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KIDNAPPING, SEQUESTRATION OF Paul CHOUTA, WHISTLEBLOWER AND PROMOTER OF THE TGV INFO PAGE IN CAMEROON AND VICTIM OF INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT, ACTS OF TORTURE IN YAOUNDE-CAMEROON

REDHAC Declaration N°001/11032022

Paul CHOUTA, whistle-blower and promoter of the Facebook page *TGV DE L'INFO* was kidnapped around 10 pm, in the night of March 9 to 10, 2022 by 3 men "not yet identified", while he was watching the match between PSG *(Paris Saint Germain)* and Real Madrid at a leisure space around Damas district in Yaoundé-the political capital of Cameroon. His torturers subjected him to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment. The physical integrity abuses, the swollen eyes of the victim, combined with the intensive care he received in a local hospital in Yaoundé are sufficient proof of the degree of this violence.

This is the testimony of the victim Paul CHOUTA, whistle-blower, promoter of the Facebook page *TGV DE L'INFO*. *« They forced me into a vehicle, blindfolded me and drove me to the highway that leads to the International Airport, at a peripheral area of Yaoundé. They undressed me, poured sand in my eyes and told me the following: You are too stubborn. Who are you? We will have to learn from this lesson we are giving to you. Who are you working with? Do you think you are telling the truth more than anyone else? We are going to kill you. Finally, they tortured me by giving me a lot of blows and abandoned me there towards one o'clock in the morning* ».
It should be noted that Paul CHOUTA is known for his freedom of opinion on the society issues. Because of his engagement, he has already been assaulted 3 times. It should also be noted that this incident comes after several publications he made on the teachers' strike that is shaking Cameroon for several days now.

The Human Rights Defenders Network in Central Africa (REDHAC):

- ✓ **Recalling** its mandate to promote and protect human rights and to promote and protect human rights defenders in Central Africa in accordance with national, regional and international human rights instruments;
- ✓ **Concerned** by the continuous deterioration of the situation of Human Rights Defenders, journalists and whistle-blowers in Cameroon;
- ✓ **Strongly** concerned by the numerous threats, intimidations, reprisals and online surveillance to which Human Rights Defenders, Women Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Whistle-blowers and Vulnerable Human Rights Defenders are subjected;
- ✓ **Stressing** that whistle-blowers are Human Rights Defenders whose contribution to democracy and the rule of law cannot be underestimated. They serve democracy and human rights by revealing information that everyone is entitled to know. *"The culture of secrecy is often synonymous with a culture of impunity. The right to know proclaimed in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is absolutely crucial to any democracy, and whistle-blowers should be protected and not persecuted.* (***Words of Mr. Alfred de Zayas, the United Nations independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order);***
- ✓ **Recalling** also that the right to freedom of opinion, to access to information including to disseminate information obtained, are fundamental freedoms recognized by the preamble of the Cameroon Constitution, by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

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- ✓ **Deploring** the deterioration of the situation of the civic space, the rise of violence and hate speech
- ✓ **Regretting** that since the Project of a proposal law on the "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Cameroon », was tabled by a Senator at the Senate office, no measures have yet been taken for the legal protection of Human Rights Defenders compare to most West African countries that have adopted laws on the « promotion and protection of Human Rights Defenders »,

The Human Rights Defenders Network in Central Africa (REDHAC):

1. **Condemns** with the utmost energy the kidnapping and sequestration of Paul CHOUTA, as well as the inhuman and degrading treatment and acts of torture inflicted on him by the as yet unidentified men
2. **Condemns** the repression to which Human Rights Defenders, Women Human Rights Defenders, Lawyers, Journalists and Whistle-blowers continue to be subjected
3. **Calls** for an impartial and independent investigation to identify the alleged perpetrators of this heinous acts, for them to be tried in accordance with the law
4. **Recommends** that the United Nations and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights urge the Government of the Republic of Cameroon to:

i) **Respect, protect and guarantee** the physical protection and security of Paul CHOUTA and his relatives as well as all Women Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Whistle-blowers, in accordance with the country's Constitution and its international obligations in accordance with the principles and the rule of law;

ii) **Initiate** transparent and impartial investigations on all citizen responsible of human rights violations so that they respond on their acts in front of justice;

iii) **Put an end** to the acts of intimidation, reprisals and harassment committed against Paul CHOUTA in particular and all Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Whistle-blowers in general, and release those detained for having carried out their legitimate work in favour of human rights;

iv) **Cooperate** fully with regional and international mechanisms charged with investigating cases of human rights violations, threats and reprisals against Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Whistle-blowers in Cameroon;

v) **Take all** necessary measures to ensure that the Project of the proposal bill already deposited in the Senate on the « Promotion and protection of Human Rights Defenders in Cameroon », is brought to the National Assembly for adoption.

Done at Douala, March 11, 2022

Me Alice Nkom, Co-PCA Cameroun	Me Bruno Gbiegba, Vice-Présiden RCA	Rostin Manketa 2e Vice-Président RDC	Marc Ona Osangui 3e Vice-Président Gabon	Roch Euloge N'Zombo, Conseiller Congo Brazzaville

Pyrrhus. Boguel Conseiller Tchad	Philippe Nanga Conseiller Cameroun	Lucie Boalo, Okenve Secrétaire/Rapporteure RCA	Hon.Annie Bambe Communicatrice RDC	Alfredo Okenve 2e secrétaire/Rapporteur Guinée Equatoriale	Maximilienne Ngo Mbe Directrice Exécutive Cameroun

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