



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention

Second periodic reports of States parties due in 2000

Cameroon

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List of abbreviations used

CFAF	CFA franc/s
DPT	Diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus
IEC	Information-Education-Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
MINAS	Ministry of Social Affairs
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
MINESEC	Ministry of Secondary Schools
MINJEUN	Ministry of Youth
MINSANTE	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

1. Cameroon signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter “the Convention”) on 27 October 1990 and ratified it on 11 January 1993. It produced its initial report (CRC/C/28/Add.16), which the Committee received on 4 April 2000 and considered at its twenty-eighth session (737th, 738th and 749th meetings) in October 2001.

2. In accordance with article 44 of the Convention, the present periodic report contains information on legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures taken to give effect to the provisions of that instrument. The concluding observations and recommendations adopted by the Committee following completion of its consideration of the initial report (CRC/C/15/Add.164) are also taken into account.

3. The report covers two five-year periods, 1996 to 2000 and 2001 to 2005. This is because several initiatives were being implemented at the time of its drafting, and also because Cameroon wishes to give an account of a number of measures whose implementation extended over the two periods. To cite one example, Act No. 2005/007 of 27 July 2005 on the establishment of the Code of Criminal Procedure contains important provisions in favour of children and is the result of work which began more than a decade ago.

4. This periodic report covers:

- Background information on Cameroon
- General measures of implementation
- General principles
- Definition of the child
- Civil rights and freedoms
- Family environment and alternative care
- Basic health and welfare
- Education, leisure and cultural activities
- Special protection measures

I. Background information on Cameroon

A. Territory and population

5. Located in the region of the Gulf of Guinea, Cameroon is bordered to the south by Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo, to the east by the Central African Republic, to the north-east by the Republic of Chad, to the west by the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to the south-west by 400 km of Atlantic coastline. Triangular in shape, the country has a surface area of 475,442 km², with a population estimated at 15 million inhabitants according to the general population census of 1975. The population is relatively young, with 40 per cent below the age of 15.

6. Cameroon was placed under a dual mandate (1919–1946), which was followed by two separate trusteeships, resulting in a legal system with Roman and Germanic elements coexisting with common law.

7. “Africa in miniature”. Cameroon is characterized by a great diversity of the natural environments found in different parts of Africa. There are three main climate zones:

(a) The equatorial zone, with four seasons, more than 1,500 mm of annual rainfall and an average temperature of 25° C, with a variation of 2° C. This zone covers virtually the whole southern part of the country, including the coast and the mountainous western regions;

(b) The humid tropical zone, which receives 300 to 1,500 mm of annual rainfall. The average temperature is 28° C, with a variation of 6° C. With its humid tropical, or “Sudanese”, climate, this area is one of large savannahs where trees and shrubs grow. It stretches from the northern part of the East province to the south of the North province and the entire Adamaoua province;

(c) The third is the arid tropical zone, with a Sudanese-Sahelian continental climate characterized by between 300 and 900 mm of annual rainfall and an average temperature of 28° C, with a variation of 7° C. The harsh climatic conditions indicate the proximity of the Sahelian desert conditions of Sudanese Africa. This zone covers a large part of the North and Far North provinces.

8. The country has a number of permanent rivers, some of which have their source deep within the country and empty into the ocean, which is of great socio-economic importance.

9. The environmental and climatic differences condition the way of life of the various population groups and the way they care for their children.

10. Cameroon is made up of 230 tribes divided into four sociocultural groups: the Bantu, the Bantoid or semi-Bantu, the Sudanese and the Pygmies. Far from being a source of conflict or an obstacle to coexistence, this ethnic diversity is a factor of enrichment and development, thanks to the untiring efforts of the authorities and the determination of the populations themselves. Peace, both domestically and with Cameroon’s neighbours, constitutes one of the main pillars of the nation, and the individual is at the centre of the entire development process. It is against this background that Cameroon recently joined the Global Movement for Children, whose goal is to build a better world in the third millennium. Cameroon has set itself Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is actively participating in the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

11. There are an estimated 4 million foreigners in Cameroon, who live peacefully alongside the national population, Cameroon being a hospitable country in terms of African practices and traditions.

12. The Cameroonian economy is largely primary and rural, based on agriculture and livestock raising, which account for more than 21 per cent of GDP and employ 73 per cent of the working population. However, most of the production is commercialized in basic products without transformation and thus without added value. That situation, among others, has given rise to an embryonic industrial sector which employs 6.3 per cent of the population and accounts for 34 per cent of GDP. The industrial sector has recently witnessed considerable disruptions associated with the liberalization of world markets and the resulting competition, the harsh conditions attached to foreign capital and an insufficient energy supply. Unemployment, particularly among young people, is one of the country’s biggest social problems. It stands at between 17 and 25 per cent of the population, and is as high as 33 per cent in urban areas. There are many other social problems in various forms, including those brought about by evolving or growing phenomena such as children living or working on the streets (estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 in the

biggest cities), economic and sexual exploitation of children, prostitution, trafficking and even slave trade in women and children.

13. The public authorities have been working continuously to reorganize the national economy. This has resulted in improvements in macroeconomic indicators, starting with the control of public expenditure. Approved for the decision point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative on 13 October 2000, Cameroon plans to pass the completion point in order to improve its social situation. The effect of this would be the definitive implementation of relief measures for 90 per cent of commercial credits and a debt rescheduling over 40 years, with a 16-year grace period for public assistance loans for development. The positive benefits of the completion point will be periodically allocated to social investments (construction of classrooms, health centres, hospitals, roads and other social infrastructure), all of which will help promote the realization of children's rights and thus the well-being of the population. Thus, an era of great promise has dawned in the country. It should be noted that in Cameroon, life expectancy at birth varies considerably by gender: it is 59 for women (51 per cent of the population) and 54.5 for men.

14. According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper prepared by the Government, 4 out of 10 Cameroonians are living under the poverty line (less than 1 US dollar per day).

15. With regard to religion, reference is made to the secular nature of the State. Religious freedom is guaranteed (preamble to the Constitution: principle of religious affiliation, Act No. 6 of 18 January 1996 amending the 1972 Constitution). Catholic and Protestant Christians, along with Muslims, are the country's biggest religious groups. There are also a large number of so-called religious "revival" associations and movements, which are considered to be Pentecostals. Many Cameroonians remain attached to their ancestral religions.

B. Political structure

16. Cameroon is a unitary State with a semi-presidential regime. The executive, legislative and judicial branches are separate.

(a) The President of the Republic, who is the Head of State, embodies the executive power. Elected by the whole nation by direct universal suffrage for a seven-year term, he is the guarantor of national unity. He safeguards the Constitution and national institutions, defines national policy, appoints the Government, ensures the various functions of sovereignty and oversees the smooth running of government bodies. He is the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity, the permanence and continuity of the State and compliance with international treaties and agreements which Cameroon has signed and ratified.

(b) Pursuant to article 14 of Act No. 06 of 18 January 1996 amending the 1972 Constitution, legislative power is vested in Parliament, which consists of two houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. The Parliament legislates and monitors government action. The Act of 9 July 2004 on decentralization and the Act on the organization of the Senate constitute a significant step towards setting up the institutions established by the Constitution.

(c) Justice is administered in the territory of the Republic in the name of the Cameroonian people. Judicial power is exercised by the Supreme Court, courts of appeal and lower courts. The judiciary is independent of the executive and legislative powers (article 37 of the Constitution).

17. Three basic administrative models exist side by side: centralization, devolution and decentralization. In accordance with article 55 of the Constitution, the regional and local

authorities of the Republic comprise regions and councils. The shift towards transforming the provinces into regions gradually began to take shape with the Decentralization Act of 9 July 2004.

C. Policies and programmes

18. In Cameroon, the situation of children in general and child labour in particular are taken into account in the overall framework of policy for the protection and promotion of childhood. Strategies based on this policy focus on:

- Raising awareness and mobilizing communities on questions relating to child labour
- Promoting classical and informal education and training
- Improving and strengthening child labour legislation
- Coordinating and monitoring activities to combat trafficking in children

19. These strategies were taken into account in the draft plan of action to combat child labour, the main obstacle to realization being financial constraints.

20. With regard to technical cooperation and international assistance, Cameroon is participating, with French cooperation, in the Bi-Multi project, in the Baka programme of assistance for economic and social development (PADES/Baka) with Belgian cooperation, and in initiatives in the area of basic education with Japanese cooperation. Also under way are cooperation programmes with UNICEF, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as part of the national youth policy, with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to set up the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC programme) and with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to provide assistance to orphans and vulnerable children.

21. Finally, Cameroon is cooperating with international non-governmental organizations such as Plan International to promote community development centred on children, with SOS Kinderdorf to provide care to orphans in Children's Villages and with the Hope for African Children Initiative (HACI), the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and CARE Cameroon to help orphans and vulnerable children.

D. General legal framework for the protection of human rights

22. The protection of human rights in general and the rights of the child in particular is ensured in Cameroon through a legal arsenal consisting of protocols, charters and ratified international conventions and national laws and regulations. The ratified international instruments acquire superior legal force.

23. In this connection, it should be pointed out that Act No. 06 of 18 January 1996 amending the 1972 Constitution, proclaims in its preamble that the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights. It also reaffirms Cameroon's commitment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all other international instruments ratified on the subject.

24. At international level, reference is made to the following instruments:

- ILO Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment
- ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, instrument of accession dated 7 January 2005
- The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 15 November 2000, ratified by Cameroon at national level by the Decree of 18 November 2004
- The law transforming the National Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms into the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms in order to make this independent body more operational and efficient
- The School Act, which makes schooling compulsory until the age of 14
- The Labour Act and regulatory provisions relating to areas in which child labour is prohibited
- The Criminal Code and all penal aspects of offences against children and public morals
- The new Code of Criminal Procedure, which entered into force on 1 January 2007

E. Information and dissemination

25. Cameroon has an Official Gazette in which all laws and regulations are published in English and French. With the increasing liberalization, the country is witnessing unprecedented growth in the written, spoken and television media. A social communications act covers this sector, which, despite differences in tone, regularly informs Cameroonians about their rights and about events relating to the promotion and violation of those rights. Several FM radio stations, including at least 15 in Yaoundé, regularly provide information to the administration and bodies responsible for the promotion of the rights of children and to all sectors of the population. A number of radio stations also broadcast in rural areas.

26. Seminars and workshops are regularly held throughout the country on human rights and on the rights of children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and women. These seminars, such as the five training workshops in juvenile justice held in Kribi, Garoua, Ngaoundéré and Douala, are generally attended by civil servants (judges, social workers, law enforcement officials, prison staff, health-care workers, teachers, etc.) and representatives of organizations of civil society.

27. Following the example of the publication of more than 5,000 copies of a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, NGOs and associations have undertaken to publish, in the coming days, national and international legal texts on the rights of children in local languages. The public authorities are promoting this initiative.

28. The various religious denominations are involved in the dissemination of information on such rights. The illiteracy of a large part of the population and the inaccessibility of some areas are obstacles which must be borne in mind when information on the rights of children is disseminated.

II. General measures of implementation

29. Cameroon has made continuous efforts to create an environment propitious to children's development.

A. Legislative and administrative measures

30. In accordance with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and bearing in mind local realities, during the reporting periods Cameroon has adopted a number of legislative and administrative measures of vital importance for the implementation of the rights of the child, and procedures set in motion for the introduction of others are at a very advanced stage. These measures are the following:

- The promulgation of Act No. 2005/015 of 29 December 2005 on combating child trafficking and slavery
- The promulgation of Act No. 2005/007 of 27 July 2005 on the Code of Criminal Procedure
- Decree No. 2004/320 of 8 December 2004 on the organization of the Government, which sets up several ministerial departments responsible for the promotion of the rights of the child, including the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) (promotion of children's rights and child welfare), the Ministry of Basic Education (nursery school and primary school education), the Ministry of Secondary Schools (general education and vocational training), the Ministry of Public Health (prevention and health care for mothers and children), the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Family (education for responsible parenthood and promotion of family well-being) and the Ministry of Youth (promotion of leisure and after-school and extra-curricular activities)
- The imminent adoption of legislation establishing a code on persons and the family
- Completion of the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, bringing various domestic legal systems into line with ratified international legal instruments

B. Other measures

31. In addition to the above-mentioned legal framework, a number of initiatives with a direct impact have been conducted by the State and by other stakeholders. These are:

- The adoption of a cooperation agreement between Cameroon and UNICEF for the five-year period 2003–2007, comprising five main programmes (basic education, supervision and integral development of young children, participation and development of adolescents, special protection, and planning, assessment and communication). Drawing on the “*Approche droit*” (an initiative which makes use of local languages in the initial phases of literacy campaigns), and taking into account age groups, the programme is designed to contribute to the creation of an environment which ensures the rights of children to life, development, protection and participation. The relevant operational framework plan was signed on 5 November 2002.
- The promulgation of Act No. 97/009 of 10 January 1997 on combating torture.
- The promulgation of Act No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on educational guidance.
- Decree No. 2001/041 of 19 February 2001 on the organization of public schools and the powers of school administration officials, which in article 47 introduces an exemption from annual school fees for pupils at public primary schools to give effect to the presidential decision of 10 February 2000 making public school free.
- The circular on the organization of practical details for the supply of a “minimum kit” of teaching materials to public-sector primary schools.

- Circular No. 38/B1/1464 of 8 December 2000 on combating violence in schools.
- Circular No. 10/B1 of 13 May 2002 on violence and vandalism in schools.
- Circular No. 005/B1/1464 of 13 February 2002 on curbing occult practices in schools.
- Circular No. 006/B1/1464 of 4 March 2002 on the secular nature of public schools.
- The development of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), whose protocol of cooperation was signed between Cameroon and ILO on 22 October 2004. Under this programme, two projects to combat child labour were conducted between 2004 and 2005, one to combat the exploitation of child labour in cacao tree plantations (West Africa Cocoa/Commercial Agriculture Project (WACAP)), and the other to combat the trafficking of children for labour exploitation in West Africa and Central Africa (LUTRENA). The latter project has given rise to an exploratory study which, drawing on the characteristics of trafficking, has identified the emergence of the phenomenon in Cameroon, in particular in the Northwest, East, Far North and South provinces. Subsequently, and at the same time as the promotion of awareness and the formulation of specific legislation, direct cooperation under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, ILO, Nkumu Fed-Fed and Associations ETA has made it possible to proceed with the rehabilitation of 103 child victims of trafficking in the Northwest and Centre provinces. In the north-west, 70 children, including 33 girls, were given shelter at the Gwan Multipurpose Centre in Bali Nyanga, several kilometres from Bamenda. In addition to the psychological counselling provided, all the children learned a trade, their parents were found and given assistance with a view to creating a private welfare agency, and the children were then reintegrated into society. Training courses on slavery and trafficking were provided for 60 rural communicators, with the support of the Embassy of the United States. Like clubs and associations of parents and children, the courses aim to make the benefits of the initiative durable and to combat the development of trafficking in children in the areas concerned.
- The joint MINAS/Belgian Red Cross project on the socio-economic reintegration of street children in Yaoundé. The aim is to raise awareness, identify, select and promote a durable reintegration of children living and working on the streets, encouraging them to abandon immoral behaviour by reunifying them with their families and promoting their schooling, vocational training or activities that enable them to earn a living. Between July 2003 and August 2005, this project reached out to nearly 15,000 children through various initiatives, and 480 children were rehabilitated. Unfortunately, the project was discontinued when funding dried up, although such children continue to be in need of protection.
- Cameroon-Japan cooperation on the building of primary schools.
- Cooperation with the Chantal Biya/Edicef Foundation, with whose help five primary schools were equipped and turned over to the State.
- The involvement of the Global Fund in identifying and assisting orphans and vulnerable children, an initiative under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the framework of the National Committee to Combat AIDS, which aims to provide access for 300,000 orphans and vulnerable children to basic social services by 2010.
- The France/UNICEF/Cameroon cooperation effort in the context of the Bi-Multi project, whose objectives are in keeping with the above-mentioned goal.

- The MINAS/Belgian technical cooperation partnership (PADES-BAKA) to assist pygmies, including children in Djoum and Mintom in the South province.
- The Cameroon/Plan International partnership to promote the rights of children (5,000 birth certificates issued in 2005, water conveyances and watering places built), education (several classrooms built and equipped) and health (promotion of health care) and to enhance community and agricultural capacities.
- Increased involvement of organizations of civil society in child advocacy and support initiatives: Chantal Biya Foundation, African Synergy against AIDS and Suffering, UN-HABITAT, Association for Children, Youth and the Future (ASSEJA), Coalition of Cameroonian NGOs for Children's Rights (COCADE), World Association for the School as an Instrument of Peace (EIP), DET, Cameroonian Association of Assistance for Families affected by AIDS (ACAFAS), AGIR International, Emmanuel Association of Cameroon (AECCM), as well as decentralized local authorities.
- References, in religious discourses and sermons, to the rights of children (apostolic letter of 9 October 2005 of Monsignor Paul Verdzekav, archbishop of Bamenda, to all Christians concerning trafficking in children), organization in Kribi in July 2004 by the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Cameroon (FEMEC) of a training seminar for church leaders on the rights of children, the appeal in August 2005 for the adoption of specific legislation on combating trafficking, and raising the awareness of the faithful and other listeners of Catholic, Protestant and Muslim programmes broadcast on national radio (CRTV), Canal 2 international, STV 2 and confessional radio stations. Memorandum of the national secretary of private Islamic education making Muslim nursery and primary schools free in the northern part of the country in order to combat the endemically low levels of school enrolment there. It should also be pointed out that in Cameroon, confessional schools are open to all children without any discrimination.

C. Measures to disseminate information on the Convention

32. Pursuant to the recommendation contained in paragraph 22 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/15/Add.164), Cameroon took the following measures to disseminate the principles and provisions set out in the Convention and to mobilize the public:

- Organization of information campaigns on the rights of children during Days of the African Child (16 June), National Youth Days (11 February) and other events.
- Organization of seven meetings of the Children's Parliament, with training of junior delegates on children's rights and distribution of material of various kinds.
- Printing of 15,000 comics on the Convention, distributed to children in schools and homes during campaigns.
- Printing of posters and leaflets to raise public awareness about violations of children's rights. The NGO Plan Cameroun and the Ministry of Secondary Schools (MINESEC) helped fund the production of some of the posters.
- Organization of several annual editions of Radio/Television Days for children, based on the dissemination and promotion of children's rights.
- Gradual introduction in school and university curricula of modules on the teaching of human and children's rights (education for citizenship, postgraduate degree (DESS) in human rights at Dschang University, targeted training in human rights at

the Catholic University of Central Africa, specialization at the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon).

- The translation of the Convention is encountering the problem of the many national languages and illiteracy.

33. In response to the recommendation in paragraph 16 of the Committee's concluding observations concerning budgetary allocations for children, reference is made to the following:

- The significant increase in public funding for ministries responsible for ensuring children's rights, namely the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), the Ministry of Secondary Schools (MINESEC), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), the Ministry of Youth (MINJEUN) and the Ministry of Health (MINSANTE)
- The systematic formulation of ministerial and sectoral strategies, including the strategy of the social development sector, to better plan initiatives and the allocation of resources needed to improve the living conditions of the population, in particular children and other vulnerable persons
- The promotion, with national resources and the support of development partners, of programmes and projects with an immediate impact on children, for example the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses Strategy, the National Programme to Combat AIDS, the National Programme to Combat Malaria, the programme to assist orphans and vulnerable children (Global Fund and Bi-Multi), the IPEC (LUTRENA and WACAP) and Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation 2003–2007
- Outlook: expected impact of Cameroon's attaining the completion point; agreement with France in the context of the Debt Development Contract (C2D); introduction of national action plans to combat the sexual exploitation and trafficking in children

34. As to the recommendation contained in paragraph 16 (b), a systematic assessment has been started of the impact of budgetary allocations on programmes and projects carried out for the benefit of children. The halfway review of the Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation programme took place in December 2005, and the final assessment of the IPEC programme will be in 2006, after the periodic assessments.

35. The recommendation contained in paragraph 17 on indicators for children and women was taken into account, and basic information was gathered in this regard during the population census, for which data were collected in 2005.

36. Current practice in Cameroon is to systematically involve organizations of civil society in all State activities, including in the formulation of the preliminary draft code on persons and the family and the preliminary draft code on the protection of children.

D. Obstacles

37. The effective implementation of the Convention in Cameroon is encountering the following obstacles:

- Insufficient coordination of sectoral policies for assisting children
- The recession, which has led to limitations on State expenditure and has had an adverse impact on budgeting for social services, in particular for children
- The persistence of customs and traditions detrimental to the realization of children's rights

- The aggravation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted in an increase in parent mortality and in the number of orphans and vulnerable children

38. Cameroon is also experiencing practical difficulties in determining the nature of the operational mechanisms of the structure recommended in D.1., paragraphs 12 and 14, of the concluding observations. In the meantime, a child welfare unit has been set up pursuant to Decree No. 2005/160 of 25/5/2005 on the organization of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The National Commission for the protection of children whose moral well-being is in danger, juvenile delinquents and abandoned children (Decree No. 90/524) has been revitalized.

III. Definition of the child

A. Concept of the child

39. Cameroon subscribes to the definition of the child as enunciated in the Convention. Children are considered to be every human being below the age of 18 years.

40. The reform of legislation under way (preliminary draft code on persons and the family and preliminary draft code on the protection of children) aims to introduce a single age for the definition of the child in all areas and has made significant progress by defining the child as “a human person below the age of 18 years”.

B. Consent to marriage

41. In Cameroon, marriage is based on the free will of a man and a woman to join together as spouses. Thus, the free and solemn consent of the future spouses is essential to validate the marriage and must be indicated on the marriage certificate. Article 52, paragraph 4, of Order No. 81/02 of 28 June 1981 on civil status provides that “no marriage may be celebrated ... without the consent of the future spouses”. Cameroonian legislators have sought to be unequivocal on the importance of consent to marriage to make clear their strong opposition to forced marriage. Recognizing that marriage is a form of emancipation of the child, they have taken care, through the provisions of Title VI, Chapter III, of the above Order, to include the precaution of requiring that the parent(s), guardian(s) or person(s) customarily responsible give their consent for the marriage of a child (girls 15 years of age and boys 18 years of age).

42. This legal mechanism, which was enacted in 1981 before the ratification of the Convention, is in the process of being amended. The preliminary draft code on the protection of children will not permit the marriage of children. Consent to marriage, which is still one of the prerogatives of “parental power”, along with the concept of “parental authority over the person of the child” (Book I, Title IV), will thus disappear with the promulgation of the code on the protection of children. Parental power is defined as being “a set of rights and duties conferred on the father and the mother in the interest of the child”. The father and the mother have parental authority until the child reaches the age of majority or is declared to be of full age, the aim being to ensure the child’s safety, health, morals, education and harmonious development. The only rights and duties which parents have are those of care, supervision and education. Thus, the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, simply by prohibiting the marriage of children, automatically abolishes the right of parents to consent to such marriages.

43. It should be pointed out, however, that although the preliminary draft code aims to bring domestic legislation into line with international instruments in keeping with the

Committee's recommendation, it masks a reality which will have to be addressed: sexual precociousness. This is becoming a major problem, as seen in commercials which stress that HIV/AIDS can be curbed either by using condoms or by being faithful to one's partner. Among adolescents, who unanimously reject early marriage, this has led to promiscuity and immoral sexual behaviour.

C. Minimum age for admission to employment

44. Article 14 of Act No. 92/007 of 14 August 1992 on the Labour Code, which sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years, clearly stipulates that schooling is compulsory. No one under 17 years of age may be enrolled in the armed forces. However, there is still a category of age in which persons do not have a legal status and face a dilemma, because by law, they are children up to 18 years of age and adults as from 20 or 21 years of age. Thus, they need a legal status, which might be obtained through "ipso facto empowerment".

D. Access to education

45. The preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 declares that the State shall guarantee the child's right to education, that primary education shall be compulsory and that the organization and supervision of education at all levels shall be the bounden duty of the State.

46. Article 47 of Decree No. 2001/041 of 19 February 2001 on the organization of schools, which defines the powers of school administration officials, provides that primary public schools are free in accordance with the presidential decision of 10 February 2000.

47. In an attempt to meet the rapidly growing demand, many schools are built and opened every year at all levels and for all forms of education, with the help of a number of development partners, including the African Development Bank, the *Éditions classiques d'expression française* (EDICEF), Japan and organizations of civil society. An ongoing effort is being made to improve quality through governance (four ministerial departments responsible for questions of education and training); the creation of numerous monitoring, supervisory and oversight bodies; training of instructors (support of schools for training teachers, recruitment of 1,700 part-time teachers to the civil service every year); and by making education more occupationally relevant in order to promote new talent and help ensure that skills taught in the educational system are consistent with the requirements of the labour market.

E. Consultation of a physician

48. Today, the permission or consent of a parent is not required for a child to see a physician. On the contrary, the administrative bodies responsible for health care and for the promotion of the rights of children, and society at large, promote access to medical care for all without any exception.

49. Regarded as a priority social sector, health care in general, and the health care of women and children in particular, is high on the list of political demands. Access of children to medical consultations and quality health care is an indicator of development and public well-being. The State is increasing the resources allocated for improving the health-care system and ensuring better access to quality care for all population groups:

- A framework law on public health has been passed.

- A health-care card has been introduced and has reached virtually the entire population.
- Access to medicine for all has been facilitated by public subsidies, multilateral support, the establishment of hospital dispensaries and the sale of generics.
- The training of physicians and other health-care personnel is continuing; these persons are assigned to posts throughout the national territory.
- The cost of medical consultation in public hospitals is CFAF 600. Exemptions are granted on a case-by-case basis for children receiving social assistance, once action is taken by a social worker.

50. There are, however, a number of basic obstacles to full access for all to medical consultations: the large-scale departure of physicians and other specialists because of problems finding employment and poor pay in the public sector; and the insufficient quantity and quality of health-care personnel, infrastructures and equipment, making it difficult to provide all children with medical care. The cost of medicine remains inaccessible to many poor families.

51. Nevertheless, thanks to the determination of decision makers, children are the main beneficiaries of all health-care programmes in Cameroon. Antiretroviral drugs are now free for all children living with AIDS up to the age of 15 years.

F. Drugs and alcohol consumption

52. It is no secret that children in Cameroon are exposed to drugs and alcohol. This concerns children who have dropped out of school, children who spend their time in bars and, above all, children who live on the streets. This situation is due to their vulnerable living conditions, dissolute and uncontrolled behaviour and a slavish imitation of role models in the mass media.

53. Although it has not been the subject of a specific study, empirical observations suggest that there is an urgent need to promote the protection of children. The Ministry of Social Affairs (department for combating social scourges), the Ministry of Health and the law enforcement authorities are timidly addressing the issue. To be efficient, it would be necessary to support these efforts by opening operational drug treatment centres and by making psychologists, sociologists and social workers available. It is hoped that initiatives will be approved to enable these children and adolescents to receive training in a skill and to have a chance to achieve lasting socio-economic reintegration.

IV. General principles

A. Non-discrimination

54. The principle of non-discrimination is inalienable and is enshrined and guaranteed in the preamble to the Constitution. The Government is implementing it in all areas concerning children.

1. At school level

55. Under existing regulations, there is no limit on the age of enrolment, and all children can go to school.

2. At the level of protection and social security

56. A number of texts have been added to existing ones. These are:

- Decree No. 2001/109/PM of 20 March 2001 on the organization and functioning of public institutions for the care of children and the rehabilitation of socially maladjusted minors. (This text provides for the creation of shelters, supervision centres, transit centres and hostels.)
- Decree No. 2001/110/PM of 20 March 2001 on the organization and functioning of public institutions for the care of infants.
- Circular No. 2002/9062/DAPG of 15 October 2002 on judicial procedures for juveniles who commit offences for which ordinary courts have jurisdiction.
- Decree No. 2005/160 on the organization of the Ministry of Social Affairs, creating a department of child welfare.
- A preliminary draft act on violence against women, approved in April 2004.
- The preliminary draft code on persons and the family provides that:
 - The rights enunciated in the code shall also benefit foreigners
 - Children, regardless of sex, both legitimate and born out of wedlock, shall have the same inheritance rights
- The preliminary draft code on the protection of children, which groups existing law applicable to children in a single document and includes the fundamental principles embodied in international legal instruments ratified by Cameroon.

57. A reform of the social security system has begun in order to provide for illness and unemployment, in addition to the risks already covered. A national forum is planned on this matter.

3. Rights of vulnerable groups

58. Legislation and programmes on the protection of vulnerable persons are to be improved. A forum on national solidarity was organized in June 2005 by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Discussions were subsequently held with a number of administrative partners and organizations of civil society to give effect to the recommendations adopted. The process of amending the act on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities is nearing completion, and the elaboration of a policy of national solidarity has begun. This reform will focus on:

- Aid for education
- Medical coverage
- Assistance for special education for children with disabilities
- Support for rehabilitation and functional retraining
- Medical and social prevention measures

B. Best interests of the child

59. Several legal provisions in this area were set out in the previous report.

60. The preliminary draft code on persons and the family contains the following provisions with regard to civil matters:

- Custody to be assigned in the event of a marital crisis, following an investigation by a competent social worker and bearing in mind the best interests of the child
- This investigation must also take into consideration the financial situation of the parents in relation to maintenance payments for child support
- The best interests of the child must be taken into account in criminal, administrative and social matters

61. The preliminary draft code on the protection of children seeks to regulate the exercise of parental authority over the child and safeguard the child's inheritance rights.

C. The right to life, survival and development

62. The right to life is embodied in Cameroon's Constitution, which states in its preamble that every person has the right to life and to physical and moral integrity. That right is reflected in a range of criminal, civil and social provisions.

1. Health care in school

63. Creation, within the Ministry of Basic Education, of departments responsible for health care in schools and, within the Ministry of Secondary Schools, of medical inspectorates in all principal cities, as well as infirmaries in schools with more than 1,000 pupils and supervised pharmacies in the others.

2. Access to health-care services for juvenile detainees

64. Although the principle has been introduced, access to medical care for juvenile detainees is insufficient. Given prison overcrowding and the scarcity of funding for medical coverage for detainees, further support is clearly needed. The same is true for children placed in specialized institutions for supervision and rehabilitation.

3. Health care for children in need of special protection measures

65. Cameroon's health-care policy is heavily influenced by the cost-recovery system. All patients must contribute to the cost of treatment. Under the system, patients themselves, their guardians or persons responsible for their assistance must pay for their treatment. The budgeting of the Ministry of Social Affairs for child welfare is not, however, sufficient to cover all costs. Exemptions can be obtained only through negotiations or for humanitarian reasons. This is not always easy with regard to medicines which Cameroon does not manufacture. Increased funding and financial support are indispensable.

4. Access to education for detainees

66. Education for incarcerated juveniles continues to be informal. However, juveniles placed in rehabilitation and social reintegration institutions have schooling and/or vocational training.

5. Living conditions of detainees

67. Decaying prisons and overcrowding do not make for ideal living conditions. However, families are permitted to bring food to detained relatives to supplement prison rations.

68. Negotiations are being held with international organizations to find ways of meeting the needs of incarcerated children, including through the creation of separate prison wards for imprisoned boys and girls, the opening of schools in prison wards so that detained

children can attend classes and receive vocational training, the setting up of libraries, video collections and recreation areas and, in the city of Douala, the transformation of the shelter and observation centre in Bépanda into a pilot institution at which children in need of special protection measures (orphans, vulnerable children, street children, children in conflict with the law and children who have been victims of slavery and trafficking) can be cared for at a single location. If it takes shape, this project, which is backed by the UNICEF special protection programme, would serve as a model for the entire central African area. However, funding for its effective implementation needs to be mobilized.

69. Incarcerated children have access to leisure activities such as dance, television, cinema, parlour games, cultural weeks, etc.

D. Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)

70. The preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon enshrines freedom of opinion for all citizens and affirms that freedom of communication, expression, the press, assembly and association, as well as the right to organize and to strike, shall be guaranteed under the conditions fixed by law.

71. By annually celebrating the Day of the African Child, Cameroon allows children to express their views at sessions of the Children's Parliament on education, health, the fight against corruption, the phenomenon of street children, etc.

72. In accordance with recommendation D.3., paragraph 31, of the concluding observations, 24 information, education and crisis centres have been set up in secondary schools with the support of UNICEF in the framework of the Adolescent Development and Participation Programme. There has also been a proliferation of health clubs in primary and secondary schools working to combat HIV/AIDS. "Schools – friends of children, friends of girls" pilot projects have been drawn up to ensure their right to participation. Children's governments and municipal councils of children and young people have been set up in Douala, Yaoundé, Ngaoundéré and Bertoua with the support of UNICEF.

V. Civil rights and freedoms

A. Name, nationality and preservation of identity (arts. 7 and 8)

1. Legal declaration of birth

73. In addition to existing legislation (Order No. 81/02), the preliminary draft code on persons and the family and the preliminary draft code on the protection of children define aspects relating to the declaration of birth, which has become obligatory for all parents or any persons with knowledge of a birth. Traditional and religious chiefs and other opinion makers have been made aware of the issue.

74. With regard to marginal and disadvantaged population groups (Bororos, Pygmies, Mafa, border creek groups), Cameroon began promoting birth registration two years ago in collaboration with international partners to help children from these marginalized groups have access to citizenship and schooling.

75. To support the Government's efforts, UNICEF (special protection programme) has opened nearly 300 birth registries throughout the province of Adamaoua, where the rate of registration of births is lowest. More than 3,000 children have benefited from this initiative, following awareness campaigns conducted in the context of the June 2003 Day of the African Child, which focused on the theme of birth registration.

76. Steps have been taken to ensure that all births are registered. In this connection, a project for the issuance of birth certificates is under way for children in marginalized population groups (Bororo and also Baka and Bakola, commonly known as pygmies, in the Adamaoua, East and Northwest provinces) with the support of UNICEF and the NGO Plan Cameroun.

77. The aim of the project is to issue more than 20,000 birth certificates between 2000 and 2005 in the above regions with the help of awareness campaigns and the mobilization of resource persons.

2. Name of the child

78. Article 8 (b) of the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, in conformity with the relevant provisions of international legal instruments ratified by Cameroon, recognizes that all children have the right to an identity and a nationality from birth. The constituent elements of this identity are the child's name and age (date and place of birth) and the names of the parents.

79. Although it has not yet entered into force, this mechanism is already applied, and all children living in Cameroon have a name that takes their honour and dignity into account.

3. Nationality

80. There are many legal documents relating to the nationality of children. The preliminary draft code on persons and the family will constitute a major innovation, because it regards as a Cameroonian:

- Any child one of whose parents is Cameroonian
- Any underage child adopted by a Cameroonian parent
- Any child born in Cameroon (if it is established that the child's parent is a foreigner)
- Any abandoned newborn child found in Cameroon, until proof of the contrary

81. Cameroonian nationality is also automatically acquired by the sole fact of having been born in Cameroonian territory for persons who cannot claim to have another nationality.

4. Preservation of identity

82. Article 12 of Order No. 81/02 of 29 June 1981 on the organization of acts of civil status, in force, provides that such documents must indicate the date of the facts which they establish and the date on which they are issued, as well as the family name, given name, occupation, domicile and residence of the persons concerned. They thus contain information on the identity of the person.

83. In addition to the legal provisions in force, international (Plan Cameroun, Belgian technical cooperation) and national NGOs support the Cameroonian Government in promoting access to citizenship through campaigns for the elaboration of national identity cards. This is the case for 5,000 Pygmies in the East province, for whom national identity cards were issued and distributed with the support of Plan Cameroun.

B. Freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, association and peaceful assembly (arts. 13, 14 and 15)

84. The Cameroonian State is secular. Religions can be worshipped freely, and religious instruction and socio-religious activities are permitted.

85. The Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion. All citizens have the right to profess or not to practise a religion, to choose their religious convictions and to manifest their religion or beliefs, provided they respect other religions. Children are educated in the religion of their parents.

C. Protection of privacy (art. 16)

86. Protection of privacy for all is provided for and guaranteed by the Constitution. However, article 300 of the Cameroonian Criminal Code, which punishes violations of the privacy of correspondence, gives parents, guardians or persons customarily responsible the right to open and even to stop the correspondence of their children if they have not reached the age of majority.

87. A report which analyses Cameroonian legislation on children in the light of the Convention proposes that, in the best interests of the child, this breach of article 16 of the Convention should be corrected by differentiating on the basis of the age of the child and the possible nature and probable origin of the correspondence.

D. Access to appropriate information

88. Several changes have been observed in the activities and programmes aimed at enabling children to have access to appropriate information. This concerns oral communication and the proliferation of FM radio stations broadcasting programmes for children and disseminating provisions of the Convention. For the school year 2004/05, CRTV has launched educational programmes focusing on preparations for examinations for children in remote areas, where there are not enough teachers and specialized documents are inaccessible. It also has programmes for, and with the participation of, young people, such as “*jeunesse parlons-en*” (Young people, let’s talk about it). The press has special publications for young people which address educational themes, such as “*100 % Jeune Programme*” (100 per cent Youth Programme). Television stations also broadcast programmes and spots targeting children and adolescents.

89. The sole problematic area concerns the uncontrolled use of the Internet by adolescents and young people, who have access to programmes of all kinds.

E. The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37, para. (a))

90. Law enforcement officials, prison staff and judicial personnel have regularly attended training seminars in humanitarian law since 2004.

91. Teaching modules on combating all forms of violence, elaborated by the Ministry of Education, will be taught as from the beginning of the 2006 school year. Studies are also under way on violence against children.

92. However, no measure has 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. Cases are reported in an informal manner, and the State always takes action.

VI. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5; 9-11; 18, paras. 1 and 2; 19-21; 25; 27, para. 4; and 39)

A. Parental guidance and parental responsibilities

93. The preliminary draft code on persons and the family and the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, which are in the course of completion, will strengthen legislation on the family and on the protection of children in the family and the community.

94. Modules on family life education and on the population, elaborated by the Ministry of Education, will be taught as from the beginning of the 2006 school year to give greater attention to children's rights.

B. Separation from parents (art. 9)

95. The preamble to the Constitution of 18 January 1996 declares that the State shall protect and promote the family, which is the natural foundation of human society. Cameroon's social policy is essentially based on protection of the family. Everyone has the right to have a family and to flourish in it.

96. In that connection, article 8 of the preliminary draft code on the protection of children specifies that, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the international legal instruments ratified by Cameroon, all children have the right not to be separated against their will from their parents and family.

97. Apart from the traditional practice of "*confiage*", in which, for various reasons and in the interest of the child, children are temporarily cared for by a close relative, friend or relation, Cameroonian children are officially separated from their parents only in order to punish an offence or to place them in a care or rehabilitation facility.

98. These two measures are decided by a judge acting in conformity with the provisions of the Decree of 1935 or article 80 of the Criminal Code. A social worker is always consulted.

99. An additional effort was made in 2005 to introduce legislation in response to the growing number of cases of children who are victims of trafficking and are thus illegally separated from their parents. Perpetrators of such acts are now severely punished, and the State, with the participation of organizations of civil society, is taking steps to identify, care for and protect such children in shelters pending their social reintegration.

100. These new bodies will require assistance in order to be set up and operated.

C. Family reunification, illicit transfer and non-return (arts. 10 and 11)

101. Cameroon retains the right to guarantee the protection of all children in the family. All policies, programmes and projects on the special protection of children are designed to ensure that children remain in their families or are returned to them.

102. Order No. 81/02 on civil status contains provisions on the determination and recognition of paternity and punishes the abandonment of a child by a parent by imposing the payment of maintenance.

103. Social centres attempt to settle marital and domestic conflicts as part of their assistance to individuals and families. In so doing, they ensure the preservation of family unity and the functioning of the family system. Special attention is given to cases in which

children would suffer psychological and emotional distress from the break-up of the family unit.

104. The preliminary draft code on persons and the family and the preliminary draft code on the protection of children provide for equality of inheritance rights for all children, both legitimate and born out of wedlock, whose parents have been legally identified.

105. Illicit transfer and/or non-return are severely punished. This applies to slavery and trafficking, concerning which legislation was enacted in December 2005.

D. Recovery of maintenance for the child

106. As noted earlier, a parent who abandons the family or loses divorce proceedings is usually sentenced to pay maintenance for children cared for by the other parent or a specialized childcare institution.

107. Ignorance of this arrangement and of procedures for the recovery of maintenance is the primary obstacle to making this child protection measure effective. The relevant administrative bodies and organizations of civil society have been working to disseminate information in that regard. Legal handbooks published by the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Family are simply worded and contain practical details on such topics as marriage, divorce, child maintenance, labour contracts, etc. Field workers, who serve as the local arm of the Ministry in rural areas, have used these handbooks for outreach, awareness and functional literacy initiatives for women and communities in order to encourage women, the main victims of family abandonment, to turn to the courts.

108. The Cameroonian Association of Women Lawyers (ACAFEJ) has pursued this action, focusing on practical aspects and efforts to resolve pending cases in order to give effect to the initiative, from which all 10 provinces in the country have benefited.

109. However, child maintenance has encountered two major obstacles:

- *Payment proportional to the needs of the child.* Maintenance is usually understated and does not cover basic needs (food, health care, housing, costs of schooling, etc.). It is even lower when a large number of children are recipients.
- *Recovery procedures.* Although it is relatively easy to recover maintenance payments from a parent who earns a salary, by attaching payment at the source, the process is more laborious when the parent works in the rural sector. Current legal provisions stipulate that maintenance is to be recovered by a bailiff. Unfortunately, indigent women do not have the resources to pay the bailiff's fees.

E. Children deprived of a family environment (art. 20)

1. Child abandonment: a growing phenomenon

110. Child abandonment is a growing phenomenon in Cameroon. The problem is the result of uncontrolled sex among adolescents, parental irresponsibility and poverty in the context of a deterioration of ancestral ties of solidarity, and recently it has become more severe with the impact of HIV/AIDS and the new phenomena of child trafficking and slavery.

111. Nearly 300,000 orphans and vulnerable children are at risk of finding themselves without support or a family because of HIV/AIDS and its stigma.

112. The public authorities, in conjunction with development partners (the Global Fund and Bi-Multi) and with the participation of organizations of civil society, are seeking solutions to the problem.

113. Current initiatives focus on identifying these children and ensuring that they have access to basic social services, but appropriate mechanisms must also guarantee their physical protection and provide for their integration.

114. Initiatives are planned for opening shelters like those in Yaoundé and Garoua, hostels and other facilities for children in distress. Financial support will be vital in this regard. The introduction of the status of “public welfare child” is also envisaged in order to define the conditions of eligibility for a full adoption of such children.

2. Alternative measures

115. Two types of alternative care are currently provided in Cameroon: interim alternative care and permanent alternative care.

(a) Interim alternative care

116. Interim care usually applies to an emergency situation in which a child’s physical safety calls for an immediate response. In such cases, and in accordance with the provisions of Decree No. 109 of 20 March 2001, the departmental delegate for social affairs, acting on a report by the head of a shelter for children in distress or any other person concerned, places the child in such a facility on an interim basis. The centre replaces the parents of the child until the parents are found.

117. Although already operational in Yaoundé and Garoua, this measure awaits the establishment and opening of suitable facilities throughout Cameroon in order to be applicable in all parts of the country. Insufficient budgeting from the Ministry of Social Affairs is the main obstacle to meeting this need, which is perceptible in Douala, Bafoussam, Maroua and Bertoua, to mention only the main cities.

118. This measure, which for the moment only targets infants and street children in Yaoundé, must also address cases of children who are victims of slavery, trafficking, abuse and exploitation of various kinds and must make provision for alternatives to the imprisonment of children in conflict with the law.

(b) Permanent alternative care (adoption, art. 21)

119. Adoption is the permanent form of alternative care in Cameroon. Basically, it seeks to address a dual family tragedy, that of a person or family unable to have children, and that of a child with no parents.

120. Adoption is currently governed by a judicial arsenal which draws on both national and international legal instruments. It exists in two forms: simple adoption (by mutual consent) and full adoption. In order to harmonize and modernize the legal framework, Cameroon has made adoption one of the main points to be included in the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, which aims to regulate both domestic and international adoption.

121. Outlook: a campaign is to be launched to promote the ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

F. Periodic review of placement (art. 25)

122. Pursuant to Decree No. 110/PM of 20 March 2001 on the organization and functioning of public institutions for assisting minors and rehabilitating socially maladjusted and/or delinquent juveniles, institutional placement is the subject of periodic review, which takes place in the framework of educational meetings, case counselling or house counselling and whose purpose is to assess the evolution of the case in order to modify action or terminate a child's stay in an institution.

123. Medical examinations are systematically conducted upon admission and in the event of an epidemic, and are carried out case by case as a function of the child's medical problem.

G. Neglect or negligent treatment (art. 19), including physical recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

124. In addition to the implementation of the recommendation contained in paragraph 41 (a) of the Committee's concluding observations, Cameroon, with the assistance of UNICEF and ILO, has carried out studies on the sexual exploitation of children, child labour in the informal sector and trafficking in children.

125. These preliminary studies have confirmed that children in Cameroon are victims of such forms of violence. National plans of action to address the problem focus on prevention, assistance and reintegration. Further studies are also envisaged to gauge the extent of the phenomenon and to identify areas in which it is most likely to occur.

126. In the meantime, a workshop held in Bandjoun in December 2005 formulated a code of conduct for persons active in the protection of children and guides on prevention of sexual exploitation of children, to be used by children so that they know how to protect themselves, by parents so that they know how to protect their children and by teachers so that they know how to prevent the phenomenon.

VII. Basic health and welfare (arts. 6; 18, para. 3; 23–24; 26; 27, paras. 1–3)

A. Children with disabilities (art. 23)

1. Social assistance

127. There are no reliable statistics on the exact number of disabled children in Cameroon. However, the general population census of 2005 took account of the category of disabled persons, and its results will provide data on their current situation. Public awareness campaigns on the problem of disabled persons have been conducted at community level. The situation of children with disabilities has witnessed the following developments since 2001:

- Legislation on the protection of disabled persons is being reviewed and is near completion
- Three meetings of the National Committee on the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (CONRHA) were held in 2002, 2003 and 2005
- The Congress of the World Blind Union was held in 2004 in Yaoundé
- Disabled pupils have been provided with school aid and wheelchairs

- A partnership agreement with the Italian NGO AIAS di Afragola was signed in July 2004
- The Centre for Rehabilitated Blind Young People was opened in 2003
- The plan of action designed to serve as a basis for a partnership agreement between Cameroon and the international NGO Emmaüs Suisse (ALES) is nearing finalization
- The National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Yaoundé and the Rehabilitation Institute for the Blind in Buéa have been audited
- Private promoters have been authorized to open special education institutions and have received operating subsidies
- Young Cameroonians registered in national and foreign institutions have been granted a special education allowance, which usually serves to defray the costs of schooling and purchase artificial aids

128. These initiatives have encountered a number of difficulties, including:

- The scarcity of State funding, owing to which it has not been possible to meet the many needs of children with disabilities
- The continuing qualitative and quantitative shortage of specialized bodies and staff

2. Health care for children with disabilities

129. Health care for disabled children will be improved through the imminent construction of a National Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Maroua and the training of specialized staff in the framework of cooperation with the NGO AIAS di Afragola.

130. The construction of a centre for the manufacture of prosthetic and orthotic devices is planned in Garoua with the support of an international NGO.

131. These facilities will take the pressure off the National Centre in Yaoundé.

132. The ENNAS retraining project, which aims to train specialists in various areas of social service, will address the current shortage of specialist staff in a reasonable length of time.

133. Together with the international community, Cameroon annually celebrates the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which provides an opportunity to raise public awareness of the fundamental rights of such persons, in particular children.

B. Health and health services (art. 24)

1. Availability of health-care services

134. The Cameroonian public authorities, through the Ministry of Public Health, have strengthened programmes for primary health care by linking the health-care structures of the beneficiary population (health districts and integrated health centres).

135. Thanks to steps taken in this regard, in 2005 there were 2,521 health-care units in 267 hospitals for all categories and 2,254 health centres throughout the country. It is planned to build another 1,000 health centres over the next five years, including 150 already programmed for this year. Despite the severe shortage of staff, due in particular to the public sector recruitment freeze, ratios are about 1 physician per 10,000 inhabitants and 1 nurse per 2,000 inhabitants. In 2002 and 2003, a special recruitment took place of 1,800 staff members (148 physicians and related professionals and 1,652 health personnel).

136. The sectoral strategy of the Ministry of Public Health is focusing on the elaboration of programmes to combat illnesses (Expanded Programme on Immunization, programmes to combat malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS, etc.), with the establishment of permanent secretariats.

137. Access to drinking water and adequate sanitation is essential to a healthy existence and was one of the commitments of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (1995). However, most Cameroonians living in extreme poverty or in rural areas must usually make do with surface water from rivers, springs and wells, which is often insalubrious.

138. Consequently, three programmes have been identified to guarantee access to drinking water. These are:

- Strengthening programmes for the construction of infrastructures for access to drinking water
- Setting up mechanisms so that the population concerned can operate the infrastructures
- Improving mechanisms for monitoring the quality of drinking water

139. The proportion of households with access to drinking water rose from 51 per cent in 2001 to 63 per cent in 2004.

2. Maternal and child health

140. The health and well-being of children continues to be a concern of the public authorities. Progress has been made, but major challenges remain. The high rate of mortality among newborns and children under 5 years of age and the high percentage of mothers who die in childbirth and of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and polio constitute serious threats to the survival and development of children.

(a) Child health

141. The implementation of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses Strategy is continuing, the objective being to reduce morbidity and mortality due to common child illnesses, in particular acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases and malaria, as well as malnutrition.

142. Vaccination coverage has improved, thanks to the increased capacities of the Expanded Programme on Immunization and the free distribution since 2003 of vaccines and syringes at public health units.

143. The following developments are worth noting:

- The DPT 3 vaccination coverage rate rose from 43 per cent in 2001 to 72 per cent in December 2004.
- Measles morbidity has been reduced by 90 per cent, and measles mortality by 98 per cent.
- Very significant progress has been made towards attaining the global objective of eradicating polio. Cameroon has not registered any cases of wild poliovirus since 1999, and it reached the pre-certification stage of eradication in 2002 after three consecutive years without any case being reported. Unfortunately, this process was interrupted in 2003, when two cases of wild poliovirus originating in a neighbouring country were registered. This resurgence continued in 2004, with 13 new cases. Efforts to attain the objective of eradication are being intensified.

144. New antigens, hepatitis B and yellow fever have been included in the Expanded Programme on Immunization.

145. Implementation of the national programme recently adopted in the area of nutrition will improve the nutritional situation of children. Infants between 6 and 59 months of age regularly receive vitamin A supplements. Cameroon has made significant progress towards eradicating illnesses associated with iodine insufficiency by introducing universal iodination of cooking salt. This has eliminated these illnesses as a public health problem, thereby protecting children. More than 90 per cent of households use iodized salt, and the prevalence of goitre has declined sharply.

146. A slight improvement has been noted in the mortality rate of children under 5 years of age, which fell from 150.7 per thousand in 1998 to 142.0 per thousand in 2004. The mortality rate for children under the age of 1 declined from 77.0 per thousand to 74.0 per thousand over the same period.

(b) *Maternal health*

147. The health of the mother is one of the action priorities of the health-care sector. The launching of the recently adopted national health and reproduction programme and the ongoing introduction of emergency obstetric and neonatal care units in a number of health-care facilities are major steps towards improving the health of this target group.

148. The proportion of deliveries assisted by qualified medical personnel increased from 54.3 per cent in 1998 to 59.0 per cent in 2004, as did the percentage of women who benefited from prenatal visits, which rose from 78.8 per cent in 1998 to 83.3 per cent in 2004. Although maternal mortality remains high, monitoring capacities for pregnant women and women in labour have increased considerably.

Table 1
Evolution of indicators of maternal and child health

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2004</i>
Maternal mortality		430*	669*
Probability of death per 100,000 live births	-	(1989–1998)	(1995–2004)
Prenatal visit	78.8%	78.8%	83.3%
Delivery in a health-care centre	62.4%	54.3%	59%
Use of modern contraception	4.2%	7.1%	12.5%
Infant mortality			
Probability of death under the age of 1 per 1,000 live births	65	77	74
Infant and child mortality			
Probability of death under the age of 5 per 1,000 live births	126.3	150.7	142
Chronic malnutrition	24.4%	29.3%	31.7%
Acute malnutrition	43%	6%	5%

Source: Demographic and health surveys in 1991, 1998 and 2004.

* The method used makes it possible to assess the situation which prevailed between birth and age 9 before the survey.

(c) Female genital mutilation

149. As to the concern expressed by the Committee about female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice has declined considerably in the remaining pockets (Far North, East and Southwest provinces). In 1998, Cameroon formulated and implemented a strategic plan to combat FGM, which has three main areas of focus:

(a) Prevention, by making women who practise FGM aware that they are violating the rights and physical integrity of their victims, and by holding seminars for opinion makers (traditional and religious authorities) to alert them to the issue;

(b) Care for victims through psychological and social assistance, and reconversion support for the perpetrators through financial or material aid to help them find another income-generating activity to replace the practice of FGM;

(c) Punishment of perpetrators of FGM. To this end, the Ministry of Justice has proposed an amendment to the Criminal Code to introduce measures to punish the practice; the amendment has not been adopted yet.

3. The National Programme to Combat AIDS

150. In Cameroon, HIV/AIDS has been identified as a problem for development, and combating the pandemic is a priority in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

151. The Government has set up a national multisectoral strategy plan 2000–2005 to combat the scourge.

152. In the period 2001–2004, Cameroon made considerable progress towards providing access to treatment and improving the prevention of new infections so as to reverse the course of the epidemic.

153. A special effort has been made to combat AIDS, childhood diseases (malaria and diarrhoea) and malnutrition.

154. These actions have been strengthened through strategies formulated in related sectors. Reference is made in particular to:

(a) The approval of the sectoral plan (social affairs, education, etc.) to combat HIV/AIDS;

(b) The formulation and implementation of Bi-Multi projects, the component of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria that focuses on orphans and vulnerable children, the Hope for African Children Initiative (HACI) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), which are made up of the following elements:

(i) Combating stigmatization and promoting recognition of the rights of HIV/AIDS orphans;

(ii) Enhancing the capacities of communities and local support structures for caring for orphans and vulnerable children;

(iii) Promoting access for orphans and vulnerable children in the context of HIV/AIDS to basic social services (health care, education and nutrition);

(iv) Drawing on the results to elaborate a global strategy on the protection of HIV/AIDS orphans.

155. Between 2003 and 2005, the Global Fund provided assistance to 20,000, the Hope for African Children Initiative (HACI) and African Synergy against AIDS and Suffering to 1,000, and Bi-Multi to 3,200 orphans and vulnerable children.

156. The aim of the fourth focal point of the National Plan of Action to Combat AIDS 2006–2010 is to provide care for 75 per cent of Cameroon's 122,000 orphans and vulnerable children.

157. Children are involved to a certain extent in formulating and implementing preventive policies and programmes, notably in the phases of the analysis of the situation and the collection of data, through networks of children's associations and NGOs. In this connection, under the Bi-Multi project it is planned to have children join a steering committee.

(a) *Situation of the pandemic in Cameroon*

158. The rate of HIV seroprevalence in the general population went from 11.8 per cent in 2001 to an estimated 5.5 per cent in 2004, 6.4 per cent for women and 4.1 per cent for men. The most common mode of transmission is still by unprotected heterosexual contact, but mother-to-child transmission also gives cause for concern. The number of infections of children was estimated at 69,000 cases at the end of 2001 and 43,000 at the end of 2003 (UNAIDS 2003). According to UNAIDS estimates, the number of persons living with HIV/AIDS in 2005 stood at 470,000 adults (15 years of age and older) and 35,000 children (aged 0 to 14), and the total number of HIV/AIDS-related deaths since the start of the epidemic is estimated at 48,700 (40,000 adults and 8,700 children). In 2005, Cameroon had 122,670 AIDS orphans.

159. The groups most at risk are prostitutes, military personnel, police and related persons, lorry drivers, prisoners, youths and children.

Table 2

Basic statistics on the impact of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon in 2005

<i>Number of persons living with HIV</i>	<i>2005</i>
Men	183 300
Women	286 700
Children	35 000
Total	505 000
Number of persons living with HIV in need of therapy	75 750
Number of orphans	122 670

(b) *Strategy to combat the epidemic*

160. The various components of the fight against AIDS are discussed in the following paragraphs:

i. Prevention

161. Prevention is the lynchpin of the strategy. The core element, originally called Information-Education-Communication (IEC), is now known as Communication to Change Behaviour and aims to raise the awareness of the general public, and especially of risk groups, with regard to the following areas:

- Channels of transmission.
- Preventive methods focusing on responsible sexual behaviour and the use of one-time or sterile medical equipment.
- Transfusion safety, i.e. minimizing the number of blood transfusions, which should be administered only when the case warrants and after the blood designated for use

in the transfusion has been screened. To this end, it is planned to establish a network of laboratories to conduct HIV serological testing in all health districts. A blood transfusion guide has been formulated.

- Voluntary testing free of charge.
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

162. With regard to the latter point, the approach chosen is global and systematic. The number of women who benefit from this service has been rising constantly, with an average rate of consent to testing of nearly 63 per cent. Nevirapine is provided free of charge to women who are HIV-positive as well as to their newborns.

ii. Effective care for AIDS patients, orphans, relatives and persons infected by HIV

163. Initially, such assistance encountered difficulties due to the exorbitant cost of antiretrovirals (CFAF 300,000). The Government has opted for universal access to treatment. In 2003, it began to subsidize antiretrovirals, and this led to a sharp decline in costs (to CFAF 15,000), which were further reduced in 2004 (between 3,000 and CFAF 7,000, depending on the protocol). Treatment is free for children up to the age of 15.

iii. Epidemiological surveillance

164. In addition to systematic disease control, sentinel surveillance remains the principal source of information.

165. Various surveys and studies are used to provide a very detailed picture of the pandemic.

166. Sentinel surveillance targets pregnant women.

iv. Research

167. Research focuses on:

- Viral forms
- Vaccines
- Treatment in collaboration with practitioners of traditional medicine

168. The increasing exposure to the disease of certain social and occupational categories has led to the identification of five main groups in Cameroon, namely:

- Prostitutes
- Military personnel, police officers and related personnel
- Lorry drivers
- Prisoners
- Young people, including girls, who have the highest rate of prevalence

169. With a view to providing a comprehensive community care programme, the campaign against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) forms part of the minimum programme to be implemented by hospitals and health units. The IEC programme also attaches importance to this campaign.

170. The following principles have been laid down for the care of HIV-positive pregnant women undergoing treatment at a hospital or health unit:

- Practise contraception

- Regularly attend antenatal clinics to term and post-natal clinics thereafter
- Regular check ups of the newborn, comprehensive care and successive tests

171. In certain rare cases, a disappearance of HIV infection has been noted due to a spontaneous and natural seroconversion.

v. Combating sexually transmitted diseases

172. This focuses on three areas:

- Attendance at a hospital or health unit at the first sign of disease in order to avoid self-medication
- Procedures enabling personnel to deal expeditiously with cases of STDs
- Promotion of responsible sexual behaviour through the IEC programme

173. Prior to 1997, the National Programme to Combat AIDS operated exclusively with external funding. The five-year plan of action, budgeted and implemented with funding from the State budget and the contribution of donors, has been in effect since the budget year 1998/99.

4. Combating malaria and tuberculosis

(a) *Malaria*

174. Malaria is endemic in Cameroon. Forty-five per cent of persons who go to health units do so because of malaria, and 35 per cent of cases of mortality of children under the age of five are attributed to it.

175. At the summit in Abuja (Nigeria) on 25 April 2000, the heads of State and Government of 46 African countries agreed to take appropriate measures to reduce the burden of malaria by 50 per cent by 2010. Following this regional commitment, the Government started a process to reform the fight against malaria. A national strategy plan to combat malaria for the period 2002–2006 was adopted which focused on prevention through the use of treated mosquito nets. The two most vulnerable target groups, pregnant women and children under 5 years of age, receive special attention, including through the free distribution of mosquito nets.

176. Of the 610,000 mosquito nets acquired for pregnant women, 250,000 have been distributed. Another 800,000 nets were acquired for 2005.

177. Of the 150,000 mosquito nets acquired for children under 5 years of age, 40,000 have been distributed. Another 1,100,000 nets were acquired for 2005.

178. In order to improve access to treated mosquito nets for the rest of the population, in 2004 the price was reduced from CFAF 5,000 (US\$ 9) to CFAF 3,500 (US\$ 6).

(b) *Tuberculosis*

179. There has been a resurgence of tuberculosis in recent years due to the difficult living conditions of a large part of the population and to the progression of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for which tuberculosis still constitutes the primary opportunistic infection. The National Programme to Combat Tuberculosis has 173 diagnostic and treatment centres around the country.

180. After reducing the cost of treatment of tuberculosis to CFAF 5,000 in 1997, the Government decided that treatment would be free as from 1 October 2004.

5. Disadvantaged population groups

181. Most of the programmes set up for children in disadvantaged population groups have been carried out on site with the institutional assistance of United Nations bodies and bilateral cooperation with national and international NGOs.

C. Social security and childcare services and facilities (arts. 26 and 18, para. 3)

182. Article 26 of the Convention recognizes for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance.

183. In Cameroon, social security is administered by:

(a) The National Social Contingency Fund (CNPS) in the case of workers subject to the Labour Code, i.e. the employees of private and semi-public enterprises;

(b) The Ministries of the Civil Service, Administrative Reform, the Economy and Finance, as well as all ministerial departments concerned, in the case of civil servants and non-civil servant staff.

184. It may thus be seen that the right to social security benefits continues to be, in the first place, the right of salaried workers and, in the second, that of their children and those regularly under their care.

1. Normative framework

185. There has not been any major change in the normative framework since 2001. The old measures (laws and regulations) continue to govern social security at the level of the National Social Contingency Fund and the civil service. Even at this level, however, the following problems remain:

- Unwieldy procedures
- Structural and organizational weaknesses
- The complexity of the arrangements
- Disparities between the two systems
- Lack of computerization of benefits
- Irregularly supplied database
- Arrears in contributions owing to economic difficulties experienced by private enterprises and the State where staff subject to the Labour Code are concerned
- Accumulated arrears in benefits owed to beneficiaries of the Contingency Fund because of arrears in contributions and the decline in funding resources, on the one hand, and the contraction of salaried employment, on the other
- Restricted categories of social security beneficiaries: children of non-wage earners, workers in the informal sector, independent farmers and the unemployed are excluded
- Low amount of benefits, which are purely symbolic
- Limited scope of social security: the health insurance and unemployment insurance branches are not covered
- Adverse effects of the economic crisis

2. Outlook

186. Consideration is being given to the rehabilitation of the National Social Contingency Fund and to the reform of social security in Cameroon.

187. It is clear from these different indicators that children's access to social security benefits deserves attention from the authorities.

188. Since they are interrelated, any improvement in these social security benefits can be achieved only by improving those of the parents.

189. The Government is furthering the creation of mutual health insurance funds to address the lack of sickness insurance benefits in Cameroon.

D. Standard of living

190. Measures under the Poverty Reduction Strategy focus on the development and promotion of young children through preschool education, encouragement of on-site community initiatives and enhancing individual and family capacities.

191. To that end, the Government is working to ensure:

(a) The establishment of additional assistance facilities, particularly in rural areas;

(b) The involvement of local authorities, NGOs, communities and families in the financing of preschool education;

(c) The diversification of shelters through flexible comprehensive programmes;

(d) The training of supervisory staff;

(e) The effective follow-up and supervision of the functioning of preschool facilities.

192. A framework document is being elaborated on national policy for the integrated development of young children as part of the Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation programme 2003/2007.

193. With regard to private welfare agencies, steps are being taken to amend Decree No. 77/495 of 7 December 1977, which sets the conditions for their creation and functioning. A draft text on cooperation is being elaborated with associations and NGOs. The Ministry of Social Affairs has also signed partnership agreements with these bodies which define the responsibilities of both parties and give the Ministry a right of oversight.

VIII. Education, leisure and cultural activities

A. Education, including vocational training and guidance (arts. 28 and 29)

194. Laws and regulations governing education are to a large extent in conformity with the Convention. Cameroon recognizes the right of all citizens to education and instruction without discrimination. The measures taken by the public authorities to guarantee to all equality of opportunity for access to education are of a permanent nature. The crude rate of enrolment for girls is 71 per cent and 81 per cent for boys. One of the measures taken in this regard was the launching by the Ministry of Education of a national campaign to promote education for girls and the elaboration of a document on a strategy to be implemented.

195. The Ministry of Social Affairs deals with school placement and provides school aid to destitute children and children from indigent families. Children with disabilities or whose parents have disabilities receive the same benefits, in keeping with Act No. 83/013 of 21 July 1983 on the protection of disabled persons and Decree No. 90/116 of 28 September 1990 on the procedure for the implementation of the Act, which is still in force.

196. The State has also undertaken to improve mechanisms for assisting children by:

(a) Creating, in 2002, a State Secretariat for Youth within the Ministry of Youth and Sports and, in 2004, a Ministry of Youth;

(b) Working on the elaboration of a framework document on national policy for the integral development of young children in the context of the Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation programme 2003/2007;

(c) Providing public primary schools with minimum packages.

197. For this initiative, Cameroon is relying on both domestic resources and international cooperation.

(a) *Domestic resources:* These consist in the State budget, which, thanks to the economic recovery, has been growing for the social sectors; allocations envisaged under the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, HIPC funds, subsidies and customs exemptions are part of this increase, as are contributions from national NGOs.

(b) *International cooperation:* This concerns contributions from United Nations bodies and multilateral and bilateral cooperation agencies through jointly funded programmes and projects.

1. Availability of education

198. The availability of education has grown significantly with the increase in the number of classrooms and teachers. To cite one example, many primary schools were built in the framework of Cameroon/Japan cooperation and are now in operation.

199. At the nursery school and primary school levels, 3,562 schools were in operation in 2002/03, with 138,716 pupils in nursery schools and 2,798,523 pupils in primary schools.

200. The crude preschool and primary school enrolment rates improved steadily between 1997/98 and 2002/03, increasing from 10.5 to 13.5 and 83.4 to 105.4, respectively (cf. table 3.2 TBS2 P57).

2. Improving the quality of education

201. Decree No. 2001/041 of 19 April 2001 concerns the organization of school councils at nursery, primary, post primary, secondary and technical levels. These bodies are responsible for deliberating on, supervising and assessing the functioning of schools.

202. With regard to the improvement of the quality of education, the State has undertaken reforms to harmonize the educational system. New teaching methods have been introduced which focus on children and ensure that each child receives quality education. The introduction of innovative experiences which enhance children's sense of worth, the adoption of comprehensive and flexible curricula and the teaching of life skills reflect the commitment to provide quality education.

203. The contribution of the State to the financing of education is relatively modest, namely CFAF 182 billion in 2001 (15.7 per cent of public expenditure as against 20 per cent in the indicative framework of the accelerated initiative for universal primary school enrolment), whereas that of parents is very high (CFAF 239 billion, or 57.3 per cent, in 2001 as against 182 billion, or 43.3 per cent, for the State).

3. Guaranteeing fairness

204. The adoption in 2002 of the sectoral education strategy has helped facilitate access to education for young girls through numerous programmes and projects. One example of this is the “Basic Education” project, whose activities are aimed at reducing the repeater and drop-out rates of young girls. In order to promote and protect young girls and women through literacy campaigns and informal education, the number of centres for the advancement of women grew from 27 in 1998–2000 to 35 in 2000–2005 (source: MINPROFF). The Act on educational guidance was passed in 1998, making public primary school compulsory and free of charge. Steps have been taken to overcome obstacles to formal education for young girls.

205. Reference is also made to the “Schools – friends of children, friends of girls” initiative, which is designed to increase the enrolment of girls and promote the right of children to participate. It was introduced by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with UNICEF.

4. Outlook

206. With a view to pursuing its efforts to include classes on peace and tolerance and on children’s and other human rights in primary and secondary school curricula and to promote equality of opportunity for access to education, the Ministry of Education plans to:

- Improve school curricula by introducing classes in civics and humanitarian law
- Identify priority areas of children from poor backgrounds in order to provide them with textbooks

B. Leisure and cultural activities (art. 31)

207. The Government has carried out a number of initiatives to promote recreational, sports and cultural activities:

- (a) The creation in 2004 of a State Secretariat responsible for youth within the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the establishment of a Ministry of Youth;
- (b) Revitalization of the national committee of youth and adult education;
- (c) Formulation of a national youth policy;
- (d) Financing of a national literacy campaign through the HIPC fund;
- (e) Implementation of a project for the creation of a youth reintegration fund;
- (f) Article 31 of Decree No. 2001/041 of 19 February 2001 on the organization of public schools creates a general assembly of clubs and associations of pupils, and article 44 provides for an after-school and extra-curricular activities service in each public secondary school to coordinate the school’s vacation camps, construction projects for young people and cultural activities.

IX. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 38, 39, 40, 37 (b) and (d), 32 (a) and 36)

A. Children in conflict with the law

1. Administration of juvenile justice

208. Concerns about the administration of juvenile justice are taken into account in the framework of the preliminary draft code on the protection of children, which is in the course of being approved. Studies have already been conducted in order to provide better guidance for the drafters of this important text. The recent publishing of a work on juveniles and criminal justice in Cameroon and the formulation of a compendium of texts and a comparative analysis of legislation applicable to children have also offered guidance.

209. Training sessions with stakeholders involved in the administration of children in conflict with the law were held in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005; 150 experts received training in juvenile justice and the protection of the rights of children.

210. In March 2004, a study tour was organized to Senegal in order to share experience.

2. Treatment of children deprived of liberty, especially child detainees and prisoners or those in establishments under supervision

211. The improvement of the system of caring for children deprived of liberty is a priority for the Government. In this connection, concern about the proper monitoring and assessment of the relevant public facilities has led to the signing of Decree No. 2001/109/PM of 20 March 2001 on the organization and functioning of public institutions for the care of children and the rehabilitation of socially maladjusted juveniles. The work of these bodies has thus been harmonized and is more closely monitored, thereby significantly limiting inconsistent actions and abuses.

212. The recent creation of an annex to Yaoundé Central Prison, the reform of the penitentiary system and the formulation of a new prison policy are part of a strategy designed to make prisons more humane and to address overcrowding.

213. A study on children in conflict with the law was conducted in 2002 by the Association AGIR with the support of UNICEF.

214. *Outlook:* There is a firm political determination to protect the rights of children, a commitment demonstrated by the draft code on persons and the family and the approval under way of the preliminary draft code on the protection of children.

3. Exclusion of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

215. There has been no major change with regard to existing measures.

4. Physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration

216. Major action to improve infrastructure includes the creation in 2001 of the Crisis Centre in Mfoundi and the Shelter and Social Rehabilitation Centre for street children in Yaoundé. Similar facilities are planned in other regions.

B. Children subjected to exploitation or victims of violence

1. Economic exploitation, including child labour

217. The exploitation of child labour is a growing phenomenon in Central and Western Africa. Relying on existing structures and resources, the Government, in conjunction with the international community, has taken measures to eradicate the practice. Recommended administrative measures will be based on a number of prior actions.

218. Cameroon ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in 2004.

219. In addition, two preliminary studies were conducted with the support of ILO and UNICEF to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon and to confirm its existence. The results of the study are available.

220. A study on child labour in the informal sector carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs in conjunction with UNICEF has been submitted and approved.

221. Admittedly, the lack of precise statistical data continues to be a shortcoming and a challenge to efforts in favour of children subjected to economic exploitation. More specific quantitative studies are envisaged to measure the extent of the phenomenon and to improve understanding.

222. The programmes of cooperation between Cameroon, UNICEF and ILO have made the fight against child labour and trafficking one of their priorities. A national plan of action to combat child labour and trafficking in children was elaborated in October 2005. The second regional conference on trafficking and exploitation of children in Western and Central Africa was held in Yaoundé in August 2005.

223. A plan of action to combat sexual exploitation of children was drawn up in October 2005, and guidelines for the prevention of exploitation were approved and adopted in December 2005, along with a code of conduct for children, parents and the community.

224. In November 2005, a subregional session was held to train instructors in the fight against child slavery and trafficking.

225. At legislative level, on 29 December 2005 the President of the Republic promulgated the Act on combating child trafficking and slavery.

226. The preliminary draft code on the protection of children takes the question of protecting children against exploitation into account.

2. Sexual exploitation

227. The following provisions were introduced as part of the implementation of policies and programmes to prevent sexual exploitation of children in Cameroon:

- Adoption and dissemination of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, in particular the provisions prohibiting the use of tourism for sexual exploitation, above all with regard to children
- Organization of awareness-raising seminars and training sessions throughout the country for officials in the Ministry of Tourism, educators and private tour operators (hotels, tourist agencies, recreational centres) on the need to combat sex tourism involving children
- Promotion of responsible tourism
- Participation in programmes of the World Tourism Organization on the subject

- Conducting of a study on “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cameroon: Yaoundé, Douala, Limbé, Ngaoundéré”, by Frédéric Boursin and Séverin Cécile Abega (April 2004), as part of Cameroon’s contribution to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children

228. At the level of the judicial system, criminal sanctions for the sexual exploitation of children are severe: article 344 of the Criminal Code (corruption of youth), article 345 (children whose moral well-being is in danger), article 346 (indecent assault on a minor below the age of 16), article 347 (indecent assault on a minor aged between 16 and 21), article 347 bis (homosexuality), article 356 (forced marriage) and article 296 (rape).

229. *Outlook:* The following recommendations, adopted at the close of awareness sessions, will soon be implemented, including through regulatory provisions (for example, circulars issued by the Ministry of Tourism):

- Prohibition of all forms of sexual exploitation of children in tourist centres and at tourist locations
- Close collaboration with the administrative and law enforcement authorities, and reporting of suspicious behaviour to the competent authorities
- Organization of training sessions for hotel receptionists, and creation of special training centres
- Continuous awareness-raising of tourists through the production of a logo to be affixed to travel documents or displayed at tourist locations, and production of leaflets for distribution at all places frequented by tourists
- Informing tourists about the laws and regulations in force at the time they make their reservation for a trip
- Creation of telephone hotlines
- Appeal for a prohibition on all forms of suggestive advertising
- Introduction of a training module for judges, police officers and social workers in seminars organized on their behalf
- Awareness-raising of teachers and pupils, with a pilot initiative in one of the northern provinces
- The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Secondary Schools are producing modules on family life education and on the population which focus on combating all forms of violence against children, and sexual exploitation in particular

3. Protection against abuse and neglect

230. The following initiatives have been carried out:

- A study on violence against children is in the approval process.
- Violence at school is prohibited pursuant to article 35 of Act No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on educational guidance.
- It is customary in judicial procedures, in particular those concerning violence against children, to take into account the testimony of the child and, above all, the best interests of the child. Measures are taken to ensure that children can express themselves freely in private interviews held in the presence of a social worker.

231. This assistance is provided by certain NGOs and associations active in combating violence against children.

232. In the absence of a programme for psychological and social assistance for children who are victims of violence and other abuse, physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration are ensured by local social workers, including the personnel of social assistance centres and welfare services at police stations, courts and hospitals.

C. Children living or working on the streets

1. Data

233. A study on street children in Cameroon carried out in Maroua, Garoua, Ngaoundéré, Douala and Yaoundé by Marie Thérèse Mengue in August 2003 shows the initial evolution of the phenomenon. Whereas in 1999 there were an estimated 4,000 street children, 10,000 children now live and/or work on the streets around the country.

234. The number of children found to be members of groups established in 1999 gives an idea of the evolution of the phenomenon.

235. The problem is most noticeable in cities such as Yaoundé, Douala and Ngaoundéré.

236. The break-up of families and the destabilization of the family environment are the main causes identified in the study.

237. Two itineraries have been pinpointed:

(a) The itinerary of rural origin, in which the child leaves his or her village to go to the city, with the resulting school failure, wasted occupational training and the search for ways to feed one's family. Here the village is perceived as a place of conflict which in a sense impedes the young person's development;

(b) The itinerary of urban origin, characterized by an unstable economic context which leads to the financial insecurity of the displaced families and unstable and random employment.

238. This eventually results in separation, divorce and remarriage, which destabilize children and disturb their development.

239. In addition to these factors, the study notes that street children live in vulnerable conditions and are at risk of exploitation and abuse.

2. Improving the living conditions of these children

240. A crisis centre and a shelter and reintegration centre for street children were set up in Yaoundé under a joint project conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Belgian Red Cross. As part of this initiative, 1,052 street children were assisted between 2002 and 2005, of whom 355 were returned to their families, 74 received school aid, 155 were given vocational training and 11 were placed in an institution.

241. Since 2003, the Ministry for Youth has given new impetus to activities for young people by:

- Launching a national project to promote the reintegration of young people (PRONAIIS)
- Working to formulate a national youth policy with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF
- Reactivating the national civil service for participation in development

X. Children belonging to minorities

242. Cameroon is taking steps to implement programmes for the socio-economic integration and protection of children belonging to so-called marginalized groups by:

(a) Improving their legal status (acquisition of nationality) through a programme for the registration in the population registry of Bororos children of the Northwest and Adamaoua provinces and Baka and Bakola (pygmy) children in the East province, and organizing special campaigns for providing young adults with national identity cards. In the area that received UNICEF assistance (Adamaoua province), some 3,850 substitute birth certificates were issued;

(b) Promoting income-generating activities (NGO Plan Cameroun);

(c) Raising awareness of the problem of HIV/AIDS.

243. Surveys have been conducted in a number of locations in these regions in order to obtain a better understanding of the vulnerable situation of these population groups in general, and children in particular. As part of programmes and projects for caring for orphans and vulnerable children, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Hope for African Children Initiative (HACI) project, the Bi-Multi project and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) project are working to identify and analyse the needs of this growing category of vulnerable children.

Conclusion

244. Efforts to implement the Convention have continued, with emphasis being placed on the formulation and enactment of legislation and regulations and the implementation of an institutional framework in conformity with the provisions of the Convention.

245. Studies have been conducted to arrive at a better understanding of the various categories of vulnerable children, such as street children and children who are victims of sexual or economic exploitation.

246. The data collected have served to formulate plans of action and prepare laws and regulations.

247. With the help of international cooperation, effective steps have been taken to care for orphans and vulnerable children, a category of growing importance.

248. Efforts to provide services for children must be intensified.

249. Poverty in Cameroon has had an adverse impact on the functioning of specialized institutions, but the establishment of a legislative, regulatory and institutional framework for children augurs well for the protection of their rights in the future.