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**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches to improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

## **Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/165, provides an overview of the work carried out by the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and the most significant developments in its operations from September 2009 to August 2011. The report also presents the Centre's strategic thematic priorities for the period 2010-2013. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Centre's activities, in 2011, the report analyses the feedback on the Centre's work, impact and future directions received from an online survey addressed to Governments, subregional organizations, civil society organizations, the United Nations system and bilateral development partners. The report also provides an analysis of some of the Centre's experiences over the past 10 years and outlines its future direction.

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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	3
II. Human rights, peace and security in Central Africa .....	3
III. Strategic thematic priorities of the Centre (2010-2013) .....	5
A. Elimination of discrimination, focusing on the rights of indigenous populations, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and their families, women's human rights and gender issues .....	5
B. Strengthening the rule of law and combating impunity .....	7
C. Promotion of democracy and good governance .....	8
D. Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights .....	9
E. Strengthening national human rights institutions and cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms .....	10
IV. Tenth anniversary of the Centre: 2001-2011 in review .....	11
A. Outcome of the online survey .....	11
B. Results achieved .....	12
C. Analysis of achievements and opportunities for future engagement .....	14
D. Challenges .....	16
V. Conclusions .....	17

## **I. Introduction**

1. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (hereafter the Centre), was established in 2001 at the request of the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), pursuant to the resolution adopted by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa at its fourth meeting, in April 1994, in Yaoundé, as well as to General Assembly resolutions 53/78A and 54/55A.

2. The Centre operates under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and functions as the Central Africa regional office for OHCHR, covering the 10 member States of ECCAS (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tomé and Príncipe) and Rwanda. In accordance with its mandate, the Centre works for the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy through advocacy, lobbying, dialogue, technical assistance and advisory services extended to Governments, parliaments, United Nations country teams, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and the media, among others.

3. The Centre is currently staffed with a Regional Representative/Director of the Centre, a Regional Adviser for Democracy, two Human Rights Officers, a National Programme Officer in charge of documentation, information and advocacy, a Communications and Advocacy Associate, two Programme Assistants (human rights and democracy), and five support staff. Since December 2010, the Centre has benefited from the expertise of an Associate Expert (gender and women's human rights), whose post is funded by the Government of France. In addition, the Centre's staffing is complemented by the contributions of five fellows (in the fields of human rights; democracy; information, communications and advocacy; gender and human rights of women; and administration and finance), for a maximum period of six months per fellowship. The fellows are young professionals, civil servants, civil society activists or academics originating from Central African countries.

## **II. Human rights, peace and security in Central Africa**

4. Past and ongoing conflicts and social crises in the Central African subregion continued to affect the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights during the reporting period. At the same time, countries that were not affected by conflicts also continued to face human rights challenges and democratic deficit, albeit at varying degrees. The reporting period was characterized by the holding of legislative and presidential elections in many countries of the subregion. Although most periodic elections were conducted in a relatively open manner, in several countries of the subregion (Burundi, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Príncipe), in some cases the openness, fairness and transparency of these elections were challenged.

5. In the Central African subregion, despite a high level of ratifications of international and regional human rights treaties, the implementation of these commitments at the national level remained inconsistent. Many countries continued to suffer from inadequate national legislative frameworks, unaccountable public administrations, underfunded judiciaries and a lack of social policies. Excessive control by the executive over the legislative and the judiciary challenged the

independence of such national institutions as election management bodies and national human rights institutions. National human rights protection systems remained weak across the subregion, with few national human rights institutions in the subregion having been accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions. Generally, civil society and non-governmental organizations also remained underdeveloped, uncoordinated and underfunded, focusing largely on donor-driven microlevel projects, and lacking in strategic advocacy or national networking capacity.

6. In addition, corruption continued to be widespread. The lack of systematic investment of State revenues in basic socio-economic services for all, without discrimination, seriously challenged the realization of economic and social rights. The urban poor, rural populations or otherwise marginalized groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and migrant workers and their families, generally lacked access to basic socio-economic services. High rates of infant and maternal mortality, low levels of adequate housing and the lack of access to safe water and sanitation, to education and to decent work affected the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in all countries of the subregion.

7. Some countries in the Central African region witnessed a deterioration in human rights protection, particularly in the treatment of political opposition actors, human rights defenders, media professionals, or those alleged to be involved in overthrowing regimes; and in discrimination based on sexual orientation.

8. Although some efforts were made, in particular by Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of the Congo, to meet overdue reporting obligations, most Central African countries have significant numbers of State party reports outstanding, under several treaties, and have not taken adequate follow-up measures to implement recommendations from treaty bodies or special procedures. Few States in the subregion have ratified the following international human rights instruments: the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

9. At the same time, during the reporting period, active engagement by all countries in Central Africa with the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council proved an important opportunity to revitalize cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and the beginning of a dialogue to address many specific human rights issues. It is encouraging that, among others, the Republic of the Congo (in 2010 and 2011) and Equatorial Guinea (in 2010) received visits by special procedures mandate holders, that Cameroon extended invitations to two special procedures mandate holders and that Sao Tomé and Príncipe made a commitment to extend a standing invitation to all special procedures mandate holders.

### III. Strategic thematic priorities of the Centre (2010-2013)

#### A. Elimination of discrimination, focusing on the rights of indigenous populations, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and their families, women's human rights and gender issues

10. Discrimination and marginalization remained persistent concerns in the subregion, including on the basis of gender, ethnicity, health status, social and political affiliations, nationality and sexual orientation. The problem of population movements resulting from conflicts and economic hardship further compounded discrimination against migrant workers and their families, who were at times victims of arbitrary arrest and detention, inhuman or degrading treatment or forced expulsions. Others, in particular women and children, became victims of human trafficking.

##### **Migrant workers and their families**

11. Migration was the single most significant source of population movements across the subregion, and most countries were countries of origin, destination or transit for migrant workers and their families. Migrant workers were frequently denied freedom of movement and equal access to employment, adequate housing and education. Migrant workers were also subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. There was a general lack of awareness of the rights of migrants, and there were no adequate national or subregional policies on migration. The Central African States had generally not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

12. In response to these challenges, and in the context of the twentieth anniversary of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Centre, together with the International Organization for Migration and ECCAS, organized the first subregional dialogue on migration and human rights, gathering representatives of Governments and civil society organizations from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, at an event held from 6 to 8 December 2010, in Yaoundé. The subregional dialogue aimed at raising awareness about the substantive content of the Convention and the relevant international standards protecting the rights of migrants, and at facilitating the development of human rights-based national and subregional migration policies and practices. The Centre also continued its advocacy efforts in the region for the ratification of the Convention, as part of its universal periodic review follow-up strategy and during the country visits by the Regional Representative.

13. As an immediate positive national follow-up action, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization of Cameroon requested the Centre to carry out training for its staff on migration and human rights, to be held in 2011.

14. Following the prioritization, by several countries of the subregion, of combating trafficking in persons as a serious human rights challenge, the Centre has planned to organize a subregional consultation on human rights and fighting trafficking in persons in the latter half of 2011, and to support the national anti-trafficking campaign of the Republic of the Congo, as part of its implementation of the follow-up to the universal periodic review.

**Indigenous peoples**

15. With regard to the protection of indigenous peoples in the Central African region, notable progress included the ratification, by the Central African Republic, of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples, and the inclusion of information relating to the rights of indigenous peoples by Cameroon in its most recent periodic State party report submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD/C/CMR/15-18). The Republic of the Congo adopted a law on indigenous peoples on 30 December 2010, shortly after the visit to the Congo, in November 2010, of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, in collaboration with the Centre. Within the framework of its priorities for the biennium 2010-2011, the Centre carried out several activities to ensure discrimination against indigenous peoples was acknowledged and addressed by public authorities, the media and civil society, and advocated for public policy dialogue at the national and subregional levels.

16. The Centre joined the Governments of Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo in the commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, on 9 August 2010, to sensitize target audiences to the rights of indigenous peoples, as contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Centre produced a series of outreach materials to contribute to a better understanding of the Declaration. Such materials included a public information kit published with financial contributions from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Congo, the European Union, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Congo and the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Congo. The materials included 1,000 booklets on questions and answers on indigenous peoples and human rights in Central Africa and several hundred copies of posters produced by indigenous peoples in the Congo, which were published during a photo exhibition at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in Brazzaville. The Centre contributed to the organization of a subregional seminar on the application of international norms and principles related to the rights of indigenous peoples, in collaboration with the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office in Yaoundé. The seminar was held from 26 to 28 May 2010, in Yaoundé.

17. In addition, the Centre is planning to contribute to a research study on the definition of indigenous populations in Cameroon by the Ministry for External Relations, with the view to preparing a draft law on the protection of indigenous populations.

**Persons with disabilities**

18. In the subregion, persons with disabilities continued to be victims of social isolation and marginalization by their own families and the rest of the society. Their access to education and employment was often far below the national average. Social security protection and legal protection were virtually inexistent. With the exception of Gabon and Rwanda, Central African States had not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities nor its Optional Protocol, although several were signatories.

19. In this context, from 23 to 25 November 2010, the Centre organized a subregional training and advocacy seminar on the Convention and its Optional Protocol. The seminar was organized jointly with the Ministry of Social Affairs of Cameroon, Sightsavers and the secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with

Disabilities. It served as a forum to encourage Governments of the subregion to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol, as well as to adopt and implement enabling legislation for existing national laws on disabilities.

20. On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on 3 December 2010, the Centre participated in two major activities organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Cameroon and Sightsavers. Outreach materials developed by the Centre included T-shirts, pocket-size copies of the Convention and copies of Cameroon's national law on persons with disabilities.

21. Similarly, in cooperation with Sightsavers, Elections Cameroon and the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, the Centre has been advocating for the adoption of an accessible approach to elections in Cameroon, allowing for free, informed and inclusive participation by persons with various disabilities in the forthcoming elections.

#### **Women's human rights and gender issues**

22. During the reporting period, the Centre increased its work on gender issues and women's human rights, covering a range of themes, including: violence, small arms and light weapons; political participation and elections; women living with disabilities; the rights of refugees; women's human rights in the media; advocacy for the integration of a human rights-based approach in gender-responsive budgeting and budgeting for women's human rights; and technical support for State party report submissions on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in several countries.

23. In the light of the global redesigning of OHCHR gender policy, a subregional training was conducted for the heads of human rights field presences and the gender facilitators of United Nations country teams in Central Africa, in August 2011, in Yaoundé, with a view to improving gender integration skills and methodologies.

### **B. Strengthening the rule of law and combating impunity**

24. All countries of the Central African subregion faced significant challenges in the administration of justice, especially in affording access to justice for all and combating impunity for violations of human rights. Some of the contributing factors included: the lack of judicial independence safeguards in constitutional provisions; special law enforcement agencies operating outside regular command chains; ineffective accountability structures for law enforcement bodies; and a failure to rigorously enforce existing laws.

25. The justice systems, including prison administrations and law enforcement agencies, generally lacked sufficient budgetary allocations. They also faced shortages of qualified personnel, adequate premises and equipment. Awareness and application of human rights standards in their work was very low. Ill-treatment by law enforcement officials of migrants, victims of trafficking and other vulnerable populations was of concern.

26. In countries of the subregion affected by violence and conflicts, the lack of effective transitional justice mechanisms had led to widespread impunity. Increased knowledge and awareness of the importance of transitional and post-conflict justice

could facilitate peaceful transitions, including in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Transitional justice challenges in other countries have not yet emerged, since these countries did not face conflicts on a scale comparable to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in the Great Lakes region, nor undergo major political transitions. Prevailing impunity in these countries appeared to be linked to the challenges affecting the administration of justice, as described above.

27. To address these challenges, the Centre continued to strengthen the capacities of core justice and law enforcement professionals in protecting human rights, and to provide assistance for the institutionalization of human rights training for law enforcement officials in the subregion. Notable progress was already registered in Cameroon where the Centre, in collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, provided human rights training sessions, on a regular basis, at the national institute for the judiciary police and for law enforcement officers working in the field. Similarly, from 18 to 22 July 2011, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, the National Commission, the Bar Association of Cameroon, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Centre conducted a training workshop on human rights in the administration of prisons for trainers of the National School of Penitentiary Administration of Buea, Cameroon. The Centre has committed to following up on the recommendations of the training of trainers related to the adoption of penal and penitentiary reforms to protect the rights of persons in detention, and the development of a code of conduct for prison administration staff. The Centre has offered to facilitate a training workshop on human rights and the rule of law, with a focus on detention issues, human rights and migration and trafficking, for security forces in Equatorial Guinea, later in 2011.

28. In the area of transitional justice, and building on a previous regional seminar on transitional justice in francophone Africa, in November 2009, the Centre pursued its efforts to expand knowledge about transitional justice mechanisms. The second regional conference on transitional justice, organized in Yaoundé in partnership and with the financial support of the Governments of France and Switzerland, provided an important subregional platform for sharing experiences and disseminating tools that could facilitate the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms in the conflict-affected countries of the subregion.

### **C. Promotion of democracy and good governance**

29. A number of elections were held in the subregion in 2009, 2010 and 2011. As election processes in some countries are commonly contested over fraudulent practices, they could constitute a significant destabilizing factor for countries of the subregion. Voter turnout was generally low in the subregion, and problems regarding the timely delivery of voter registration cards, the independence of the elections management bodies and a lack of transparency were regularly reported. The capacity of administration of justice mechanisms was not adequate for settling electoral disputes. Despite the formal existence of multiparty systems, meaningful political choice and competition was often inexistent, with ruling parties heavily outweighing the opposition in representation in parliaments and Governments, and in access to resources. Parliaments were at times not effective in adopting legislation to address the significant human rights challenges in the subregion, nor



in ensuring checks and balances over the executive branch of Government. In effect, the constitutional frameworks of the subregion generally did not grant adequate independence and relative autonomy to democratic institutions.

30. Engaging with key stakeholders in democratic processes to build their human rights capacity was considered an important contribution towards strengthening democracy, promoting free and fair elections and minimizing electoral violence in the subregion. A first subregional conference on democracy, organized by the Centre, in Malabo, in October 2009, provided a useful opportunity for representatives of Governments, national human rights institutions, civil society and international organizations to hold a public discussion on human rights in democratic processes, and to critically identify existing gaps and discrepancies between international standards and practices in Central Africa.

31. During the reporting period, the Centre also organized a series of subregional training workshops on elections and human rights for various target audiences, including a training for media professionals in Cameroon (March 2010), followed by a subregional workshop for representatives of elections management bodies (in cooperation with Elections Cameroon and the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and with the participation of the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs), also in Cameroon (July 2010). A subregional seminar for Central African parliamentarians was organized in Libreville (September 2010), with the participation of the rule of law section of OHCHR and in cooperation with the Senate and Parliament of Gabon and the Central African network of parliamentarians. This was followed by a commemoration of International Democracy Day, on 15 September 2010. A subregional human rights training for election observers was also conducted, in cooperation with the International Conference, in Burundi (June 2011).

32. In the context of national election processes, the Centre participated in an OHCHR mission to Gabon, to observe the human rights situation during the presidential elections in August and September 2009. During 2011, the Centre also organized national workshops on elections and human rights for political parties, for media professionals and for civil society organizations in Cameroon, in anticipation of the presidential elections later in the year.

#### **D. Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights**

33. The promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights posed important challenges in all countries of the subregion. Equal access to adequate housing, education, adequate health care, safe water and sanitation and to employment and decent work remained a distant reality for significant parts of the population in Central Africa. The practice of forced evictions in urban areas persisted. Access to free primary education was promoted, in fulfilment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Millennium Development Goals, but these targets appeared far from being met by 2015. Access to quality health services was largely unobtainable due to prohibitive costs or the lack of qualified professionals. Ineffective social policies and programmes in the employment sector have resulted in the lack of access to decent work, affecting the living conditions of young unemployed persons in particular, many of whom have a formal education.

34. The revenues from the exploitation of oil and other natural resources, such as timber and minerals, were not always used for the benefit of the neediest segments of the population, and corruption further aggravated the situation. While economic, social and cultural rights were often guaranteed by the constitutions of the subregion, their realization remained a challenge. The States of the subregion had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which could assist in terms of rendering administrative and judicial mechanisms more effective to ensure the justiciability of the economic, social and cultural rights.

35. The application of a human rights-based approach or the use of human rights indicators in analysing sector strategic plans and budgets could also be useful tools for tracking expenditures in social sectors. In that regard, the Centre had planned to organize, in collaboration with OHCHR, a subregional workshop on the human rights-based approach to budgeting, to be held in December 2011, in Yaoundé. The meeting would aim at strengthening the capacity of participants to systematically mainstream human rights in their respective activities, with a view to promoting good governance and reducing poverty through human rights-based budgeting and planning.

#### **E. Strengthening national human rights institutions and cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms**

36. National human rights protection systems require significant strengthening in all countries of the subregion, despite some progress made during the reporting period. The Centre contributed to the first meeting of national human rights institutions in Central Africa, organized in June 2010, in Brazzaville, by the Commission of the African Union, in association with ECCAS. In follow-up, the Centre, in collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms of Cameroon, organized a subregional workshop for representatives of Governments, Parliament and national human rights institutions from Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, from 27 to 29 June 2011, in Yaoundé. The workshop aimed at strengthening the status and capacities of national human rights institutions, in compliance with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (Paris Principles), and at establishing a network of such institutions in Central Africa. The workshop was instrumental to adopting specific national action plans to strengthen national human rights protection systems and a road map for the creation of the Central African network of national human rights institutions. The next meeting to consolidate the network is planned for late 2011 or early 2012.

37. The universal periodic review and its follow-up allowed the Centre to deepen its engagement on human rights issues with the Governments in the region, to build strategic partnerships with technical and financial development cooperation partners and national stakeholders, including civil society organizations, and to increase cooperation by Central African States with international human rights mechanisms. In this context, the Centre facilitated trainings in preparation for universal periodic reviews in Equatorial Guinea and in Rwanda. With the support of the Centre, and following the creation and training of inter-ministerial national follow-up

mechanisms for the review, comprehensive national road maps for universal periodic review follow-up in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tomé and Príncipe were adopted in 2011. Also with the support of the Centre, the Governments concluded consultations with civil society organizations and the national human rights commissions on the implementation of universal periodic review recommendations. The Centre reached agreements with the Governments of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon to conduct review follow-up activities, later in 2011. The Centre benefited from a substantive financial contribution from the Universal Periodic Review Trust Fund to support these follow-up activities.

## **IV. Tenth anniversary of the Centre: 2001-2011 in review**

### **A. Outcome of the online survey**

38. On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, in 2011, the Centre launched an online survey in French and English, targeted at all its partners in the subregion and beyond, in order to better understand how the work of the Centre is perceived, receive suggestions for future directions and inform the Centre's strategic planning for the years to come.

39. This section provides a brief summary of the key elements of the survey. The full results will be published on the Centre's tenth anniversary web page, available from [www.cnudhd.org](http://www.cnudhd.org).

40. By mid-July 2011, a total of 125 responses from 10 countries of the subregion had been received. Responses were received from civil society organizations, which made up the largest participation (45 per cent), and from Governments, the United Nations system, universities and academic institutions, subregional organizations, national human rights institutions and bilateral development partners.

41. In terms of the substantive views, 84 per cent of respondents considered the Centre's overall work "very important and useful" or "important and useful", with only 1 per cent considering it as "not important".

42. The Centre's capacity-building activities (chosen by 73 per cent of respondents) and the dissemination of international and regional human rights and democracy standards (according to 75 per cent of respondents) were considered as its most important and useful activities. The documentation centre, the fellowship programme and the Centre's public information and outreach activities were considered among the most relevant activities.

43. The biggest impact of the Centre's activities was identified as the effective strengthening of national capacities of Governments, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and the media in the area of human rights (according to 53 per cent of responses) and the role the Centre plays in increasing public awareness and knowledge of international and human rights standards (30 per cent of responses).

44. The survey confirmed the choice of the Centre's strategic thematic priorities for the period from 2010 to 2013, by considering them very relevant, as follows: combating impunity (according to 60.5 per cent of responses), promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights (55.7 per cent of responses),

promoting democracy (59.3 per cent of responses), eliminating discrimination (63.8 per cent of responses) and strengthening cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms (32 per cent of responses).

45. Feedback from the online survey suggested that the Centre should strengthen its activities in the area of human rights education and democracy (according to 78.9 per cent of responses), in law reform (74 per cent of responses), and increase its cooperation with civil society organizations (88 per cent of responses), with the media (83 per cent of responses), with administration of justice professionals (83 per cent of responses) and with security forces (61 per cent of responses).

46. The survey also revealed that the Centre should consider the following initiatives: offering short training courses for civil society members and Government officials working in the area of human rights; providing strategic support for thematic networks of expertise in the subregion; improving communication and outreach about its activities; and organizing more capacity-building seminars for civil society and non-governmental organizations. It was also proposed that the Centre consider how to better make use of trainers it had previously trained in the subregion and to maximize the use of such resource persons in the Centre's activities.

## **B. Results achieved**

47. This section aims to highlight some of the key results achieved by the Centre during the reporting period, demonstrating the concrete impact of its activities in selected areas.

48. The Centre succeeded in institutionalizing training on human rights, gender and the rule of law in the curriculum of the training institute for the judicial police in Cameroon and in the training centre for armed and security forces of the Central African region, who are to be deployed in peace missions.

49. The national human rights institutions of Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea took steps to improve their compliance with the Paris Principles, with technical and substantive support from the Centre. So far, two national human rights institutions met their objectives of becoming increasingly compliant with the Paris Principles: the institution in Cameroon received "A" accreditation status from the Sub-committee on Accreditation of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, in July 2010, and the institution in the Republic of the Congo received its first-time accreditation of "B" status, in October 2010. The institution in Equatorial Guinea was expected to undergo its accreditation process by October 2011. Finally, the Centre facilitated the establishment of a network of national human rights institutions in Central Africa.

50. The Centre contributed to raising awareness among persons living with disabilities and their representative organizations through the production and dissemination of human rights communication tools (including a DVD on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in accessible format for persons with sensory disabilities).

51. Several countries significantly increased their engagement with human rights mechanisms, including through the universal periodic review process, largely as a

result of the Centre's cooperation with country teams in the subregion. The Centre supported preparations for the universal periodic review in Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and follow-up activities in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, leading to the adoption of national implementation action plans. The preparatory process and simulation exercise for the universal periodic review in Equatorial Guinea were instrumental in opening a dialogue with the Government on the main human rights and democracy challenges and in formulating a formal road map for action through agreements (aides-memoires) signed between the country team, the Centre and the Government of Equatorial Guinea, in September 2009.

52. The materials produced by the Centre for training the inter-ministerial committee of the Republic of the Congo, which is charged with managing the national follow-up to recommendations of human rights mechanisms, have already been used in Chad, Liberia, the Niger, Rwanda and in other countries.

53. The Republic of the Congo made significant progress in fulfilling almost all outstanding treaty body reporting obligations, including by submitting overdue reports under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which were expected in 2011. Similar efforts were being undertaken by the Governments of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, following advocacy and technical assistance by the Centre.

54. A Central African platform was established for sharing experiences and disseminating tools that could facilitate the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms in the conflict-affected countries of the subregion.

55. The subregional democracy conference organized by the Centre, in Malabo (see para. 30 above), provided an important platform for developing a democracy road map for Central Africa, to be implemented by Governments in the subregion in cooperation with multilateral and bilateral partners.

56. The Centre successfully contributed to the participation of indigenous peoples in legislative and decision-making processes in Cameroon and in the Republic of the Congo.

57. In Cameroon, following initiatives by the Government and civil society organizations, with the technical support of the Centre, a national law to protect the rights of persons with disabilities was adopted in April 2010, largely in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Following the Centre's advocacy efforts, ratification of the Convention in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea should follow shortly.

58. The Centre's continuing joint advocacy efforts with Sightsavers and the national human rights institution of Cameroon has led to Cameroon's election management body, Elections Cameroon, starting to take concrete accessibility measures to allow for persons with disabilities to vote freely, independently and in dignity, in the forthcoming 2011 presidential elections.

59. The very positive response to and desire for increased human rights engagement at the country level by resident coordinators and country teams in

Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, has also resulted specifically in the Governments of the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea requesting the deployment of human rights advisers in their countries, with support from the Centre.

60. The presentation of the Centre's annual report of activities to the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa led to the decision of the Standing Committee, at the ministerial level, to consider, at its meeting in 2011, the challenges posed by trafficking in persons to human rights and stability in the subregion.

61. Partnerships with bilateral donors in the area of transitional justice and in campaigning against torture constituted important alliances for the Centre in increasing the effectiveness of human rights activities.

62. More generally, as part of the Centre's core cross-cutting activities, popular awareness and knowledge of human rights and democracy were strengthened through the Centre's ongoing outreach and advocacy strategy, which included the development and dissemination of various public information materials (posters, pocket-size human rights treaties, T-shirts, an accessible CD-ROM version of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, folders, calendars, notebooks, pens), press releases and a newsletter entitled "Rights and Democracy Focus", which is distributed to over 6,000 global contacts through an electronic human rights network. The Centre received an average of close to 1,000 visitors per year, including students, academics, journalists, researchers, Government officials, civil society and national human rights institution members and others, at its subregional documentation centre for human rights and democracy, which made an important contribution towards raising awareness of human rights among the public.

### **C. Analysis of achievements and opportunities for future engagement**

63. The engagement of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, covering 11 countries in the Central African subregion, has focused on developing the human rights protection capacity of Governments, regional organizations such as ECCAS, national institutions, civil society and the United Nations system agencies, and on the consolidation of democratic processes to ensure accountability. Geographically and strategically, the Centre's activities focused on 5 out of the 11 countries of the subregion under the Centre's mandate: Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, which do not have a human rights field presence at the country level, as well as Chad (after the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, and in anticipation of the establishment of a small OHCHR human rights field presence in the country during 2011).

64. In this context, the Centre successfully implemented activities on human rights in many countries of the subregion. These covered: law enforcement and detention issues, including advocating against torture; raising awareness on treaty body reporting obligations and the follow-up to recommendations by human rights mechanisms; the protection of human rights defenders; national human rights institutions; transitional justice issues; child trafficking; the promotion of human rights education, the right to information and freedom of the media; the human rights of indigenous peoples, women, persons with disabilities, older persons and

persons living with HIV/AIDS; and the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

65. The strategy of the Centre has been to address the key protection gaps by empowering frontline protection actors, including civil society organizations and national human rights institutions. It has also sought to strengthen national laws and policies pertaining to human rights and to facilitate the drafting of legal frameworks to advocate for increased protection of human rights. The Centre established a human rights and democracy fellowship programme and hosted 16 fellows of the subregion (graduate students, civil servants and civil society representatives), over the past two years.

66. At the regional level, the Centre continued to strengthen its dialogue and cooperation with the Standing Advisory Committee, including through its annual reports to the Committee. Additionally, discussions were held on how to revitalize the existing memorandum of understanding between the Centre and ECCAS, through the adoption of a more detailed implementation framework of joint activities. The Centre intensified its support to activities of the Economic Commission for Africa, including by contributing to its subregional post-conflict programme, and initiated a first contact with the Central African Economic and Monetary Community.

67. Increasingly, the Centre is recognized as an important player in addressing subregional challenges in the areas of human rights and democracy. In recent years, Governments of the Central African subregion have increased their engagement in the promotion of human rights and enhanced collaboration with OHCHR, especially with human rights mechanisms. The Centre's advocacy efforts have contributed towards the ratification of international human rights instruments and the establishment of human rights units or focal points within Government structures. The Centre has enabled country teams, especially in countries without a human rights field presence, to build their capacity on applying a human rights-based approach to development and in carrying out joint human rights activities at the national level.

68. The Centre has succeeded in consolidating its credibility and visibility in the subregion as a result of systematic outreach activities, including establishing an electronic network of journalists; cultivating media contacts; supplying substantive human rights stories; using attractive and creative audio-visual materials; and holding regular press meetings and training workshops on human rights for media professionals. The Centre's activities were regularly covered in the major newspapers, television and radio, especially in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo and Gabon.

69. While many countries of the subregion had generally ratified most of the key international human rights instruments, the implementation of these commitments was generally lacking. In some particularly challenging situations, OHCHR ensured that national authorities remained engaged with international and regional protection mechanisms, which provided a useful entry point to address human rights protection concerns. The universal periodic review process and recommendations provided an entry point to discuss many human rights recommendations that had remained unaddressed, with the Centre remaining in a facilitating role and ensuring national ownership of a voluntary and internally driven process.

70. The Centre also provided support to the visits of three special procedures mechanisms, namely the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, to the Republic of the Congo, and of the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination, to Equatorial Guinea.

71. An important new opportunity for engagement and strategic collaboration in the subregion opened up through the establishment of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, based in Gabon, in early 2011. The Centre engaged in regular dialogue with the Department of Political Affairs to identify possible common areas of thematic priorities and activities for the future.

72. In January 2011, the Centre took the initiative to organize, for the first time, a strategic consultation bringing together OHCHR human rights field presences in the Central African region to share information, foster cooperation and identify common human rights concerns and issues in the region, with a view to raising the level of attention to human rights in the region, and to developing elements of a strategy on human rights issues of common interest. The consultation was an important occasion for the representatives in the region to increase cooperation and information sharing, maximize collaboration, share expertise and discuss regional trends with human rights implications.

73. The effective mainstreaming of gender issues across the Centre's programmes was stepped up significantly since the arrival of the Associate Expert on gender and women's human rights, in December 2010. Even before, in the context of inter-agency and development partner cooperation, the Centre took an active substantive role in leading the United Nations system's contribution to the development and adoption of a national gender policy in Cameroon, in September 2010. The Centre is equally committed to supporting the 2011 action plan of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family of Cameroon, in the area of the human rights of women. In-house training on gender mainstreaming and the human rights of women was conducted for the Centre's staff, in May 2011, and for Central African human rights field presences and country team gender facilitators, in August 2011, with the support of OHCHR.

#### **D. Challenges**

74. The subregional mandate of the Centre remained a challenge insofar as ensuring that the engagement with Governments of the subregion, in particular those without other human rights field presences, was balanced and equitable. The Centre's experience showed that strategic partnerships were essential towards making an impact in a diverse subregion, while being based in one country only. Dedicated and committed partners in the countries of the subregion, especially those without other human rights field presences, contributed to the sustainability of activities and their follow-up. Maintaining an active presence in the various country teams as a non-resident United Nations system partner was almost impossible. However, the identification of one of the country team members as the Centre's human rights focal point, as was the case with UNICEF in Gabon, proved a useful practice in terms of facilitating the Centre's activities in that country.



75. The Centre's efforts to revitalize the memorandum of understanding between ECCAS and the Centre, and cooperation between the two organizations, proved challenging, and failed to ensure substantive engagement during the reporting period.

76. The Centre's dual mandate of human rights and democracy also posed a challenge in terms of ensuring that equal efforts were made to support both substantive pillars of the Centre. The first subregional conference on democracy, held in Equatorial Guinea in late 2009, formed the basis for a revitalization of the Centre's democracy mandate and activities, including cooperation with a wide range of expert stakeholders working on democracy issues.

77. Other programme implementation challenges during the reporting period included some built-in constraints experienced in the Central African region. In addition to French, which is the predominant working language, English (in Cameroon), Spanish (in Equatorial Guinea) and Portuguese (in Sao Tomé and Príncipe) are official languages for the Centre's focus countries in the region. As a result, the Centre spends significant resources to make documentation available in the necessary languages (which is not always possible), and at times to provide for costly interpretation and translation services. Travel within the subregion is difficult in the absence of a regional airline. These factors heighten the logistical support needs and require additional financial resources.

## V. Conclusions

**78. Since its establishment in 2001 by the General Assembly, at the initiative of ECCAS member States, the Centre has enjoyed a unique position in the subregion, owing to its creation at the request of those member States it serves in Central Africa and its dual mandate of human rights and democracy. These factors have allowed for generally positive, constructive, transparent and open relationships with the Governments of the subregion, including in addressing more challenging human rights issues.**

**79. The efforts of ECCAS member States to support the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in providing sufficient funds and human resources for the staffing and activities of the Centre are welcomed. In line with the initial commitments made, ECCAS member States are further encouraged to provide additional funds to enable the Centre to respond positively and effectively to the growing needs for the promotion and protection of human rights and for developing a culture of democracy and rule of law in the Central African subregion.**

**80. Regular briefings held by the Centre, aimed at ambassadors of Central African States based in Geneva and in Yaoundé, and organized in countries of the subregion during visits of the Regional Representative and in New York on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Centre, are useful occasions for communicating and receiving feedback on the Centre's strategic thematic priorities and activities. Similarly, the annual reporting to the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa is an important opportunity to consult and share information with Member States.**

81. Based on such dialogue and on feedback from the online survey marking the Centre's tenth anniversary, the Centre has decided to maintain its five strategic thematic priorities for 2010-2011 for its work in 2012-2013, in order to allow for a consolidation of achievements in these important areas in line with the High Commissioner's global thematic priorities: (a) eliminating discrimination, focusing on the rights of indigenous populations, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and their families, women's human rights and gender issues; (b) strengthening the rule of law and combating impunity; (c) promoting democracy and good governance; (d) promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights; and (e) strengthening national human rights institutions and cooperation with international and regional human rights mechanisms.

82. At the subregional level, the Centre will further strengthen its cooperation and invest in relations with subregional organizations and bodies, including the African Union, ECCAS, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations country teams of the subregion and the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to maximize resources and impact. Similarly, in cooperation with the West Africa Regional Office of OHCHR, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Regional Office in Central Africa, the Centre will attempt to foster cooperation between subregions and subregional organizations, including between ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States, in order to address human rights challenges across subregions, such as combating trafficking in persons and establishing human rights-based policies to manage migration.

83. The Centre will strengthen its efforts to promote engagement with African regional human rights mechanisms, alongside international human rights mechanisms, to consolidate the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level.

84. The Centre will continue to reinforce its engagement on democracy issues, with a special focus on elections and human rights, including consolidating its working relationship with the Department of Political Affairs and other key democracy actors.

85. As a result of its strengthened staff capacity on gender and the human rights of women, the Centre will continue to increase the integration of gender and the human rights of women into all its activities, outreach and advocacy.

86. The subregional documentation centre, public outreach materials and the fellowship programme are unique services offered by the Centre, which will be further reinforced and made available more widely in the subregion, as recommended by respondents to the survey.

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