



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General  
16 March 2011  
English  
Original: French

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Fifty-third session

### Summary record of the 1464th (Chamber A) meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 14 January 2010, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Lee

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*Second periodic report of Cameroon*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports of States parties** (*continued*)

*Second periodic report of Cameroon (CRC/C/CMR/2); list of issues (CRC/C/CMR/Q/2); written replies by the State party to the list of issues (CRC/C/CMR/Q/2/Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Cameroon took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chairperson** invited those present to observe a minute of silence as a gesture of solidarity with the people of Haiti, 50 per cent of them children, who had just experienced a terrible earthquake. Her thoughts also went out to colleagues and their families at the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which had been hard hit.
3. **Ms. Bakang Mbock** (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of her delegation, joined the Chairperson in expressing great sadness at the events in Haiti. Cameroon was committed to promoting and protecting the rights of the child; the President of Cameroon, Mr. Biya, had made a statement to that effect during the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children in 2002.
4. The second periodic report had been prepared through a participatory process and covered the period 1996–2005, during which Cameroon had acceded to the majority of child rights protection instruments and had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At the national level, the period had been marked by the entry into force, at the beginning of 2007, of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which improved the juvenile justice system by taking international standards more fully into account. Incarceration was foreseen only as a last resort for minors, and reintegration was the primary aim.
5. Noteworthy institutional measures had been the 2004 reorganization, which had accorded responsibility for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child to nine ministerial departments; the 2004 transformation of the National Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms into the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, in accordance with the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), to give it greater independence and to authorize it to receive and communicate complaints; and the 2005 reorganization of the Ministry for Social Affairs, which had included the creation of the Department for the Social Protection of the Child, whose Director was a member of the delegation.
6. Several of the Committee's previous recommendations had been implemented, including the integration of the definition of the child, as set out in the Convention, in the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, which increased the age of marriage for girls to that for boys (18); the creation of a Children's Parliament; and the establishment of children's governments and municipal councils of children and young people in 4 of the country's 10 regions. That initiative would be extended with the creation of children's governments in all primary schools from 2010.
7. As a result of international cooperation and the debt-relief measures, Cameroon had been able to invest further in the social sectors and had made considerable progress in education and health between 1996 and 2005. The budget allocation for education and health was steadily increasing. Particular focus had been placed on vulnerable children, namely children with disabilities, refugees and those from minority groups and marginal population groups (the term used in Cameroon to describe indigenous groups).
8. Action had also been taken to address the worrisome phenomena of street children, trafficking in children, and violence against children, particularly against orphans and other children made vulnerable because of HIV/AIDS. A prevention system for street children had therefore been implemented, focusing on strengthening the legislative, regulatory and

institutional framework. Major investments had also been made in the institutions that came under the Ministry for Social Affairs (thanks to funds made available under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) and 467 street children had received assistance through a project launched in March 2008 in the pilot cities of Yaoundé and Douala.

9. Studies had shown that child labour was more prevalent in the informal sector. With the support of the International Labour Organization and as part of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the Government had implemented the West Africa Cocoa/Commercial Agriculture Project (WACAP) to combat the exploitation of children in the cocoa sector, and another to combat the trafficking of children (LUTRENA). An Act on combating child trafficking and slavery had been adopted in December 2005, along with a national plan, which had been approved in July 2009. The authorities had identified about 183,000 orphans and other children vulnerable through HIV/AIDS; 65,000 of them had been cared for under different projects and programmes by 2008, and sponsoring was currently being considered as a supplementary care solution for them.

10. With a view to achieving greater coherence between the different initiatives for children up to the age of 8 years, in 2009 Cameroon had adopted the Framework document on national policy for the integrated development of young children, which identified measures to be taken between 2010 and 2012 in priority areas and under which 10 programmes would be launched with a budget of over 30 million euros.

11. Cameroon had the valuable support of several partners in its multisectoral mobilization thrust, including the First Lady of Cameroon, who was also UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Education and Social Inclusion and worked hard to promote children's education through several charities, including African Synergy against AIDS and Suffering, the Circle of Friends of Cameroon and the Chantal Biya Foundation; organizations of the United Nations system; and bilateral and multilateral cooperation partners. Cameroon's manifest will to implement the Convention still came up against various obstacles, the most significant of them linked to, among others, the impact of the food, energy, financial and ecological crises, which called for the establishment of safety nets and integrated services; HIV/AIDS; and shortcomings in the statistical data collection and analysis system. The Government of Cameroon considered cooperation with United Nations bodies an excellent way of making progress and was delighted, in that regard, to have the opportunity for a discussion with the Committee.

12. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) paid tribute to Cameroon, a large country with considerable natural resources and reasonable financial means, that had experienced peace for more than 30 years, which made it a model for multicultural society in the region. Although the State party report did not fully adhere to the Committee's revised guidelines, it was analytical and often critical and was fleshed out by written replies that contained detailed and updated information.

13. Many noteworthy advances had been made since the consideration of the initial report in 2001: Cameroon had played an active role in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which it was preparing to ratify; it had ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol); and it had adopted the Act concerning the status of refugees and the Act on combating child trafficking and slavery. It had also drafted three draft bills, the adoption of which would greatly enhance the rights of the child: the code on the protection of children, which should fully harmonize national legislation with the Convention; the draft code on persons and the family; and the draft Act on gender-based offences, which criminalized, inter alia, female genital mutilation. A National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms and a National Youth Council had also been established. Among the new policies adopted, particularly welcome were the national policy for the

integrated development of young children, the national youth policy, the national health and reproduction policy paper, the growth and employment strategy paper and the “Cameroon 2035” long-term development vision.

14. However, several of the recommendations made by the Committee in 2001 had not received adequate follow-up, in particular with regard to coordination; definition of the child; violence towards children, including corporal punishment; female genital mutilation; child labour; and juvenile justice. It took too long for draft laws to be adopted and for their implementing decrees to be published and, following their entry into force, they were not vigorously enforced. It would be useful to know why that was so and whether the necessary information campaigns were carried out.

15. To ensure coherence and efficiency in the cross-cutting theme of the rights of the child, a body with recognized authority and adequate human, financial and technical resources needed to be responsible for coordinating the various actions, which in Cameroon were handled by nine ministries. No such body existed, nor did a national plan of action that covered all the areas relevant to the Convention and that linked them to major plans and policies. The Committee would like to know how the State party intended to resolve that critical problem.

16. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey had shown a reduction in the birth registration rate, which had fallen from 79 to 70 per cent between 2004 and 2006. There were obvious disparities between urban and rural areas, which raised the question of what measures were being taken to facilitate birth registration in remote areas and among refugees and indigenous groups.

17. Although prohibited by law, violence still persisted within the family, in schools, in prisons and in communities, and posed a serious problem. Given that paragraph 92 of the report stated that no measure had been taken to date to investigate cases of torture or abuse of children, to compensate and rehabilitate the victims or to set up a complaints mechanism, and that cases were reported in an informal manner, she wished to know what was being done to combat the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of violence and to guarantee children’s safety.

18. **Mr. Kotrane** asked whether Cameroon was planning to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it had signed but not ratified. Noting with concern that the code on the protection of children had not yet been completed, he would like to learn what its main points would cover and, in particular, whether it would provide for the implementation of response mechanisms for child abuse victims. Lastly, would the code on persons and the family ensure the removal of the social obstacles to protection of and respect for the rights of the child.

19. **Mr. Guráň** asked the delegation to provide information on the tangible results of the Children’s Parliament. He regretted the lack of disaggregated statistical data on the country’s ethnic composition and on discrimination towards minority groups and non-nationals, 4 million of whom resided in Cameroon.

20. **Mr. Citarella** asked how the draft code on persons and the family made up for the fact that the Constitution and other legal texts contained no general definition of the child in line with the definition set forth in article 1 of the Convention.

21. **Ms. Ortíz** noted with satisfaction that Cameroon had organized awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of the child in schools, but wondered whether the authorities had taken any such action with regard to the media, which shaped public opinion. In particular, she asked whether there were any regulations on how children were portrayed in the media.

She would like further information on the training of civil servants and law enforcement officials in the provisions of the Convention and on the measures taken to ensure that civil servants respected the Convention and that children were not discriminated against. Concerned that the situation had worsened in the health and education sectors and that inequalities were widening between boys and girls, she wondered what the Cameroonian Government was doing to slow that trend.

22. **Mr. Pūras** asked whether measures were being taken to support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by providing them with the resources to take more effective action on the ground, given that they played a fundamental role in defending and promoting human rights. He noted with concern that article 300 of the Criminal Code, which related to the violation of the privacy of correspondence, did not apply to parents if their children had not reached the age of majority (21). That being the case, he would like to know how the State could guarantee the right of the child to privacy. Since, under article 347 bis of the Criminal Code, any person who had sexual relations with a person of the same sex was subject to imprisonment, how could adolescents develop fully, and freely access information on sexuality?

23. **Ms. Villarán de la Puente** asked what percentage of the gross domestic product was set aside for education, health and combating malnutrition. She also wished to know whether the economic crisis had affected the budget of the social sector and whether Cameroon had set specific targets with regard to reducing malnutrition and combating education and health inequalities among the regions and between the sexes.

24. On the subject of corruption, she would like to know how Cameroon guaranteed greater transparency in the allocation and use of resources for children.

25. **Ms. Al-Asmar**, welcoming the establishment of councils of children and young people, asked whether they constituted a pilot project that would be extended to all regions and what their objectives were, in particular with regard to combating violence in schools. She would also like further information on differences between the school enrolment ratios of girls and boys and on access to schools for children with disabilities and children from minority groups.

26. **The Chairperson** asked for details on how children's opinions were respected in legal and administrative matters, in the divorce of their parents, for example, and wondered whether there was a specific age from which children had to be consulted, drawing the delegation's attention to the Committee's general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard.

27. She wished to know whether the reduction in the budget allocated to the social sector, observed since 2005, had affected child mortality, poverty and malnutrition rates, which were all very high, and how many children had disabilities and why the budget allocated to primary and secondary education had been cut.

28. Recalling that several guidelines had been adopted on child abuse, she wondered what penalties were incurred by the perpetrators of such acts and their accomplices. She feared that children who committed vandalism were punished more severely than perpetrators of violence and wanted to know how a child who had been a victim of violence at school could report it and what legal action was taken in response to a complaint of abuse.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 p.m.*

29. **Ms. Bakang Mbock** (Cameroon) explained that significant cultural diversity existed in Cameroon, a middle-income country, owing to its position as a migration hub in Africa. Taking diversity into account was high on the Government's agenda and was one of the reasons for delays in publishing implementing decrees; lawmakers needed to ensure that the

different communities were taken into consideration. Furthermore, they needed to take into account rapid developments in society in order to establish a legal system for the long term.

30. The document on national policy for the integrated development of young children, adopted in 2009 and covering the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was fundamental bringing together as it did all the procedures undertaken both by the authorities and as part of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The Ministry of Economy and Planning had submitted a report to the Government requesting the allocation of funds for the implementation of that policy.

31. The Ministry for Social Affairs intended to implement a strategy to increase the birth registration rate, which had fallen in recent years, especially in rural areas. In the context of the Day of the African Child, an awareness-raising campaign on the importance of declaring the birth of a child had been held in Cameroon, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The public and private sectors had been made aware of the issue and traditional chiefs had been asked to relay relevant information to the most isolated communities. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization had launched a wide-ranging review of registration procedures.

32. Cameroon had not been spared the scourge of violence in homes, communities and institutions, particularly as cultural diversity led to the existence of different views on children's education. The Government was currently studying the possibility of implementing a strategy to educate parents on non-violent behaviour towards their children.

33. The Ministry for Social Affairs had asked international organizations and NGOs to make available to it a reliable database on the number of victims of female genital mutilation, which was a secret practice and therefore difficult to document, even though it was so harmful to women. The current strategy was focusing on raising awareness among the population about its dangers.

34. Given the status of Cameroon as a migration hub, the Government was intending to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

35. The Government considered that it was important to involve opinion leaders in the drafting of laws and to implement awareness-raising and prevention policies with which communities could identify, hence reconciling civil and customary law.

36. **Ms. Kembo** (Cameroon) said that the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms was an independent administrative body with its own budget and a specific mandate. It could act *ex officio* when violations of human rights were brought to its attention or could notify the Ministry of Justice of such violations. It assisted the Government in promoting human rights and presented it with periodic reports containing proposals for action.

37. **Mr. Kotrane**, concerned about the conformity of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms to the Paris Principles and the Committee's general comment No. 2 on the role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, asked how independent it was from the Government, whether the representative from the Ministry of Justice who sat on it was entitled to vote, whether it had a child rights department and, if so, whether that department received complaints from children or families, whether it provided advice on cases of violations of the rights of the child and whether that advice was followed up.

38. **Mr. Guráň** asked whether a specialist on the rights of the child had been designated within the Commission to deal with cases that concerned children, as the Committee had recommended previously, and whether the report drafted by the Commission included a section on the rights of the child.

39. **Ms. Kembo** (Cameroon) replied that the members of the Commission were nominated by presidential decree but that their independence was guaranteed. The Government representatives who sat on the Commission were not entitled to vote and the Commission established its own work plan. It comprised two subcommissions, one focusing on civil and political rights and the other on economic and social rights. It did not have a specialized child rights body. Its advice was taken into consideration by the Ministry of Justice, which took legal action if necessary.

40. **The Chairperson** noted that, in its recent concluding observations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had mentioned the Commission's lack of independence.

41. **Ms. Bakang Mbock** (Cameroon) explained that the members of the Commission took an oath before the Supreme Court to ensure their independence and fairness in dealing with cases. Complaints about human rights violations from Cameroonian citizens or foreign nationals, whether adults or children, were examined by a specially designated member of the Commission.

42. The Children's Parliament, which had been established in 1998 with the support of UNICEF, met every year. In 2009, 180 child delegates met over several days at the National Assembly to put questions to members of the Government and to raise issues. The Prime Minister required a report on the children's concerns to be produced each year.

43. It had been decided to adopt in its entirety the definition of the child as found in the Convention, namely that a child meant every human being below the age of 18 years. That definition had been incorporated into the code on the protection of children and the code on persons and the family, which were being drafted.

44. In 2005, the Ministry of Social Affairs had organized a forum on national solidarity, at which vulnerable persons, including young children, had been discussed. The participants had drawn up a model for implementing actions to guarantee the rights of vulnerable persons. One strategy was a partnership between several mechanisms and ministerial departments. Meetings had been held at the inter-ministerial level to decide on the key actions to be taken in the medium to long term. The model had allowed community projects to be carried out in partnership with the Ministries of Education and Health. The Ministry of Communication had also been involved in order to promote the harmonization and wider dissemination in the media of national and international texts on the rights of the child.

45. In 2009, the Ministry of Social Affairs had concluded an agreement with Cameroonian news agencies on regularly devoting a page of the official national newspaper, the *Cameroon Tribune*, to information on capacity-building relating to the rights of the child for targeted audiences and partners in order to promote, among other things, behavioural change among citizens.

46. With regard to education, the Ministry of Social Affairs had concluded an agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Secondary Schools (and would soon conclude one with the Ministry of Basic Education) on several actions to be carried out, in particular with regard to integrating child rights-related instruments signed by Cameroon into education. Guidelines had subsequently been sent to all collaborators on the ground to contribute to the capacity-building of all stakeholders.

47. The principle of non-discrimination in budgetary allocation was important because all of the activities that the Government intended to carry out in the field of the children's rights required not only human resources, but material resources as well. The State budget remained the main source of finance, which was why the Ministry for Social Affairs was working to raise awareness within the Government so that more budgetary resources would

be granted to the State ministries in the social sector. In that regard, the basic education budget had been increased from 84 billion CFA francs in 2004 to nearly 160 billion in 2005. The health and secondary education budgets had also been increased during that period.

48. With regard to the results-based budget, the President of the Republic had instructed the Government to modernize the Cameroonian administration, ensure that the ministers fulfilled a managerial role, and define results and the strategies for achieving them as part of a long-term national vision. That approach had been integrated into the growth and employment strategy paper. In addition, the Prime Minister had launched a results-based management programme at the ministerial department level, which integrated mechanisms that would allow analysis at the end of the period on how the allocated budget had been spent.

49. NGOs were crucial partners in supporting and assisting the State to achieve its goals on the basis of a participatory approach. State policies were implemented on the basis of participative consultations that took all sectors and all regions of the country into consideration. Two years previously, the Ministry for Social Affairs had compiled a list of nearly 568 structures active in the field of the rights of the child. The challenge that the Ministry faced was strengthening the capacity of those structures; to do so it required financial and qualified human resources, in addition to the help of NGOs and from their partners.

50. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur), expressed satisfaction that the sectoral health strategy paper (2001–2015) provided for the participation of adolescents, but regretted the lack of information provided in that regard. She wished to know whether adolescents could access health services confidentially in all regions of the country, whether services for adolescents were targeted in order to respond better to the needs of specific groups, such as street children or indigenous children, and whether health programmes targeting such groups existed. She would like information on the extent of drug and alcohol abuse among children and adolescents in the State party and wondered whether studies on the issue had been carried out and what strategies the State party had adopted to provide advice, rehabilitation and reintegration for children affected by such abuse.

51. Despite awareness-raising efforts and cooperation between Cameroon and United Nations specialized agencies, some traditional practices that were harmful to the health of the child still existed in some parts of the country, in particular female genital mutilation; “ironing” the breasts of adolescent girls to limit their development; and early marriage. She wondered how the State party intended to eliminate those practices in the long term and end such unacceptable violations of the rights and dignity of the child, that were clearly condemned by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child ratified by Cameroon in 1997.

52. She was surprised to note that the education budget figures presented by the delegation did not match those in the written replies, which had shown a reduction in the basic and secondary education budgets between 2007 and 2008. School enrolment rates for girls were low at both the primary and secondary levels, and the regional disparities were striking, in particular in the case of four regions where the school enrolment rates were only about 50 per cent of the national average and where the enrolment rates for girls was between 25 and 30 per cent. It would therefore be useful to know how Cameroon was intending to reduce those disparities and, in addition, whether human rights, especially the rights of the child, were taught within the Cameroonian educational system.

53. **Ms. Ortíz** said that the media often used police and judicial sources, even though such sources often conveyed prejudices about children and used language that did not reflect the new definition of the child as promoted by the Convention. She therefore encouraged the State party to intensify its efforts to make the media aware of the appropriate terminology.

54. Noting that the number of orphaned children was very high in Cameroon, especially owing to HIV/AIDS, and that in cases where the family failed in its obligations, interim or permanent alternative care was used, she wished to know how the State party organized the interim measures, including what it did to avoid, as far as possible, a child being separated from his or her family. She also wanted to know whether it had implemented a system to steer families towards existing social assistance programmes when poverty was at the root of their problems, and which structures and professionals provided support and resources when the problem was linked to violence, alcoholism or illness. A decree provided for a periodic review of the situation of children in permanent alternative care and she would like to know which body undertook that review and on what basis. She also wished to know whether the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, which covered management and monitoring of official and non-official residential care institutions and had recently been adopted by the General Assembly, had been taken into account.

55. She also wondered to what extent indigenous populations were involved in the preparation of programmes that concerned them; whether they were consulted during the preparation, evaluation and application of such programmes; whether indigenous children were also involved; and whether the programmes gave indigenous adolescents access to helpful information on employment, training and health.

56. **Mr. Pūras**, noting that Cameroon intended to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and had taken steps to promote the rights of children with disabilities, asked whether any measures had been taken to place further emphasis on support services at the family and community levels and on the access of children with disabilities to the education system and to vocational training in order to help them become more independent and whether NGOs, including associations of parents of children with disabilities, were part of that process. He wished to know what was being done to improve the collection of data on children with disabilities, which was crucial for policymaking. It would also be useful to know how many institutions for children with disabilities Cameroon had, how many children were placed in them and how their rights were monitored.

57. Despite progress regarding maternal and child health, many children still suffered from malnutrition and it would therefore be useful if the State party could provide further information on nutrition programmes. Given that child health problems were generally addressed through integrated social and health services prioritizing primary care — an approach adopted by Cameroon — he would like information on the main problems encountered by Cameroon in implementing that approach.

58. The State party report indicated that many measures had been taken with regard to HIV/AIDS and that resources had been allocated to providing access to treatment and preventing new cases, but with limited success. What information had been gathered from the action taken and what efforts were envisaged to continue combating the epidemic?

59. He welcomed Cameroon's political commitment to tackling the issue of street children and would like more detailed information on the fundamental measures that the Government planned to take in that regard, in particular whether it envisaged creating a helpline for children.

60. **Mr. Kotrane**, noting that, according to the National Report on Child Labour in Cameroon, 41 per cent of children in the country were economically active, asked what measures the State party planned to take in that regard, how cooperation with IPEC worked and which were Cameroon's other partners in that area.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*