

CAMEROON



54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000)

STATEMENT BY
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Mr. Chairperson,

I wish to, on behalf of the Cameroon delegation and on a personal note, extend to you and your team our hearty congratulations for the conduct of the 54th session on the Commission on the Status of Women.

We are confident that your skills and the contribution of all Stakeholders participating to the deliberations will be combined to allow a comprehensive 15-years review.

As, His Excellency President Paul BIYA, was declaring years ago, and I quote:

“I am committed to ensure that the equality of human rights and the rights of women is a reality notably in promulgating the law to punish all forms of violence against women.” (President Paul BIYA of Cameroon, Maroua, October 1997).

Mr. Chairperson,

The Cameroonian government has the political will and a commitment to implement the Beijing platform of Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) as demonstrated by our active participation in Beijing in 1995.

Looking at gender disaggregated data, much still needs to be done to achieve parity. The weight of tradition and culture is still very strong in our society. Gender issues are still considered women's issues. This constitutes a barrier for the development of women and the consideration of the Gender approach.

Women represent 52% of the population of Cameroon; contribute to 75% of the agricultural work, and produce 80% of food.

What has the Cameroonian government done concretely?

1- Institutional framework

This one has evolved significantly by the creation of specific Ministries.

- 1975, the Ministry of Social Affairs through the service of Women's Education;
- 1984, the Ministry of Women's Affairs through the Department for the Advancement of Women;
- 1988, the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs through the Department of the Promotion of Women's Rights,
- 2004, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family through the Department of Women's Social Empowerment, Sub-Department for the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender.

2- Strategic orientations

Ratification of Conventions

- Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- The Millennium Development Declaration (2000);
- Resolution 1325 of the United Nations on Women's Participation in Peace Management and Conflict Resolution;
- Declaration of the African Union Heads of State on equality between men and women;
- The Platform of ECCAS on gender integration in policies and action plans of the community;

The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family is working in conjunction with all other ministries and partners in bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the framework of an approach that is both cross-sectional, holistic and participatory.

Policy

In 1999, a national policy declaration for the integration of women in development was adopted with seven priority areas of concern:

- Women and Poverty;
- Women and the Economy;
- Women and Health, with an emphasis on the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- Education and training of women;
- Violence against women;
- Women and Decision-making;
- The female child.

Income generating activities

Cameroon has since then, striven to implement the Beijing Platform of Action in the Political, Social, Economical and Cultural fields.

Based on the fact that women remain the poorest of the poor, the government has developed programmes and projects to reduce poverty among women, with the assistance of bilateral and multilateral partners. These include:

- The Global Programme for the advancement of Women and Gender equality that contributed to the financing and monitoring of 240 projects by women in the Adamawa, Littoral, West and North-West Regions to the tune of 170 million francs CFA;

- The Programme for the Improvement of Rural Family Income (PARFAR) that enabled the construction of twelve (12) Women Empowerment Centres in the Northern Regions;
- The Poverty Reduction Project and Actions in favour of Women in the Far North Region (PREPAFEN) that granted loans amounting to 785 million francs CFA, 76% of which beneficiaries were women;
- Thanks to the debt relieve funds of HIPIC initiative, the government has developed a certain number of projects including the Project to set up a Support Mechanism for underprivileged Women in Women' Empowerment Centres, aimed at granting micro credits to individual women and groups.

This project is operational in 57 Centres and the number of women and associations having benefited from this support stands at 2430 for a total amount of 693 million francs CFA.

Representation at high level

In the Administration, the number of women in ministerial positions has showed the following trends:

02 out of 27 (7.41%) in 1995;

03 out of 49 (6.12%) in 1998;

06 out of 65 (9.23%) in 2004;

06 out of 62 (9.68%) in 2010

Some efforts have been made. But, much still needs to be done to attain acceptable representation.

In Magistracy, as of November 30 2009, 203 out of 722 (28.12%) magistrates are women.

In Parliament, the situation is as follows in different legislatures:

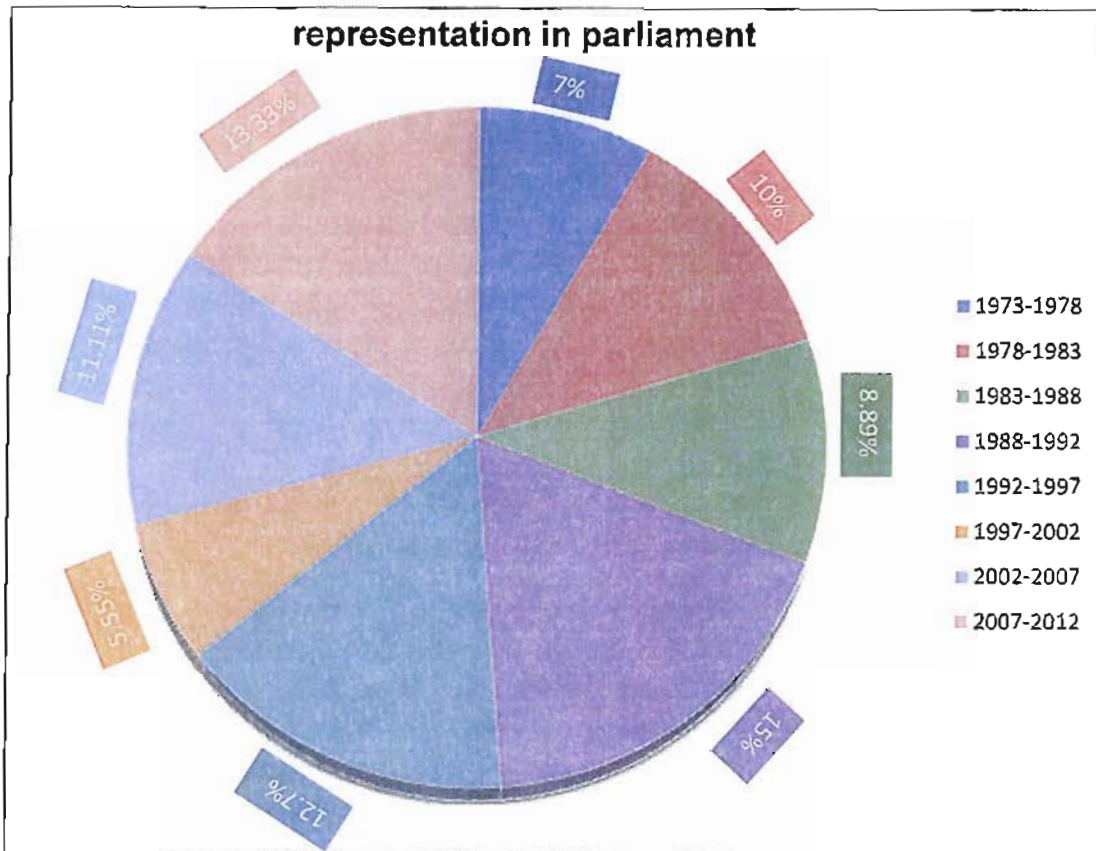


Figure1: Women's Representation In Parliament

Numerically, the best legislature was 1988-1992 with 15% female representation. The worse was 1997-2002 with 5.55%.

As for functions held in the bureau, the best years have been:

2007-2012 with 18,

2002-2007 with 09,

1992-1997 with 05.

At council level, the situation is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Number of women at council level

Years	Counselors	Number of women	Percentage	Number of women mayors
1982-1987	5107	336	6,6%	0

1987-1992	5347	436	8,3%	1
1996-2001	9932	1061	10,7%	2
2002-2007	9963	1302	13,7%	10
2007-2012	10632	1651	15,5%	24/360 or 6,67%

There has been a steady increase in the number of women at council level, though the representation remains insufficient.

The number of women in decision- making positions has also seen an upward mobility over time. Directors at the administrative level (58 women out of 366, that is 15.8%), and at the judiciary (215 women out of 1157, 18.5%).

The Head of State, H.E Paul BIYA, President of the Republic of Cameroon, has always recognised and given a privileged place to woman's role in the socio-economic development of the country. He has appointed them in key positions in some ministries.

Thus, the first female to pass a Baccalaureate in Mathematics became the Minister of Plan and Regional Development in the 90's.

In the current government, a Pharmacist is heading the Ministry of Scientific Research while an Agricultural Engineer in Minister Delegate in Agriculture and Rural Development.

Actions undertaken to reach a larger number

The weight of tradition in our milieu led to the translation of the CEDAW into some local languages, read and understood by various tribes of the country. This has enabled social partners such as traditional rulers, religious authorities, community leaders and the civil society to better understand the context of the document.

Workshops have been organized for the judicial staff to raise their awareness on the convention and judges are already applying it in the various decisions taken in the law courts concerning women. There has also been some ongoing sensitization of women at the grassroots level on the Convention.

- The MAPUTO Protocol was also ratified in May 2009 in order to strengthen women's rights regarding reproductive health.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child has also been ratified by Cameroon.

- The preliminary draft code of persons and families includes provisions relating to the protection of children's rights, those of the female child in particular, as well as women's rights within the family.
- Women are allowed to assume positions of responsibility and not tokenism.
- Qualitative, not just quantitative, gender balance of women playing the traditional roles assigned them like secretaries, cleaners, teachers, nurses or social workers are ensured.
- Women, as well as men, have the same rights and opportunities to excel in any profession of their choice and receive equal salary for equal work done.
- Because of this political good will of the government, a favourable environment has been created whereby the plight of women and their contribution has been made known. Grass-root organisations have been created and strengthened. For example, women have been organised into associations and networks throughout the country.
- Education and training is available to these organised groups to increase their knowhow and boost their production.

State budgetary allocation

From 2006 to 2009, the Ministry in charge of Women's Empowerment and Family was allocated 0.25 % of the total state budget. A slight increase has been experienced in the 2010 state budget, with 0.27% allocated to this Ministry.

Greater awareness for women's needs

Financial autonomisation

Women's needs are increasingly being taken into consideration in established programs and projects. The awareness created has led to women taking up more responsibilities within their communities. The Cameroonian woman, especially at the grassroots has become more resourceful amidst increasing hardship resulting from the economic crisis. Innovative livelihood strategies have been put in place and families tend to depend on women involved in all forms of informal sector activities to sustain the social base. The government can therefore rely on this social base to generate formal development activities and even formal institutions.

Professional training programs are prepared and disseminated among women and girls who drop out from the formal education system to reinforce their capacity and empower them with some economic skills. Funds and equipment are allocated to individual women or groups with the assistance of development partners. They are further assisted in building their managerial skills in project formulation and management. Training programs for women in Information, Communication and Technology skills dubbed "Operation 100 000 women by 2012" was established in partnership with the African Institute of Computer Sciences, and to date, 69800 women have benefited from the training.

Rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), or “Tontines” as they are commonly called, have flourished and assume a useful position in an informal banking system that is flexible and targeted to respond constructively to the needs of communities in general and women in particular who cannot access the formal banking system because of bureaucratic bottlenecks and the lack of collateral.

Better health

A Health Strategy including women's rights in reproductive health and a National Plan for the fight against Female Genital Mutilations has been prepared. Distribution of treated mosquito nets to pregnant women aimed at reducing the spread of malaria have been put in place, as well as vaccination against tetanus. Other ongoing measures include: free screening campaigns for HIV/AIDS, breast and cervix cancers, cardiovascular diseases, sexually transmissible infections. Family planning services are available. According to the Ministry of Public Health reports, the proportion of deliveries assisted by qualified personnel has improved, rising from 78.8% in 1998 to 83.4 % at present.

As concerns the prevention of HIV/AIDS, free male/female condom distribution is an ongoing activity.

Anti retroviral drugs are free of charge.

Voluntary screening for HIV/ AIDS is also encouraged especially for pregnant women. A program for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS has been set up, and in June 2009, 2019 units were operational across the country, more have been added since then.

More dignity and respect

At the cultural level government has taken measures to ensure that harmful cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation, humiliating and inhumane widowhood rites, unequal property distribution are abandoned. Advocacy programs aimed at abolishing these practices against women are frequently organized throughout all the regions of the country to sensitize the population.

Improved access to education

Government through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family promotes the enrolment of girls into schools, adult literacy for women, by making primary and secondary education in government schools free, providing scholarships to girls in the scientific domains, and giving special prizes to girls with the best performance in different training institutions.

In primary education the ratio of girls has risen from 0.83 to 0.89 between 2001 and 2007. The 2007 school chart reveals that the enrolment rate for the years 2006 and

2007 stood at 75.44 % for girls, as against 80.76 % for boys, unlike in previous years where the rate was much lower for girls.

Parity index with respect to scolarisation rate showed trends less favourable for girls over years:

Table II: Parity Index in primary education

YEARS	PERCENTAGE
2003/2004	0.84
2006/2007	0.85
2007/2008	0.86
2008/2009	0.87

In 2008/2009, 79% of boys reached the last class in primary school against 69% for girls.

In secondary education, the situation presents as follows over two years:

Table III: Representation by sex in secondary education

YEARS	GIRLS	BOYS
2007-2008	629 809 /1 127 691 or 55.85%	497 882 /1 127 691 or 44.15%
2008-2009	573 413/1 268 662 or 45.20%	1268 662/1268 662 or 54.80%

In higher education, figures are available for both State and Private institutions.

In State institutions, the following situation is described:

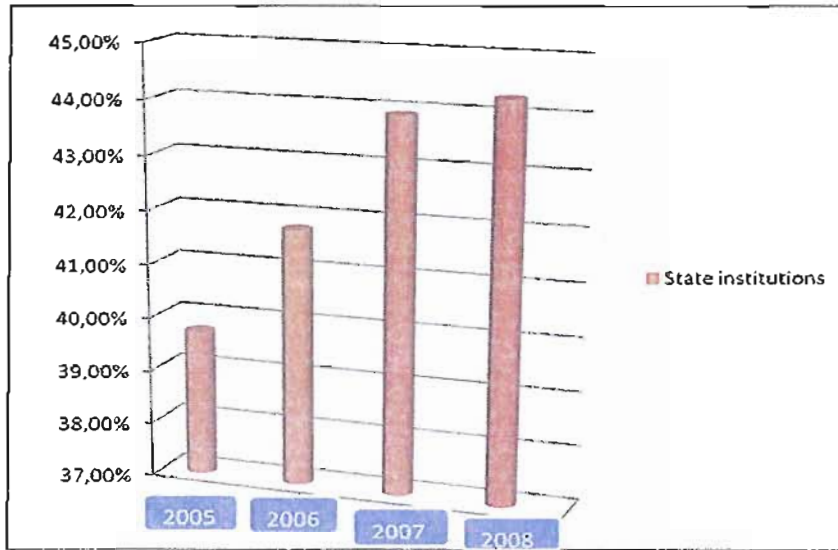


Figure 2: The Proportion of Female Students in State

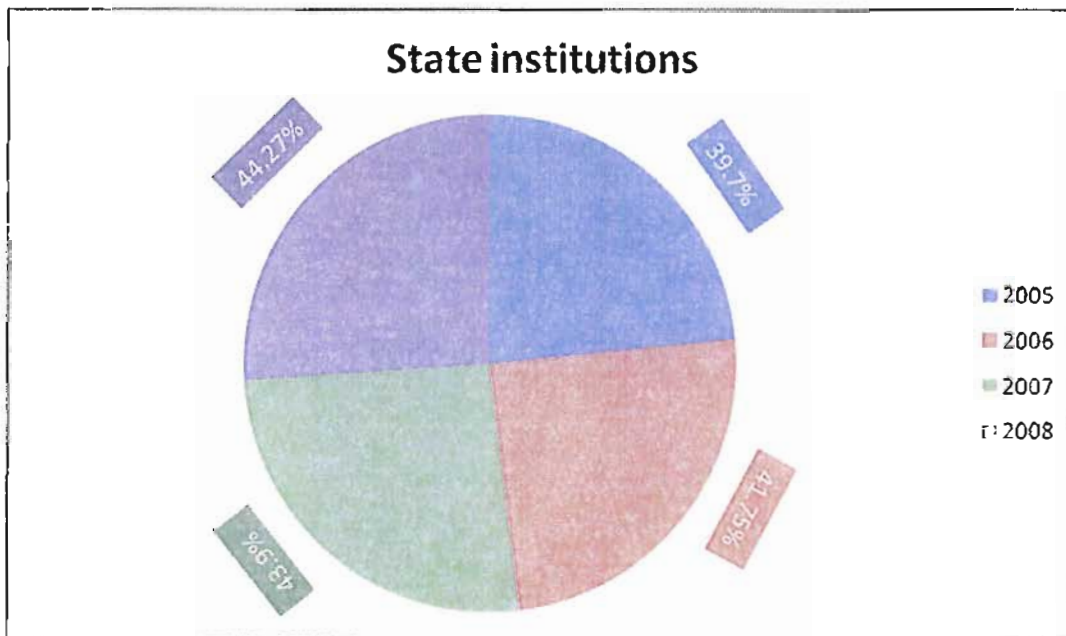


Figure 3: Proportion of female students in State Institutions over 4

In Private higher education institutions, female students are over-represented:

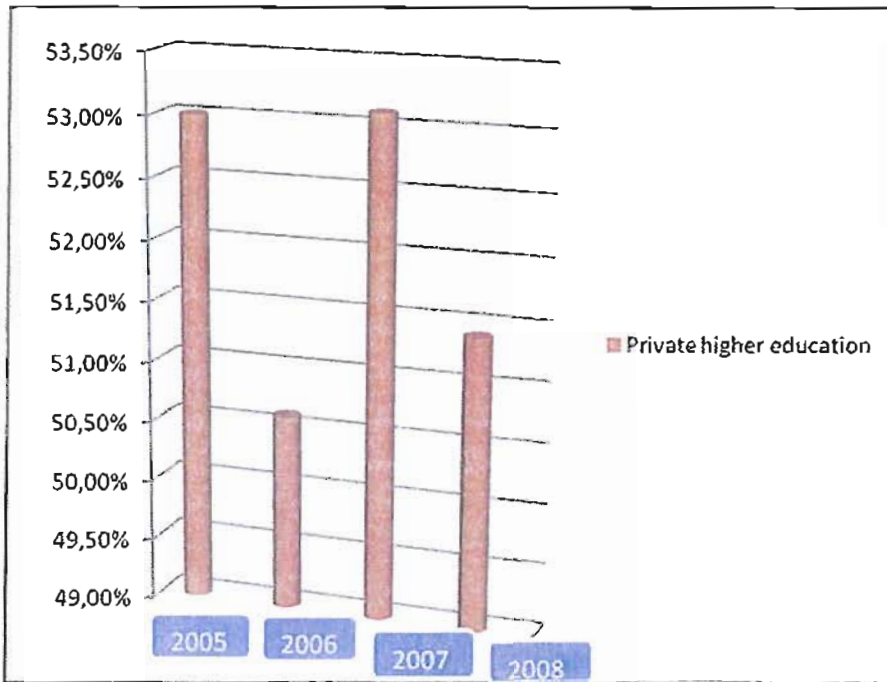


Figure 4: Female Students in Private Higher Education

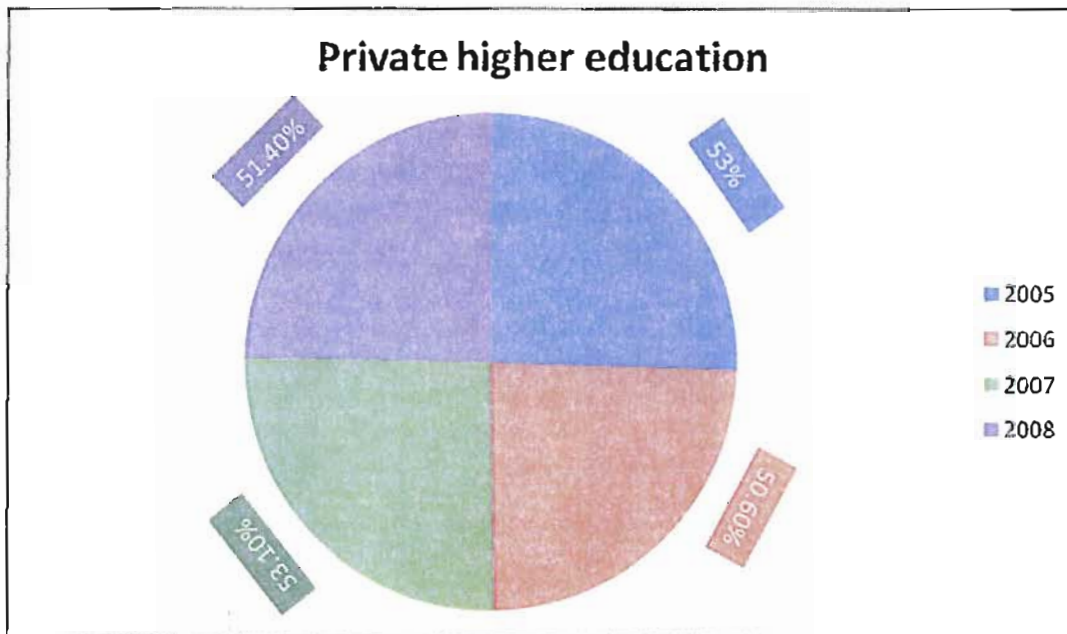


Figure 4: Female Students In Private Higher Education

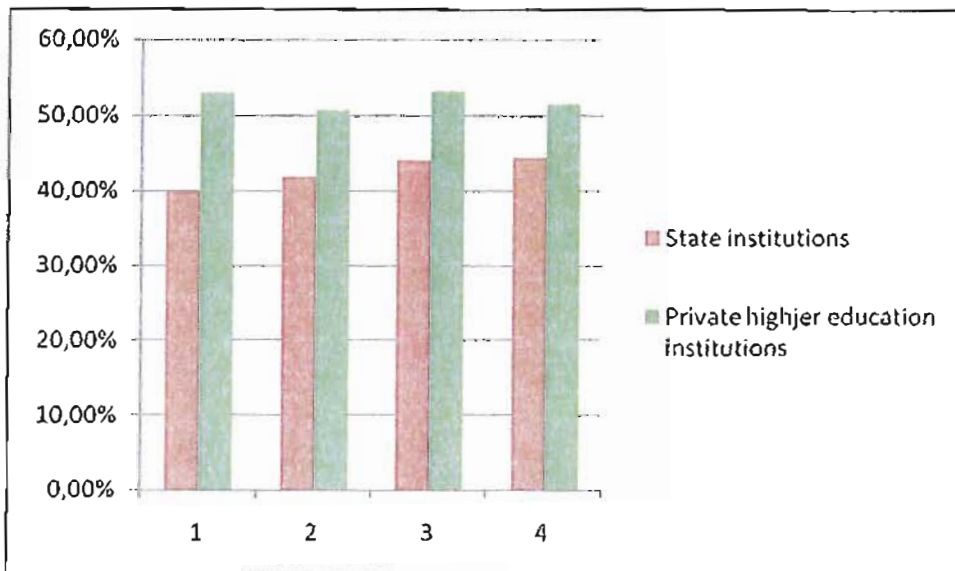


Figure 5 : Female students in State and Private Institutions.

More girls attend Private higher institutions than boys. The situation is reversed in State institutions. There is an upward trend in State structures where large number of students are found. This has helped in liberating women and girls from some of the traditional tasks.

This has been possible thanks to the assistance of development partners, particularly the United Nations System Agencies and bilateral cooperation organizations on whom we count to attain the MDG's and to continue with the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action.

Mr. President,

The major obstacles to the achievement of the above objectives can be summarized as follows:

- Traditions and customs that do not favor women;
- The high illiteracy rate among women and young girls;
- The existence of discriminatory legal provisions;
- The existence of a predominantly patriarchal society;
- The weak economic power of women;
- The unequal power relations between men and women;
- The non respect of the 30% quota of women's representation in all decision-making positions;
- Brain drain of skilled personnel including women.

In spite of the existence of national women's machineries and resources put in place by the Government, these measures are insufficient to meet the needs of the target population, notably women. A Development vision by 2035 that places emphasis on human resource development and the attainment of the MDG's through strategic priority areas such as health, education, vocational training, gender, social protection and national solidarity has been elaborated.

Mr. President,

Although Cameroon, assisted by the international community, has made some progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action at various levels, this requires additional efforts, reason why we are appealing for support from your august institution to realize this objective.

Thank you!