

# CAMEROON CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## "CCDHR POSITION STATEMENT"

### CAMEROON NOT READY FOR TRANSPARENT DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON OCTOBER 9, 2011

#### **1. Introduction**

CCDHR is saddened at the state of democracy in Cameroon, especially related to the recently announced Presidential election to be held on October 9, 2011. Less than a month to the scheduled election in Cameroon, the framework of the electoral management process and the conditions on the ground are still not set to guarantee the democratic nature of the process or transparency of the polls. CCDHR holds that the lack of will of the Government of Cameroon to institute basic but much needed democratic and electoral reform has perpetuated the voter disenfranchisement clearly evident across the country and also abroad where Cameroonians were recently accorded the right to vote.

#### **2. Prevalence of Voter Apathy in Cameroon**

CCDHR holds that the twisted nature of this electoral process in Cameroon has led most Cameroonians to completely lose faith in the system to the point where they do not believe their votes matter anymore. While a majority of Cameroonians did not even bother to register to vote, those that did register do not only appear unenthusiastic about the process, but are increasingly expressing their rejection of this electoral process by deciding in advance not to vote in the upcoming election. CCDHR recognizes that the Government of Cameroon has through intrigue and outright fraud, reduced elections to a meaningless process in Cameroon. As such, within the context of elections conduction under the prevailing circumstances, Cameroon stands out as one of the prominent autocracies where anyone can predict election results with 100% accuracy years in advance of actual voting.

While the Government of Cameroon is officially subject to the will of the people through elections, the validity of electoral results in Cameroon have been significantly compromised by severe irregularities. The 2007 Municipal and Legislative elections provided a prime example of election malfeasance in Cameroon, with widespread disenfranchisement of voters through unnecessarily complex registration processes and absolute election rigging. Regrettably, the marred 2007 elections served to further perpetuate the currently skewed and corrupt power structure in the country. In April 2008, the already tainted National Assembly acquiesced to a constitutional amendment eliminating Presidential term limit to allow Paul Biya who has ruled Cameroon since 1982 to stand for re-election in 2011. Coupled with the predictability of election results in Cameroon, the coronation of Paul Biya as the President for Life in Cameroon on October 9, 2011 appears inevitable.

#### **3. Unheeded Calls for Democratic Electoral Reform in Cameroon**

The desirability for democracy by a majority of Cameroonian citizens seems to be a far-fetched dream that is yet to be realized. This is so considering that elections which constitutes an important instrument of a democracy, in the case of Cameroon, continues to be hijacked by the ruling CPDM party, marred by widespread electoral fraud, and results rigged to its favor. In the years leading up to this upcoming Presidential election, there were numerous calls for genuine electoral reform both from international and national stakeholders, including ordinary citizens of Cameroon, members of the civil society, opposition political parties, and even some progressive members of the ruling CPDM party. However, it appears the louder and persistent the calls for reform, the more barriers the Government of Cameroon erected against the prospects of democratic elections in the country.

CCDHR notes that the need for democratic, free, and fair elections exists in all democracies, but given the specific history of electoral malfeasance in Cameroon, a robust and resolute force for unbiased

elections is especially essential. Unfortunately, calls for an independent electoral commission only led to the creation of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), an electoral body which was supposed to be an answer to Cameroon's electoral nightmare. CCDHR holds that the notion of ELECAM was bright in conception, but poor in formation, weak in operation, and paralyzed in composition. The institution is structurally dependent on the President, essentially robbing it of the independence necessary for an electoral commission to effectively safeguard the democratic process without fear of political influence or reprisal. Despite the clear proclamation of the law creating ELECAM that its members be "reputed for their .... neutrality and impartiality", the inaugural ELECAM appointees, who continue to serve on this body, were until the day of their appointment, ardent militants of the ruling CPDM party. Many of the appointees had not only served at the highest level of the CPDM party as members of its central committee and political bureau, they had served as members of the corrupt dictatorial regime of Paul Biya for extended durations, and helped in facilitating election fraud in the past.

#### **4. Biased Electoral Management Body and Predisposed Framework**

Calls for fundamental changes to the composition of ELECAM led to a recent amendment to the law creating ELECAM in which the commission members were merely increased from 12 to 18. This move was a desperate attempt by the Government of Cameroon to gain some international approbation for an already sham process because the six additional members appointed to ELECAM are without portfolio and possess no ability to affect change within the body or reassure its impartiality. The newest amendment to the ELECAM bill withdraws the body's prerogative to publish election result trends for presidential elections, a measure widely viewed as an elimination of the possibility of a rogue electoral commissioner proclaiming uncensored election trend results that may be unfavorable to the CPDM party. CCDHR states categorically that the present composition of the board of ELECAM and the power granted this body to organize elections in Cameroon does not guarantee impartiality in its work. It is evident that ELECAM cannot deliver the basic characteristics sort in a democratic electoral process which includes freedom, fairness, equity, transparency, impartiality, credibility, and accountability; and as such, the integrity of the upcoming election remains questionable.

CCDHR notes that with the Government and ELECAM having failed to canvass enough interest in the upcoming election early on, several steps were taken to encourage voter registration so as to swell the national voter list. A series of Presidential decrees reduced the cost of obtaining a National Identity Card to almost nothing in a bid to make Cameroonians to register on the electoral lists, a move that failed to achieve its intended result. CCDHR recognizes that this resistance by Cameroonians to register to vote is a reflection of an acute crisis of confidence in ELECAM's ability to manage any credible election in the country, and a recognition that the Government of Cameroon is chronically not interested in facilitating free and fair elections in the country.

Meanwhile, failure to get Cameroonians at home to register to vote has led ELECAM to accept a list of 'supposed registered voters' from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) - a list suspiciously doctored with names of 'potential ghost voters' who cannot be verified. It should be noted that MINATD, which is headed by a member of the political bureau of the ruling CPDM party holds an 'award of excellence' in the conduct of fraudulent elections in Cameroon. Worse still, representatives of MINATD are mandatory members of ELECAM at all administrative levels of government. Considering that ELECAM lacks the institutional and personnel capacity to effectively conduct elections across the country because it is not fully represented at the regional, divisional, and district levels, Cameroonians are once again left with no option but to entrust their votes with untrustworthy CPDM public administrators who are representatives of MINATD and answerable to the Minister and the current President, who himself is a candidate in the election.

On July 13, 2011, the Cameroon Parliament approved a government bill granting Cameroonian citizens abroad the right to vote in national elections, beginning with the upcoming Presidential election on October 9, 2011. CCDHR reiterates its position that the granting of voting rights to Cameroonian citizens abroad is definitely a welcomed move, but the narrow and fraudulent context within which such process is being carried out only serve to further election fraud outside the national boundary of Cameroon. Under the current dispensation, Cameroon Embassies and Consulates which are headed by CPDM operatives are exclusively charged with the registration of voters and conduct of polls abroad, a move clearly flawed as there is no oversight mechanism as to the reported number of registered voters or votes cast, let alone the number of reported voting centers or countries that Cameroonians are expected to vote. Therefore, voting rights for Cameroonians abroad is being used by the Government of Cameroon as a strategic back-up for Paul Biya and the CPDM party, which can use such mechanism to report as many votes cast abroad as may be necessary to offset national votes, if such were to be necessary to ensure the re-election of Paul Biya.

## **5. Conclusion**

The entire electoral process related to the upcoming Presidential election in Cameroon bears the hallmarks of the irregularities of past election practices. The reality on the ground is that Cameroonians are not enthusiastic about the prospects of electing their political leader next month. A cross section of Cameroonian citizens have lost interest in elections all together. Voter apathy permeates the fabric of the Cameroonian political landscape for reasons that range from voter disenfranchisement, ghost voting, ballot stuffing, and vote rigging. Therefore many Cameroonians have concluded that participating in the upcoming Presidential election is tantamount to the legitimization of election fraud as their votes will not matter, just as it has never truly mattered in the determination of the outcome of elections in Cameroon.

CCDHR notes that a true democracy where there are regular, free, fair, transparent, and credible elections is the route to political, social, and economic prosperity. Any election in Cameroon conducted under the prevailing framework has the propensity for civil unrest as the authenticity of the election results will be questionable and the legitimacy of the elected President clouded in fraud. CCDHR notes that with growing public disillusionment with the electoral process; public distrust in the current government and ELECAM; and the continued degeneration of the living conditions of Cameroonians; a fraudulent election on October 9, 2011 could become the catalyst for violence and political instability within the short or long term in Cameroon.

Done this day, **September 26, 2011.**

Presented on behalf of CCDHR,

**Eric NGONJI NJUNGWE.**

**President/Executive Director.**

**Cameroon Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CCDHR).**