

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix –Travail- Patrie

MINISTERE DE LA PROMOTION DE LA FEMME
ET DE LA FAMILLE

REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace- Work-Fatherland

MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT AND THE FAMILY



12TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS' DAY

23 June 2022

**THEME : “PROTECTING WIDOWS : A
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY”**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

June 2022

I. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

Adopted on 21 December 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/65/189, the first International Widows' Day was commemorated on 23 June 2011. In instituting this day, the United Nations decided to draw the attention of the international community on the marginalisation of widows and the issues at stake in order to take action and ensure that widows' rights are recognised and fully enjoyed.

Indeed, there are an estimated 258 million widows in the world and one in ten widows lives in extreme poverty. In his message on the occasion of the 2021 International Widows' Day, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pointed out that "For many widows, losing their husband also means losing their identity, land rights, property, income, and possibly their children. Their physical safety is particularly at risk at a time when they are exposed to severe psychological trauma", and he continued "On this International Widows' Day, let's commit to making sure all widows occupy a respected place in our societies, with access to legal and social protection, so they can live their lives in peace and reach their full potential".

In a bid to guarantee the defence of widows' rights, Cameroon has put in place a legal and institutional arsenal for the protection of women in general, and specifically the rights of widows.

Thus, at the national level, our country has ratified important international and regional instruments for the promotion and protection of the rights of widows and children ; notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to Women's rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

At the domestic level, Cameroon has a legislative and regulatory framework to protect the rights of widows and orphans.

As concerns the institutional framework, there are several ministries whose missions integrate among others the social protection of widows.

Despite the existence of this legal and institutional environment for the protection of widows' rights, there is need to acknowledge and deplore the fact that the exercise and enjoyment of these rights by widows still witness numerous obstacles due to ignorance or lack of knowledge of these rights, as

well as difficulties in having access to justice (high cost of legal fees, judicial delays, etc...).

Cultural factors also constitute major obstacles to the social protection of widows in our country. Families and in-laws, which are supposed to be privileged spaces for providing the necessary support and comfort to persons in distress, turn out to be places where widows are subjected to all kinds of violence in the form of spoliation of property, stigmatisation or exclusion, the practice of levirate, the retention or destruction of administrative documents, expulsion from the marital or family home, the prohibition on attending their husband's funeral, bullying and humiliation during the widowhood rites.

Moreover, our customs and traditions aggravate the vulnerability of the widow through widowhood rites and other funeral practices that inflict inhuman and degrading treatment, denying her the dignity of every human being without distinction of sex.

In addition, the socio-political crisis in the North-West and South-West, as well as the atrocities of the terrorist sect Boko-Haram, are plunging families into mourning, thereby increasing the number of thousands of widowed women who must assume full responsibility for their families. These women, who are vulnerable and fragile, have many needs that the State cannot meet due to lack of resources.

The theme chosen for this 12th edition, which is “**Protecting widows: a collective responsibility**” is an opportunity to highlight the various factors that aggravate the vulnerability of widows in order to understand that acting to put an end to the violence experienced by widows and to restore their dignity requires the involvement of all, institutional actors, civil society organisations, the widows themselves, families and traditional leaders as well as communities.

II. OBJECTIVES

II.1. General objective

The overall objective of this commemoration is to sensitise communities and families on the need to respect the rights of widows.

III. 2. Specific objectives

- identify the factors and different types of violence experienced by widows;
- identify the actors of violence;

- propose solutions to violence;
- educate widows on their rights;
- educate the community on the different stakeholders that can act together for the protection of widows;
- educate widows on the legal and administrative procedures for protecting their rights.

IV. EXPECTED RESULTS

At the end of the celebration :

- the factors and different types of violence experienced by widows are identified;
- the actors of this violence are identified and solutions are proposed;
- solutions to violence against widows are proposed;
- widows are educated about their rights ;
- the community is informed about the different stakeholders who can act to protect widows;
- widows are educated on the judicial and administrative procedures for protecting their rights.

V. ACTIVITIES TO BE CARRIED OUT

The activities marking the commemoration of the 12th edition of the International Widows' Day will be carried out in strict compliance with the Covid-19 preventive measures. The following activities have been targeted:

- training of widows in IGAs;
- official presentation of the legal support guide for widows;
- organisation of socio-legal clinics;
- sharing of experiences in humanising widowhood rites (in the Western region (CIPCRE);
- advocacy by the Minister in Parliament for a better respect of widows' rights ;
- participation in radio and television programmes;
- communication and community mobilisation on the respect of widows' rights and dignity.

V- SUB-THEMES :

- Rights of the surviving spouse ;
- Widowhood rites and dignity of the widow ;
- Collective responsibility in the protection of the widow;

- Role of families and in-laws in supporting the widow;
- Human rights and widowhood practices;
- Social support for the widow;
- Legal protection of the widow.

VI- STAKEHOLDERS

- Parliament ;
- Target ministries (MINJUSTICE, MINFOPRA, MINDEF, DGSN) ;
- United Nations System ;
- Cameroon Association of Female Jurists (ACAFEJ) ;
- Widows' Associations ;
- Organisations for the defence of widows' rights;
- Traditional and religious leaders ;
- Women and Family networks and associations.