. December 9, 2021. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/12/17/gender-ideologies-leadership-and-development-in-cameroon/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Republique du Cameroun. 2020. *Rapport Du Ministere*.

41. As shown in multiple sections of this report, Cameroon's security crises have had numerous impacts on women's lives, who face intersecting forms of discrimination. Yet, on different occasions, they have been left out of the negotiations table.⁶¹ With regards to the Anglophone crisis for instance, women showed their roles and influences on numerous levels, including through vibrant civil society organisations.⁶² Nevertheless, when the government held a national dialogue in 2019, with the aim of finally find peace, it saw the participation of very few women from the anglophone regions and the entire process showed a grave lack of inclusivity.⁶³
42. Cameroonian authorities realise that there are still shortcomings to their approach, as one of their main objectives 2022-2026 on gender equality is indeed to ensure greater representation of women and youth in public and political life.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, when looking at the actions listed in the National Strategy to strengthen the Rule of Law, none of them directly involve women.⁶⁵ In crises areas, Cameroon recognised that an increased focus on prevention is necessary.⁶⁶ To this end, the authorities shall set up new frameworks for citizen expression at both regional and municipal councils in which all citizens, including women, could express themselves.⁶⁷ While such an objective is laudable, it has to be coupled with actions to fight deep patriarchal roots so that women do, in fact, use the spaces dedicated to them. Going forward, the government of Cameroon will need to take more actions in order to acknowledge and redress the unique experiences of women and girls in crises affected areas.⁶⁸ It will need to revise and develop new mechanisms to actually collect their opinion and give them the adequate spaces.

Recommendations for Action:

In light of the above considerations, the signatories of this submission recommend that Cameroon:

- Ensure that all present and future policies are inclusive and gender-mainstreamed;
- Promote and encourage the collection of accurate and disaggregated data both at the State level and civil society level;

⁶¹ Moussi, C.A. 2020. Women, Peace and Security in Cameroon.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Republic of Cameroon. 2020. *National Development Strategy*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Moussi, C.A. 2020. Women, Peace and Security in Cameroon.

- Adopt a specific law to effectively combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including marital rape and reconsider the adoption of an inclusive family code;
- Scale up efforts to bridge the gap between legislation and implementation on all types of legislation and policies affecting women and girls;
- Create more shelters and response centers for survivors of gender-based violence throughout the country, with a focus on crises areas and guarantee, among others, that they have the necessary financial and human resources to run efficiently;
- Ensure that response centers and shelters for survivors of gender-based violence are effectively holistic and inclusive, including for women living with disabilities and refugees;
- Take additional steps to raise awareness on the services available to survivors of gender-based violence, including by developing more awareness programs and by vulgarising legislation;
- Strengthen school programmes to ensure comprehensive sexual education at all levels of learning and to sensitise children to gender-based violence.
- Prioritise capacity-building of teachers throughout the country and ensure that gender-based violence response and prevention is mainstreamed in their professional *curricula*;
- Fully align all national legislation on Child, Early and Forced Marriage with international standards, leaving no space for ambiguous interpretations;
- Upscale measures to guarantee the safety of all educational facilities across the country, including by implementing the safe schools declaration and the “law on school orientation (1998)”
- Take all necessary steps to address all barriers to education at all levels, especially those which derive from the lack of birth certificate;
- Promote more measures to keep pregnant girls in schools, including by disseminating the re-entry policy for pregnant adolescents to ensure its effective implementation;
- Step up efforts to fulfill the electricity gap in rural and crises areas including by promoting access to affordable solar energy, to bridge the digital divide and promote remote learning;
- Address the economic drivers of school drop outs and CEFM, including by promoting more programs to improve food security and better livelihoods for all, such as scholarships, especially in the four priority education and crises areas.
- Remove all discriminatory provisions in the labour and civil codes;
- Accelerate efforts and dialogues with the banking sector, in order to guarantee easier access to financial products and loans for women;
- Ensure a meaningful, equal and effective representation of women and girls in the operationalisation of decentralisation and local government processes;

- Guarantee substantial participation of women and girls at all levels in peace negotiations, peacebuilding and DDR efforts, crises response plans and reconstruction programmes .