Promoting the Training of Human Rights Defenders in Africa
Cameroon is a peace-loving country that guarantees freedom, is determined to enhance its democratic system, ensure respect for Human Rights and guarantee the rule of law in accordance with international norms and principles contained in the Harare and Bamako Declarations adhered to by Commonwealth and Francophonie Member States – two linguistic and cultural communities to which Cameroon is proud to belong.

AMADOU ALI
Vice-Prime Minister,
Minister of Justice, Keeper of the Seals
2005 Human Rights Report
Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and Freedoms

God, the Good Book says, created Man in his own image and placed other creatures under his command. So values became attached to Man's life and dignity from the start. God’s disappointment could therefore be understood when Cain killed Abel and asked God if he was his brother’s keeper. Since this first instance of human rights violation, Man has continued violating these moral and natural rights that belong to all people because they are human beings and worthy of respect.

The end of the Second World War marked a new beginning when nations agreed to transform these moral rights into fundamental rights and principles that became the content of the famous Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10 1948. Article 1 of the UDHR lays down the philosophy on which the Declaration is based, and reads “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” This undoubtedly provides an answer to Cain’s famous question and makes each of us his brother’s/sister’s keeper by respecting and protecting his/her rights. We must not do unto others what we would not want them to do unto us.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) that was adopted to strengthen the UDHR outlines rights that must be protected. The ICCPR covers key civil and political rights and freedoms like the right to life, liberty and security of person; freedom from discrimination; freedom from slavery; freedom from torture and cruel and unusual punishment; right to personhood; equality before the law; right to effective remedy from the law; freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention and exile; right to a fair trial; presumption of innocence; prohibition of retrospective law; right to privacy; right to asylum; right to nationality; right to marriage and family life; right to property; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of assembly; freedom of association; right to participate in government; right of equal access to public office and right to universal suffrage.

On its part, the ICESCR outlines key social, economic and cultural rights like the right to freedom from discrimination; right to social security; right to work; right to equal pay for equal work; right to just remuneration; right to rest and leisure; right to an adequate standard of living; right to special care and assistance for mothers and children; right to education; right to participate in culture; and right to intellectual property.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the UDHR, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion. National or social origin, property, birth or other status.

As we promote and protect our rights, we must keep in mind some provisions of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) which warn that every individual shall also have duties. The Charter places on every individual the duty to respect and consider his fellow beings without discrimination; preserve the harmonious development of the family and to work for the cohesion and respect of the family; to respect parents at all times, to maintain them in case of need; to serve his national community by placing his physical and intellectual abilities at its service, to preserve and strengthen social and national solidarity, particularly when the latter is threatened; to preserve and strengthen national independence and the national integrity of his country and to contribute to its defence in accordance with the law; to work to the best of his abilities and competence; and to pay taxes imposed by law in the interest of the society; to preserve and strengthen positive African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and, in general, to contribute to the promotion of the moral well being of society; to contribute to the best of his abilities, at all times and at all levels, to the promotion and achievement of African Unity.

Human Rights awareness in Cameroon is increasing as a result of combined efforts of human rights defence organisations protecting the rights of workers, consumers, women, children, prisoners etc as well as legal frameworks defined and put in place by Government to promote and protect human rights. The yearly publication by Human Rights Reports since 2005 by the Minister of Justice is a step in the right direction.

Around the world, some talented Cameroonians are active in promoting and/or protecting human rights. In Africa, Norman Taku has become a key figure in the training of Human Rights Defenders at the Centre for Human Rights in the University of Pretoria. By promoting Moot Court Competitions in Law Faculties across Africa, he has attracted several law Graduates to take up human rights defence with passion and commitment.

In Europe, Beatrice Achaleke is showing great leadership potential by opening new opportunities for Black Women in Europe to unite under the Black European Women’s Council and protect their rights. Based in Vienna, Beatrice keeps a watchful eye on activities of Black Women throughout Europe and mobilizes support to their efforts to integrate their respective host communities, socially, economically and even politically.

Banister Felix Nkongho is an accomplished human rights defender now based in Afghanistan. He shuttles to Cameroon so often to contribute towards promoting human rights awareness through activities organized by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) that he heads as Executive Director. Fresh from a Symposium on Corruption and its Implication on Human Rights in Buea, he was pleased to grant us an interview on his way back.

Every Cameroonian has the right and duty to control Government, constructively and incisively if necessary, by pointing out flaws in policy and suggesting better alternatives. Dibussi Tande’s Scribbles From the Den is now in print to take his opinions about Cameroon beyond his well visited Blog www.dibussi.com. Get your copies now!

Tonge B. Ebai

Also get some wonderful fashion wears from Kirette Couture and update your beauty at MMEK’s. Enjoy......
Promoting and Protecting Human Rights in Cameroon

Recent debates in political, social and professional circles attest to knowledge that Cameroonians have acquired on their rights and their determination to protect them. Despite its complex multicultural, demographic, religious, linguistic and political diversity, Cameroon has established a worldwide reputation for social peace, unity and stability. Most of the 18 million inhabitants come from more than 250 tribes and belong to different religions that promote respect for the dignity of fellow human beings as a standard for social reputation and well-being in the society. Hence, peaceful co-existence remains a national pride that is envied by other countries with less complexities. However, this peace is often punctuated and threatened by disputes amongst individuals, crimes, violence that constitute human rights violations and are worthy of sanctions. Concerned Cameroonians and national human rights organisations have equally been playing the ‘watchdog’ role to ensure that the protection of human rights and freedoms becomes a reality in Cameroon and to push Government to conform to standards set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter for Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

Reports from these individuals and international organizations mention violations in areas like torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; arbitrary arrests and detention; inhuman prison conditions; flawed democratic processes; child trafficking; insecurity; deprivation of life; harmful traditional practices etc. According to Reports submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission since 2005, Cameroon has explained and mentioned areas where significant progress has been made over the years to meet acceptable standards of human rights promotion and protection. The Reports also acknowledge that the assistance of national and foreign partners while admitting that much remains to be done. Presenting the 2005 Report, the Minister of Justice, Amadou Ali, said “Cameroon is a peace-loving country that guarantees freedom, is determined to enhance its democratic system, ensure respect for Human Rights and guarantee the rule of law in accordance with international norms and principles contained in the Harare and Bamako Declarations adhered to by Commonwealth and Francophone Member States - two linguistic and cultural communities to which Cameroon is proud to belong”.

Core principles of UDHR and ACHPR have been enshrined in the January 1996 Constitution and reflected in several laws enacted to promote the well-being of the Cameroonians people by safeguarding their civil, political, social, economic, environmental, cultural rights and development rights.

The right to life, physical and moral integrity is protected in the Preamble of Constitution wherein it is stated that “Every person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall anyone be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment”. Hence, life is protected from conception till natural death. The Penal Code provides punishments for Abortion (Section 337), Murder (S. 275), Capital Murder (S.276), Dangerous Activities (S. 228), Assault Occasioning Death (S.278) and Infanticide (S. 340). Cases of violations of the right to life by individuals are seriously punished in the courts. For example, a tragic case occurred at the Government High School Mendong, Yaounde on 24 February 2004, when a teacher of Spanish Language, by name PAMGA EWAE NGUENG Elise, whipped a student with a domestic gas tube causing the latter’s death a few minutes later. In a Judgment delivered on 23 April 2004 by the Mfoundi High Court, the teacher was charged for assault occasioning death, remanded in custody and subsequently convicted and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment and suspended for three years.

To protect physical and moral integrity the Penal Code punishes: Assault Occasioning Grievous Harm (S. 279), Simple Harm (S. 280), Slight Harm (S. 281), Assault on Woman with Child (S. 338), Indecency to Minor between 16 and 21 (S. 347), Assault on Children (S. 350); Assult on Ascendant (S. 351); and Acts of Violence (S. 370(1)). Perpetrators of violations to the right to life, physical and moral integrity are also found among policemen and soldiers who often hide behind orders from their hierarchy. Article 2(3) of the Constitution provides that “an order from a superior officer may not be invoked as a justification for torture” especially when the order is manifestly unlawful. Human Rights Reports from the Minister of Justice (2005, 2006, 2007) mention cases where policemen and soldiers have been severely punished for violating the rights of citizens although many still go unpunished as highlighted in the recent 2008 Human Rights Report published on Wednesday July 12 August 2009 by the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms in Yaounde. The Minister of Justice’s Reports also showcase efforts and reforms carried out to respect the rights outlined in the International Covenants on Human Rights to which Cameroon adheres. One of these efforts is the introduction of a new Criminal Procedure Code that curbs human rights abuses of citizens.

To assist Government in its efforts, human rights defenders still identify set-backs to the promotion of human rights in Cameroon. These include: a very powerful Executive; a corrupt judiciary; ignorance by citizens of their rights; gender-based violence; poverty, growing insecurity and impunity of overzealous administrative and law enforcement officers.

The introduction of human rights education in schools, the courageous engagement of civil society organizations and Government’s growing commitment towards human rights protection, all spell better days for a human rights culture in Cameroon. By George E.M. M
Promoting the Training of Human Rights Defenders in Africa

Hello Norman and Welcome to the SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE. It’s amazing to hear that a young Cameroonian is heading Africa’s most reputed Human Rights Education institution. Most of our readers are knowing you for the very first time. Tell us, who is Norman Taku?

Thank you for your very kind words, both about me and about the Centre for Human Rights. I am not sure that there is anything particularly noteworthy about me. I consider myself an instrument in a system whose success comes from so much else and so many others.

I was born to an English mother and a Cameroonian father; I grew up in N’gaoundéré when it was a quaint little town and there were only two or three anglophone families and no Anglophone school; I went to Sacred Heart College Mankon, under the Marist Brothers; I was in the second batch of students admitted to study law at the University of Buea and learned at the feet of many legendary lawyers; I took up employment at the Centre for Human Rights in January 1997, obtaining a Master’s degree in Law with a specialization in Fundamental Rights in the same year.

Tell us about the University of Pretoria’s Centre for Human Rights that you are heading as Acting Director. What Programs does it offer and how many countries participate, averagely, every year?

The Centre for Human Rights has a dual status: it operates as one of six academic departments of the Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria. Because much of our work is not university-based, the Centre also functions as an independent non-governmental organization with programmes that span the entire continent.

The Centre for Human Rights was founded in 1986 under apartheid with the idea that it would contribute to the thinking and efforts towards a non-racial South Africa. Members of the Centre were present at the first meetings between the government at the time and the ANC leadership in exile. We were involved in the constitutional negotiations at Kempton Park and took part in writing both the interim and final constitutions. For a number of years after that, our work was geared towards contributing in various ways to strengthening the new institutions, and working for social upliftment in communities all over South Africa. Over the years, however, our work has grown and now spread the entire African continent. It can be split into three parts: teaching programmes, research and publications, and programmes and project work.
The Centre for Human Rights is a very special place to be. It is a place where dreams are born, where we are constantly pushing the boundaries of what is possible and where we strive constantly to be innovative in our work. This requires a formidable team of people, who have both the qualifications and the attitude to transform the dreams of some into these successful programmes.

The Centre presents the Good Governance Programme (GGP), a series of short courses throughout the year, lasting one or two weeks, and covering a multiplicity of areas in the field of international human rights law and democracy. This is a continuous learning initiative aimed at senior civil servants, NGO managers and as refresher courses for returning alumni of the Centre.

How does the CHR's internal governance setup function under your stewardship?

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As Assistant Director of the Centre, I have overall responsibility for personnel management, for fundraising and strategic partnerships in our flagship programmes, and for the supervision of all the programmes and projects. The Director of the Centre is head of the academic programmes, and the Head of Research coordinates the Centre’s research work.

Leadership at the Centre is constant but unobtrusive. We pride our-

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selves very much on the shared values of excellence and ubuntu, on the strong sense of service and on the idea that our work must ultimately contribute to human development in Africa. We have a formidable team that works well together and that has convinced me a long time ago that there is indeed such a thing as ‘a Centre person’.

*We imagine that you have most of the resources that you need but what are some of the administrative challenges that you face in accomplishing your tasks?*

Although the Centre is an academic department of the University of Pretoria, it is financially autonomous of the University. This means that we raise all the funding we need to maintain staff and run programmes, including the Master’s courses. Our budget is approximately US$3 million annually which is raised every year. As you can imagine, this is a formidable task which takes a lot of time, effort and planning. It is also a huge task to manage the programmes and funding effectively and to report satisfactorily to donors.

Funding is the Achilles’ heel of any organization, but especially among civil society groups. In addition to the experienced programme managers at the Centre, we have a crack team of programme coordinators and financial managers who work together to ensure that programmes are presented successfully and that we have unqualified audits respectively every year. The Centre opened its doors 23 years ago and, through the relevance of its programmes, a spirit of continuous innovation and the competency of its staff, is still able to attract the funding it needs.

The job of overseeing all this is as daunting as it is demanding. I am engaged in constant efforts to find alternative and innovative sources of funding, to manage different programmes and to ensure that reporting to donors is done timeously and satisfactorily. But the sheer volume of work is balanced by the good fortune of being able to work with competent, convivial and committed staff members. It is indeed a collective and collaborative effort.

*What are the institutions or countries that give unflinching support to CHR’s programs?*

The Centre’s funding comes from a variety of sources. Naturally we get some support from the University of Pretoria: our offices and utilities are paid by the University, which now also covers the salaries of two Professors and two secretaries. The University of Pretoria is South Africa’s premier university in many ways and provides an enabling environment for the innovation in research and teaching that the Centre for Human Rights embodies.

A small income comes from fees on the short courses; most students get funding support from the Centre, however, so that we can ensure that those who attend these courses are those most likely to use the knowledge gained in their countries or communities. We also raise a small amount of money from the sale of publications, although the majority are distributed free of charge, to feed what has been described as a ‘book famine’ on our continent.

Most of the Centre’s income comes from multilateral organizations like the European Union, from governments and foundations and from several other development partners.

*The Centre for Human Rights has trained so many Africans in Human Rights and Good Governance. What are some of the visible impacts that the activities of these trainees have had in their respective countries? How do you monitor them?*

The hallmark of programmes of the Centre for Human Rights is innovation. We have tried not to replicate what is being done elsewhere but rather to create a Centre of excellence in the teaching of human rights. Our programmes are highly subscribed to and attract a large number of applications from across the continent. The programmes are specifically designed to address a particular need, in different areas of specialisation and at different levels of competence.

If the Centre is a catalyst in the realisation of human rights on the continent, then indeed the truest
The Moot of course gave rise to the LLM in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa which, since its establishment in 2000, has provided training to over 200 specialised African human rights lawyers.

measure of our effectiveness must be the extent to which alumni of Centre programmes are able to use their knowledge and training to improve the lives of people in their own countries or communities. With thousands of alumni since the Centre’s establishment in 1986, it is impossible to give you an accurate description of exactly where everyone is.

One of our most successful programmes was the Integrated Bar Project (IBP) which was presented for over 10 years and which placed senior black law students in the top law firms and commercial banks in South Africa, an opportunity that they had been denied for a very long time and which produced skewed demographics among professionals in this area. One of the very reasons why the Centre discontinued the IBP is precisely because it had succeeded, in a major way, to contribute to redressing the historical imbalance. Although there is still some way to go, most of those who went through the IBP are currently employed in the top law firms, banks and in the highest courts in South Africa.

The Moot Competition has reached an entire generation of young Africans. Since its establishment in 1992, 845 teams have taken part in the event. This means over 1,600 young lawyers have been through the Moot process. Although it is not possible to keep track of all Moot alumni on account of the numbers, it is almost impossible, in any African country that one visits, not to find someone who has been through the Moot experience - whether in government departments, in the NGO sector, or in regional and international organisations, including the AU structures.

Some of these Moot alumni have gone on to play important roles nationally and internationally. Many remain in touch with the Centre and its programmes. In several cases, we often find that the wheel has come full circle: students who argued in the Moot Competition, completed postgraduate studies at the Centre for Human Rights or elsewhere, and then - as university lecturers in human rights or international law – coached students and brought teams to the Moot Competition.

The Moot of course gave rise to the LLM in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa which, since its establishment in 2000, has provided training to over 200 specialised African human rights lawyers. The effects of this programme are being felt all the time with several alumni now able to influence human rights policy in their own countries, as Members of Parliament or cabinet ministers. Many have added significantly to the strength of other governmental institutions such as the police and the judiciary. Some of the loudest and strongest civil society voices come from groups which include graduates of the Centre, most notably in the area of gender and women’s rights and in the provision of legal aid in post-conflict societies. The programme is specifically designed to provide qualified staff for the institutions of the African Union, including the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the new African Court. Since 2000, an alumnus or alumna of the LLM has always been among the staff of the secretariat of the African Commission. Alumni work in the Office of the Legal Counsel of the AU and at the African Court. Several work in major UN bodies including UNICEF, the World Intellectual Property Organisation and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In many ways, one of the most significant contributions that the Centre’s programmes has been to strengthen the capacity at African law faculties. The ultimate objective of our programmes is to foster and encourage the creation of knowledge and skills which can help create other centres of excellence at African universities. Not only does this mean that we can then work towards a network of excellence in teaching human rights, but that these efforts go a long way to reversing the ‘brain drain’ - by giving young Africans alternatives to the best teaching programmes offered in the West.

As we work towards the 10th anniversary of the LLM programme in December 2009, we are conducting a detailed impact study of our alumni to be published on that occasion.

As you earlier said, one of the activities that you coordinate in Africa through the Centre for Human Rights is the African Human Rights Moot Court Competition. What is it all about and how is it organised?

The African Human Rights Moot Court Competition is the largest annual gathering of African law faculties and one of the most important human rights educational initiatives in Africa. It offers unparalleled opportunity for networking among young scholars, academics, judges and human rights experts. Since its inception in 1992, it has been hosted in 15 countries and has brought together 845 teams from 125 African law faculties, representing 45 of its 53 countries. The students argue a hypothetical human rights case under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights before
Human rights is identified as a core objective and a principle of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), and is now recognised in the constitutions of all 53 states of Africa. The realisation of human rights norms is a key component of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and Africa has recently become the third region in the world (after Europe and the Americas) to establish a regional human rights court. There is wide consensus that key elements of the normative and enforcement framework for human rights, both on the regional and domestic levels, are in place in Africa.

As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan remarked, there cannot be development or peace without human rights. Human rights is identified as a core objective and a principle of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), and is now recognised in the constitutions of all 53 states of Africa. The realisation of human rights norms is a key component of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and Africa has recently become the third region in the world (after Europe and the Americas) to establish a regional human rights court. There is wide consensus that key elements of the normative and enforcement framework for human rights, both on the regional and domestic levels, are in place in Africa.

Nevertheless, Africa remains the home of widespread and serious human rights violations.

It is 23 years since the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights entered into force, 22 years since the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights was established. Building on these important steps, the recent establishment of the African Court on Human Peoples’ Rights calls, among others, for a committed, qualified African human rights lawyer with the broad knowledge and technical skills necessary to make such an institution capable of fulfilling its mandate.

So there has been much progress, but we must remain active and vigilant, each in our way, working to consolidate the gains and prevent any kind of reflux.

What are some of the achievements of this competition?
The Moot Competition has, over the past 17 years, has become the largest and most far-reaching human rights educational initiative in Africa. Its effects continue to be felt, beyond the participating universities, in all African countries. It seems to me that through the Moot, three major things have been progressively achieved:

- When we started with the Moot, there were almost African law faculties where human rights was taught as a subject. Today the situation has been completely reversed.
- Outside the universities, there has been improved access to justice. This has happened through Moot alumni strengthening the capacity of governmental and non-governmental institutions, working towards effective human rights protection at the national level, especially in countries where the threat to human rights is greatest.
- The overall effect has also been to strengthen both international and regional organisations and, by extension, international and regional systems dealing with the protection of human rights.

By training 150 young lawyers and strengthening the capacity of 70 universities each year, the Moot continues to make a lasting contribution to improving the quality of human rights training at African universities and to improving the lives of Africans everywhere.

Congratulations. Now, how do you appraise Africa’s progress in the adoption of Good Governance practices and respect for Human Rights?
On the 25th of May 2007, the Centre for Human Rights formally received the 2006 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education. How did you feel on that day?

We were all very proud. The Prize was awarded to the Centre in recognition of its contribution to the realisation of human rights in Africa through education. It was the first time that the prize was being presented to an organisation in sub-Saharan Africa, and so this made us doubly proud. But, like a lot of what we do, the institutional partnerships that we have cultivated for over 20 years play a big role. It was clear that the 2006 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education, which is the highest of its kind in the world, was recognising these collaborative endeavours, and really encouraging us to carry on.

But we also felt that this prize, beyond being an achievement in itself, is an indication of the potential these programmes have to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa through human rights.

You encourage Cameroonian who wish to attend the courses offered at the Centre for Human Rights? What are the admission requirements?

There are essentially two kinds of teaching programmes at the Centre. There are the conventional master’s degrees, for which application instructions are available on our website. The primary consideration is of course academic excellence but several other factors are taken into consideration including prior experience, personal motivation and the letters of recommendation.

In addition, there is the Good Governance Programme which presents several short courses, of one or two weeks, throughout the year on different areas related to human rights and good governance. Although participation is aimed at NGO workers and civil servants, anyone can apply. Information on the GGP courses is also available on our website, whose address is www.chr.up.ac.za

Norman, you obtained your Bachelor’s Degree in Law (LL.B) at the University of Buea. Are you still in touch with some of your schoolmates? Have you been impressed by the achievements of some?

I have kept in touch with a few of my classmates from University. Many of them are doing very well in different parts of the world – many in fields other than law. But I must single out a group of them, for whom my admiration knows no bounds. I want to pay tribute here to those among us who stayed at home in Cameroon and who pursued careers in the law. They were the best ones among us. The option they chose appeared easy, but in truth it demanded much courage and sacrifice. In many ways, they elected to hold the fort while many of us went on to do other things far away from home.

Over the years, Law graduates from Universities in Cameroon go into law practice, work in institutions or travel abroad. Yet, there still remains a large number of Law Graduates still in search of jobs or better situations. What motivational talk or employment tips could you share with this category of graduates back home in Cameroon?

I don’t think I have these answers, especially in this difficult economic climate. The motivation to switch disciplines and to leave Cameroon are perhaps stronger now than they have ever been. And by and large, there is very little we can do. I suppose the most important thing is really to choose wisely when you go to university – select a course that you are passionate about, a course that has a practical dimension to it, or that gives you knowledge and skills that you can build upon easier than others. Clearly someone has to study History and not everyone can be an engineer. But to the extent that it is possible, we should bear in mind that what the world needs is people who can build things, make things, fix things, invent things.

What the world needs is people who can build things, make things, fix things, invent things.

For those who already find themselves in a difficult spot, unable to continue after they have completed their degree, I have even less wisdom to offer. It would be very presumptuous of me, speaking from a certain relative safety and comfort, to proffer thoughts on how to escape the difficult situation in which many find themselves. I would like to encourage those who elect to stay behind by saying that there are a myriad ways in which to fashion new and interesting ways to earn your living. It is important not to be fixated on the fact that because I studied law, for example, I must qualify as a barrister or train to become a magistrate at ENAM. A law degree implies that you can think critically and articulate views well. A career in journalism, for example, is just as natural a follow-up to your law degree as any. What begins as an experiment or indulging in a personal passion could easily become the main thing we do in life. It is just as important to keep your mind open to the different possibilities, as it is to work hard.

As a Cameroonian, you certainly remember a traditional meal you very much enjoy when you travel to Cameroon. What could that be? This is a difficult question! There is a plethora of Cameroonian
My beloved parents dedicated their lives to human development through the church and the village community, and remain my greatest inspiration.

There is a plethora of Cameroonian dishes which, if made properly, would easily send men to war. One of these has worked its way into my DNA, a dish that is unique in its cooking, in its ingredients and especially in its presentation. My mother-in-law is one of those ladies who hold what seems like a centuries-old secret regarding the preparation of this dish, because it is near impossible to replicate what she makes for me when I come home. Our children fondly refer to this dish as “the volcano food” due to the uncanny resemblance to that geological phenomenon: achu and njaniki. One can also go on about the ancillary items: nkanda, njakatu, kokobiako ...

But I have a dual heritage and although my beloved mother will cook any Cameroonian dish for me, when I go home to see her I become a child again and she makes the dessert I loved as a little boy growing up.

Let me end by saying how incredibly proud I am of your entire team. Your online magazine is the very example of innovation and excellence, a singular idea whose time is now. Congratulations on all that you have done so far. I offer you renewed expression of my friendship and admiration.

Thanks for talking to the Success Story E-Magazine. It is only a pleasure, thank you for your kind and generous invitation. Let me end by saying how incredibly proud I am of your entire team. Your online magazine is the very example of innovation and excellence, a singular idea whose time is now. Congratulations on all that you have done so far. I offer you renewed expression of my friendship and admiration. But I wish you especially continued success. Thank you.

Interviewed by Mabel Alioh Etuge
Protecting the Rights of Black Women in Europe

Congratulations, President Beatrice. Black women in Europe have not ceased to praise your efforts towards securing some respect from other Europeans. Who is this dynamic Cameroonian-born black European woman?

Thanks, She is Beatrice Achaleke, the founding Executive Director of AFRA - International Center for Black Women’s Perspectives (www.blackwomencenter.org). Prior to the creation of AFRA she co-founded the Black Women’s community – SFC 2003 after the tragic death of Seibene Wague in hands of the Austrian Police, (Wague was a fellow student colleague from Mauritania. She managed the SFC until 2006. Beatrice Achaleke is Initiator of the 1st Black European Women’s Congress that held in Vienna 2007 that led to the creation of the Black European Women’s Council (www.bewnet.eu)- BEWC.

She is European Programme Director of the World Diversity 1 “Challenges, Reflections and Strategies from the Vienna Congress” Achaleke has training experiences in diversity management, Intercultural communications, lobby and networking, mentorship programs, anti-racism, migration and integration, minorities and community empowerment as well as development policies. Beatrice Achaleke was a student of the faculty of law of the University of Yaoundé from 1990-1992; she later studied Sociology at the University of Vienna- Austria. She was honoured with the MIA Award 2008 for her Humanitarian and Social Engagements. In September 2008, she received the Official and Honorary Decoration of the Federal Republic of Austria for engagements in intercultural dialogue and in March 2009 the Miriam Makeba African Diva Award for her engagement in the Empowerment of Black Women in Europe.

Beatrice Achaleke is initiator of several Award-winning intercultural projects in Europe. She is author of several articles on the above-mentioned topics and a highly-demanded keynote speaker in the EU and on Austrian TV Channels.

She is the publisher of the book “Voices of Black European Women 1: challenges, reflections and strategies from the Vienna Congress”. Her second Book “100 Black European Women in Leadership” will be released in 2010. She is a mother of 2 young kids below 10.

Great, you have chosen to dedicate your energy, time, resources and know-how to the protection of the rights of the Black European woman. Who would you define as a Black European Woman today?

In terms of outreach of our activities and services, a Black European Woman is any woman of African descent living in Europe, irrespective of her legal status, country of origin, education, religious beliefs, handicap etc.

Within the Legal framework of our EU-wide mandate, a Black European Woman is a woman of African origin legally residing in any Member State of the European Union, irrespective of their place of birth.

The self-definition “Black European Women” is a very strategic working definition. Black People in Europe have very many foreign definitions: they are foreigners, strangers, people of colour, immigrants, outsiders etc. All these definitions have a common goal, which is the systematic exclusion from all forms of participation in the European societies. It exposes visible minorities especially Black Women to different forms of multiple discrimination like xenophobia, afro-phobia, racism and sexism, which leads to systematic and institutional discrimination of Black People in Europe.

Most often, the European system forgets that we, so-called Immigrants, did not in any way invent migration. Europeans started migration to African countries where they had favourable conditions not only to settle and do business but, most of all, to rob Africa of most of its valuable cultural, natural and historical assets.

Forgotten, also, is the fact that Black People have been part of, and have played key roles in the History and prosperity of Europe since Centuries.
Most often, the European system forgets that we, so-called Immigrants, did not in any way invent Migration. Europeans started migration to African countries where they had every favourable condition not only to settle and do business but, most of all to rob Africa of most of its valuable cultural, natural and historical assets.

How did you welcome Congressman Hastings’ call on the US Government to increase support for public and private initiatives focused on combating racism and discrimination against blacks and other minorities in Europe?

Congressman Alcee Hastings’ resolution published after the official launch of the BEWC in the European Commission last September gave us lots of support and backing for the cause we are fighting for in Europe. We actually contributed in the drafting of this resolution through a number of exchanges and hearings we had with Congressman Hastings’ assistant, Dr. Mischa Thompson. Black Europe needs many more bold steps like that of Congressman Hastings to help Black European in their fight for equal rights and equal opportunities in Europe. We need support from our countries of origin, from the African Union and especially from the African diplomats in the Diaspora.

How is AFRA organised to carry out its mission efficiently?

AFRA is a non-profit, non-governmental self-organisation and NGO of Black Women with headquarter in Vienna, Austria. Black Women and children belong to that visible minority in Europe, which is still exposed to different forms of multiple discrimination in everyday life.

AFRA’s main challenges, therefore, are identifying and addressing critical needs of Black European Women and children in Austria particularly, and in Europe generally. AFRA is committed to work out individual solutions, mainstreaming, networking, lobbying, and raising public awareness both at national and global levels on challenges faced by Black Communities across Europe, and positioning the special needs of Black Women and children on the agenda of the European Union.

AFRA’s structure consists of the General Assembly which elects an Executive Board consisting of the president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary general. The Executive Board appoints the Executive Director. The Executive Director is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation, including recruitment of staff members. The General Assembly meets every two years and adopts a Strategic Work Plan for the organisation elaborated by the executive board and staff under the supervision of the Executive Director, who then has the task to implement the adopted Strategic Work Plan with her team.

AFRA, under your stewardship, championed the creation of the Black European Women’s Council (BEWC). What is BEWC’s mission and achievements since its creation?

“BEWC is a vehicle for the recognition and the visibility of Black Women in Europe through which they can reach their optimum potential.”

The BEWC was founded at the Vienna Congress 2007 within the framework of the European year of equal opportunities for all. Activities so far include:

- a working strategic meeting in March 2008 in Vienna,
- the official launch of the BEWC in September 2008 in Brussels, in the framework of the EU year for intercultural dialog.
- the first general assembly and capacity building seminar in Holland in April 2009
- Several networking and lobbying meetings with different members of the EU Parliament and the Commission to manifest our presence, position our cause and ensure our visibility and participation in all EU related debates.
- the management Board of the BEWC and I are currently working on a strategic plan of the BEWC. The strategic plan shall define concretely areas of activities and set priorities for he next four years.

As President of BEWC, how do you intend to lead this organisation, using the Beijing Platform for Action, the Vienna Congress Declaration of 2007 as well as other UN and EU legislation and campaigns, to act in favour of the black woman?

Thanks for making reference to all these existing platforms and legal instruments. If you take a close look at all these instruments, you will realize that they, in most cases, cover the issues we are raising, but from a European and gender perspective. The cause of Black European Women goes beyond this; it intersects and overlaps with racism and sexism. Most of these instruments focus on equality between men and women, and we are of the opinion that, there can’t be equality between men and women, as long as there is no equality between black and white.

During my mandate, I shall make sure that we use these instruments to point out the missing link in the gender debates of Europe, the UN and other international Human Rights organizations. I shall make sure that the Vienna Declaration of Black European Women is not only disseminated but also implemented as far as possible.

AFRA is committed to work out individual solutions, mainstreaming, networking, lobbying, and raising public awareness both at national and global levels on challenges faced by Black Communities across Europe, and positioning the special needs of Black Communities especially those affecting Black Women and children on the agenda of the European Union.
my mandate I intend to, with the support of my colleagues, establish the BEWC in Brussels with an office and needed staff. I shall also make sure that our cause is included in the agenda of the European Parliament and its bodies. I intend to network with all persons and institutions within and outside Europe, who are supportive to our cause. We still got a very long way to go.

During BEWC’s launch ceremony, you declared that “Today, we have shown our determination and capacity to stand up for our rights of the recognition and full inclusion of Black Women in the diversity in European debates”. What are the criteria for membership into BEWC?

The Black European Women Council is constituted as an international, non-profit body to represent the concerns, needs, interests and empowerment of Black Women of African descent living in Europe. The Association acts as an initiator, creating a platform for dialogue with national, European and international institutions. The membership of the Association is comprised of:
- organisations of Black Women of African descent,
- Black Women’s sections of mixed organisations,
- individual supporting members of Black Women of African descent, and
- supporting organisations which are foundations,
- organisations or companies committed to supporting the aims and objectives of the Association.

What is BEWC doing to rescue some of the victims forced into prostitution, abusive unions and sham marriages that subject some black women from African countries to inhuman and degrading treatments? How can they contact you?

Trafficking in Women is leading to a high increase of Black Women prostitutes in Europe and this is becoming a very serious problem both for countries of origin and host countries today. We are aware of the fact harmful traditional practices like witchcraft, stereotypes and the belief in practices like “Mami-water”, “Obanje” etc, are exposing many young black women to traffickers. We also know that street children, orphans, in some cases, albinos are also exposed to this danger. Female genital mutilation (FGM) and many arranged marriages etc belong to some of the traditional practices which keep trafficking market flourishing. As you know the BEWC is still a very young organization. It is at the moment an umbrella organization of 31 organizations based in 12 EU Member States. Some Members of the BEWC are already doing remarkable work in these areas. As an umbrella organization the BEWC shall support its members in tackling this issue through acquisition and dissemination of information, collecting data, (there is more or less no data on Black European Populations) drafting annual reports, lobbying at all levels through seeking and gaining consultative status within important international organizations.

We are still in the process of building up the BEWC secretariat in Brussels. Before this is done, we can be contacted through www.bewnet.eu , Email: office@blackwomencenter.org or your nearest BEWC members organization. The list of members is available on www.bewnet.eu.

We have observed, with pride, how some blacks in Europe are integrating themselves into the political circles of their host European countries. You are a dynamic example. How many other women, you know, have been candidates in local and national elections in some European countries?

I had the privilege to be in Ireland a month ago and to witness and company some black women candidates to the Irish elections on their canvassing tours (door to door campaigning). This was a very empowering and enriching experience. I met over 10 Black candidates during my one-day Stop over in Dublin and Dundalk. Ireland is a unique country in Europe, which allows Immigrant to stand for local elections after six months of legal residence. Currently there are 3 Black Vice-Mayors in Ireland one in Belgium, one in Holland and one in France. The president of the London Assembly is a Black Woman, and the UK has a high level of Black Women the UK parliament. Germany and Switzerland both have a Black female and male city counsellors respectively. For the last elections of the European Parliament, we unfortunately did not have many Black candidates. I knew of one Black Woman in the UK and one Black Man in Poland. We also have three Black ministers in Europe, two female and one male. Of the 350 members of the European parliament, there are only three Black Women. So we still have got much work to do at this level to ensure more political participation of Black Women in politics, public life and leadership positions in Europe.

There is a strong need for an affirmative action to raise the number of Black Women and men in public office in Europe. The young generation of Black Europeans need role models to break out of the vicious circle of racism, criminalisation, stereotypic and Systematic social exclusion.

Why is the concept of DIVERSITY so important to immigrants in Europe today?

Only such a concept has the potential to raise awareness on the hidden potential of immigrants. Diversity means acknowledging, respecting and valorising the potentials of every individual...
irrespective of their ethnic origin, skin colour, religious beliefs, social status, disabilities etc.

Diversity is a fact. The cultures are much more diverse. Immigrant populations are very prevalent all over Europe. 35% of the population of Vienna alone has immigrant status. You can’t afford to want to exclude this mass, they’re part of the picture of Vienna and of Europe. The concept of diversity is about making people aware of how much the inclusion of differences are important to society. Multinational companies, large enterprises, government agencies etc really have to press upon people to understand that if they don’t think diversity and diversity management are important, the numbers in the population say it’s not only important, it’s a necessity and it has to happen now.

This is why AFRA would be hosting the World Diversity Leadership Summit- Europe from 11th to 13th March 2010 in Vienna. The summit is bringing together about 350 diversity experts from around the globe to debate on new trends in times of the world financial crisis, to network and share good practices.

How much support does BEWC give to black female candidates in different elections?

The Vienna Congress and its concluding Declaration of Black European Women emphasises on the importance and the need to Develop programs, which assure, support and include appropriate political representation and participation of Black Women in European politics. In line with this recommendation the BEWC encourages all Black female candidates and endorses (upon request) any of its members standing for elections on their countries. During its first general assembly the BEWC endorsed Ms Benedicta Attoh standing for county elections in Ireland this year.

Besides setting up an office and hiring staff, how do you plan to institutionalize the BEWC in Brussels?

First of all, we have to: identify the need of members of the BEWC; set up working groups and sub-commissions to define priorities; identify and set of a database of our members and their competences; develop a very strong lobbying and networking plan; raise funds; seek strategic alliances with existing civil society organisations and the other important institutions in Brussels and the World; and carrying out capacity-building and information campaigns for BEWC members. All these and more are pressing issues, which shall have to be addressed in the cause of establishing the BEWC in Brussels.

Is BEWC also participating in the European Women’s Lobby 50/50 campaign?

The BEWC concurs with the EWL and its the ongoing 50/50 Campaign regarding Gender Equality.

In consideration of Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, Article 12 of the Council Directives 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 and Article 53 of the Program of Action from the World Conference Against Racism in Durbin 2001, members of the BEWC urged for the full implementation of the above articles by the EU and its
After having celebrated Obama, it is time for us to get back to reality, to dream our own dreams and to make sure we realise them having him as a role model. His election should by no means, carry us away to the extent that we forget ourselves. We have to be the change we are looking for or have been waiting for. Each one of us is unique and has the potential to make a unique contribution for a better tomorrow, lets get down to work.

How did you welcome the election of President Obama in the United States of America?

Not in any way different from you and many others. The election of president Obama was a dream of Dr. Martin Luther King come true. We have our own Black European dream and I personally think Obama’s election gave us every reason not just to celebrate, but to dream and to let our dreams have no limitations. It gave us the courage and the ability to reach out for the stars.

After having celebrated Obama, it is time for us to get back to reality, to dream our own dreams and to make sure we realise them having him as a role model. His election should by no means, carry us away to the extent that we forget ourselves. We have to be the change we are looking for or have been waiting for. Each one of us is unique and has the potential to make a unique contribution for better tomorrow, lets get down to work.

My grandmum Mama Hellen Atabongasaba was and remains my greatest role model. She never went to school, but she knew and addressed issues related to gender equality, women’s rights and self-reliance for women long before the UN Women’s conferences. We have to be careful not to forget such women and many other round us.

What do you think about the following Black female icons: Rosa Parks, Corretta Scott King, Winnie Mandela, Graca Machel, Wangari Maathai, Gertrude Mongella, President Ellen Johnson?

These and many others are the pride of us, Black Women. They have uplifted the image of Black Women and proven that we are more competent than the rest of the world would like to believe. These women are our role models and our “sheroes”. I personally know that we have many more black “sheroes” in our neighbourhoods who have not and shall never have the exposure the black female leaders you have mentioned have. But this does not make them less “sheroes”, my grand mum Mama Hellen Atabongasaba was and remains my greatest role model. She never went to school, but she knew and addressed issues related to gender equality, women’s rights and self-reliance for women long before the UN Women’s conferences. We have to be careful not to forget such women and many other round us, while we celebrate the “Public “sheroes” you just mentioned. Besides, we still have to use the examples mentioned to create other Black European female role models our kids in Europe can identify with. And this is the driving force behind my activities.

Our Black European children definitely have it much better than us, their parents. Contrary to us, they are not and should not be treated like immigrants in Europe; they are black Europeans and should have equal rights and opportunities like every other European.
and initiatives. Our Black European children definitely have it much better than us, their parents. Contrary to us, they are not and should not be treated like immigrants in Europe; they are black Europeans and should have equal rights and opportunities like every other European. This is also the reason behind the self-definition “Black Europeans”

**President Beatrice, Cameroon has so many sons and daughters in Europe who are doing so well. But, besides remittances, how can they contribute to local, regional and national development in a spectacular way as we see in North African Countries? How can Government encourage them?**

Believe me, if I tell you this is one of the most difficult questions to answer! While Cameroonians back home will rightly insist that Cameroon needs us, our children born in Europe insist that we have to be beside them to guide them and give them the support they need to become leaders of tomorrow.

Here we have a true dilemma of making the right choice between two legitimate obligations: being a patriot and returning home and; assuming my parental responsibility and staying close to my kids to help them grow up not as foreigners, but as citizens of the countries there are born in.

I think almost each one of us who leaves her Country of Origin and forms a family in her host country or new home faces this dilemma. I think each one has to find their right balance. Investment and remittances are sometimes the best and the first step towards facing this situation. Connecting to initiatives like your Success Story Magazine is also a way of giving back home. In as much as the government can facilitate the return of many of us willing to return back to Cameroon, I would also like to mention that this is not easy decision to take and when it is taken, is usually very individual and no government measures can influence it completely.

**While Cameroonians back home will rightly insist that Cameroon needs us, our children born in Europe insist that we have to be beside them to guide them and give them the support they need to become leaders of tomorrow.**

**Well, you are so busy, hopping from one country to the other. Do you find time to eat delicious Cameroon meals?**

Ohmygoodness! Of course I do create time for a good Cameroonian meal and music. I love cooking and my six years old daughter and eight years old son love eating water fufu and eru, okro and fufu, ndole and fried plantain, rice and beans, roasted fish and miondo while listening to makossa. When they have events in their schools they always insist that we prepare Beignets. My neighbours and colleagues just can’t get enough of Beignets. I used the opportunity to travel with my kids to Cameroon last year and we loved it. During that trip my always very caring mum “Auntie Bibi” prepared lots of eru and water fufu, ndole and dried fish, so when things get really tough, I took time off and cooked a good Cameroonian dish with palm oil and invited some good friends, we all ate with our fingers, believe me, this a not just a ritual but it the best medicine against stress and nostalgia! It works like magic and I do not want to miss it for any reason.

Once in Europe, we have to improvise, like cooking eru with spinach in the absence of waterleaf, or cooking okro with sunflower oil in the absence of palm oil. This is fun, it is creativity and I am sure Aunti Bibi or my Dad would call it a European dish if I had to serve it to them, meanwhile my Austrian and European friends are convinced it is an African dish. The truth is that it is a combination of both, and reflects my double and ever changing identities. That is the identity you only get when you immigrate. That is diversity, in simple terms.

**Wonderful and Mouth-watering! Your last word to our readers, President Beatrice.**

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.

You are the one you’ve been waiting for.

Be the change that you seek.

Strive for the best and go for your full potential.

Leave footprints if you do not want to be forgotten.

Be inspired by the people you admire or inspire someone with your deeds.

You are unique, make a difference, give your live a meaning!

**Your impressions about the SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE?**

Success Story is unique and innovative in terms of concept, implementation and outreach. It upholds our Cameroonian legacy, making us proud to be Cameroonians, at home or abroad. It uplifts the image of Cameroon and its People in a unique way, it creates links and sustains networks, and this is the fascinating thing about it. Success Story is an initiative we all should join forces to support.

**Thanks so much, Our readers wish you more success in your difficult mission.**

Thanks for having given me the honour and the opportunity, I feel very privileged to have the chance to feature in your great forum.

**Interviewed by Vanessa Mbong**
Good Day Barrister, How does it feel like coming back to Buea to organize one of the most attended human rights gatherings in recent times?

It feels so good to back home in Buea, a place that is truly ‘home’ to me and the only place in the world that I consider ‘home’. As a detribalized Cameroonian and a Bayangi from Buea, I feel so honored to be back home. It is a way of given back to a community which has been very supportive of me and which has contributed tremendously in my successes and achievements.

You have been mentioned in several private and public spheres as a success story in the domain of human rights. Our readers would wish to know more about you?

Well, I truly don’t know if I am a success story in the area of Human Rights. However, being a chief apostle of the adage that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” and if the people do say that I am a success story in this domain, then am sure they have genuine reasons to say that.

I was born Felix Agbor-Anyior Nkongho. My mum gave me the name Agbor Showboy and till date, most of her friends and even some of my friends do call me Showboy. However, I am popularly known as Agbor-Balla. I grew up in the “ghettos” in Great Soppo Buea. I attended CBC Primary School Great Soppo Buea, Saint Joseph College Sasse Buea where I passed the Ordinary Levels in Form Four. I went to CCAS Kumba and then to the Musole GCE Evening Classes after I was wrongfully dismissed from CCAS Kumba for subversive writing popularly known as “Lavoir”. (It was however a blessing to me because I came to meet someone who would influence my life tremendously; Bate Besong).

I attended University of Yaounde between 1989-1994 and obtained the Licence en Droit. In 1995-1996, I attended the Nigerian Law School in Lagos where I obtained the BL in Law with a Second Class Upper Division. I was called to the Nigerian Bar in December 1996. In 1997, I went to Belgium where I did a Masters in International and European Comparative Law. Upon graduation, I started a PhD in International Law which was abandoned. During this period, I worked as a Graduate Assistant at the Centre for International Law Vrije Universiteit, Brussels. I left Belgium in 2005 for the US and was enrolled at the University of Notre Dame. I graduated in 2006 with a Masters in International Human Rights and International Criminal Law. I am currently doing a PhD at the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway. I attended The Hague Academy of International Law and the University of Leipzig Program on Conflict Prevention in Africa.

I was enrolled as an Advocate and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Cameroon in 2001 and from then till date, I am attached to Amity Law Office in Buea. Between 2006-2008, I worked as an Associate Legal Officer and Legal Officer at the International Criminal Tribunal for Sierra Leone (The Special Court) and am currently working as a Human Rights Officer with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Human Rights, you would agree Barrister, is becoming a popular concept in Cameroon but still not within the understanding of most Cameroonians. How would you define the concept Human Rights and analyse its importance in today’s national and global development equations, using pertinent provisions of some famous human rights instruments, if you don’t mind?

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin,
Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations for Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.

The principle of universality of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law. This principle, as first emphasized in the widely acclaimed Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, has been reiterated in numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions. All States have ratified at least one, and 80% of States have ratified four or more, of the core human rights treaties, reflecting consent of States, which creates legal obligations for them, and giving concrete expression to universality. Some fundamental human rights norms enjoy universal protection by customary international law across all boundaries and civilizations. For instance, freedom from torture is a universal and fundamental human right for all guaranteed under international law and enshrined in numerous international human rights instruments. The express prohibition of torture is provided in Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which emphatically prohibits torture in no unequal terms: “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of punishment.” The prohibition of torture in the UDHR was followed mutandis mutandis in Article 7 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights of 1966. In addition, there are two international instruments that are specifically aimed at combating torture, the most significant of which is the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984 which has been ratified or acceded to by 109 States. It was preceded by the Declaration on the Protection from Torture, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assem-

All human rights are indivisible, whether they are civil and political rights, such as the right to life, equality before the law and freedom of expression; economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to work, social security and education, or collective rights, such as the rights to development and self-determination, are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates advancement of the others. Likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others. Non-discrimination is a crosscutting principle in international human rights law. The principle is present in all the major human rights treaties and provides the central theme of some of international human rights conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The principle applies to everyone in relation to all human rights and freedoms and it prohibits discrimination on the basis of a list of non-exhaustive categories such as sex, race, and color and so on. The principle of non-discrimination is complemented by the principle of equality, as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It is also enshrined in Article 7 UDHR on equality before the law and Article 14 of the ICCPR. “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.”

Human rights entail both rights and obligations. States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. The obligation to respect means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the en-

The principle of universality of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law. This principle, as first emphasized in the widely acclaimed Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, has been reiterated in numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions.
Human rights entail both rights and obligations. States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights… At the individual level, while we are entitled our human rights, we should also respect the human rights of others.

The goal of a lawyer should not only be to get rich but to provide legal aid to those who are victims but who cannot afford his services.

The government however also needs to play a big role in ensuring that there is legal aid for those who cannot afford the exorbitant fees of lawyers.

How do you assess the human rights awareness or culture among the population in Cameroon; what are the major setbacks and how could the population surmount these?

I truly think that people are very aware of their rights vis-à-vis the Government. The problem is that, people always think Human Rights is only when the Government violates the Rights of its peoples or citizens. They are oblivious of situations when we private individuals violate the rights of others. I however, think that at the micro level at the level of the family, Human Rights awareness is not that much. There is a lot of human rights violation at home be it with failure to respect the rights of the child, domestic violence, gender and female discrimination in the family amongst others. Generally Human Rights education will be of immense help in curing these deficiencies. I laud the efforts of the Government to commence teaching Human Rights in our schools and colleges. I also think that a lot has to be done in educating those in the rural areas. We can use meetings, church groups, traditional rulers and community leaders, football competitions to educate people on the importance of human rights.

Most people complain that despite efforts by legal instruments to make justice more accessible to the population, securing legal aid from lawyers is just so costly. How do Lawyers’ fees and, sometimes, poor professional ethics discourage people from seeking the assistance of courts to protect or enforce their rights?

As a lawyer myself and a Human Rights Advocate/Crusader, I find it hard to reconcile these facts. It is a truism that lawyers need to be paid for their services just like Doctors, teachers and other professionals. However, I think that our lawyers need to do more in helping the underprivileged and the downtrodden. They should be the voice of the voiceless and champion the cause of social justice. As a minister in the temple of justice, our lawyers should ensure that justice is not only done but should be seen to be done. The goal of a lawyer should not only be to get rich but to provide legal aid to those who are victims but who cannot afford his services.
Corruption seriously undermines the protection and enjoyment of human rights and perpetuates discrimination

CHRDA’s goal of Human Rights awareness by educating the public and also contributing in the debate on corruption.

Corruption amounts to a gross violation of individuals’ rights and freedoms. It also poses a threat to democracy. When a State fails to curb corruption, it also fails to fulfill its obligations to promote, protect and preserve the fundamental rights of the people. It perpetuates discrimination, prevents the full realization of social and economic rights and violates fundamental civil and political rights such as the rights to free and fair elections.

Corruption seriously undermines the protection and enjoyment of human rights and perpetuates discrimination. Whereas the UDHR, for example, provides that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights provides equality as well as equal protection before the law, corruption makes a mockery of these entitlements.

Corruption is particularly harmful and poses a great danger when it becomes pervasive in law courts. By tilting the scale of justice, corruption denies the citizens their right to legal redress when their freedoms are violated. In this way, a person’s rights to a fair trial and recognition as an equal person before the law are violated.

Furthermore, corruption leads to the infringement of numerous civil and political rights. When corruption permeates politics, for example, and electoral outcomes are determined though vote buying and bribery, citizens are denied their right to political participation. The rights of the citizens to vote through universal and equal suffrage are, therefore, greatly watered down. The consequences include incapable and weak leaders, patronage and sycophancy and the erosion of democratic principles. It leads to a culture of political Methuselah’s wherein leaders stay in power in perpetuity with complete disregard and disdain for the citizenry after all they were not voted by them. These results in an octogenarian leadership where some stay in power for 41 years and others manipulate the parliament to extend their mandate beyond that stipulated by the Constitution.

The traditional relationship between corruption and human rights is always a negative one. In the words of the Council of Europe, corruption threatens the rule of law, democracy and human rights, undermines governance, fairness and social justice, distorts...
There is need to establish mutually-reinforcing institutional and legal frameworks, strengthen complementing legal framework and increase involvement of national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and other civil society movements in the fight against corruption.

Cameroon, as Justice Rose Mbah Acha pointed out in her presentation, has a rich legal armada to fight corruption. Are you impressed with the activities of the different institutions she cited and what suggestions could you make to the powers that be to take the fight against corruption beyond embezzlement to changing habits and opposing corruption?

We all know that Cameroon and most African Countries have good laws. The crux of the matter is not the laws but the interpretation and implementation of those laws. There is the need for civic education on the ills of corruption. The notion of patriotism and love for the country should not be restricted only to belonging to a ruling party or supporting the President. It should be broadened to include issues such as corruption, democracy, good governance, Rule of Law etc.

I also opine that the Anti Corruption Commission should be given wider Powers to investigate and prosecute like that in Sierra Leone. It should not be used in settling personal scores otherwise it would lose its credibility. It should be independent from the Presidency of the Republic

Did you agree with Professor Tazoacha Asonganyi’s assertion that there is an “Internal Sabotage” of the laws which has rendered the legal instruments inapplicable?

I totally concur with the erudite Professor.

You have observed the implementation of the new Criminal Procedure Code in Cameroon. How would you assess the impact of the Code in upholding the rights of the accused in criminal proceedings as well as the rights of those in detention?

The Criminal Procedure Code has gone a long way in upholding the rights of the accused. The inclusion of the Right of Habeas Corpus and the presumption of innocence with the burden of proof on the accuser is very welcome. According to Section 8 of the code: (1) Any person suspected of having committed an offence shall be presumed innocent until his guilt has been legally established in the course of the trial where he shall be given all the necessary guarantees for his defence. (2) The presumption of innocence shall apply to every suspect, defendant and accused. The code also makes provision for those in custody as evident in its Section 30 (4) which prohibit torture and any degrading treatment. The new code is a very liberal and progressive code as it is in consonance with international human rights practice, particu-
am still not very certain that the police and the Gendarmes will respect the code. Am also not very certain that the judiciary is independent enough to implement this code.

In his keynote address on “Economic Crimes and International Justice”, Professor Ndiva Kofele Kale raised the need for Corruption to be elevated to the status of a crime in positive international law. How efficient could this be in fighting corruption?

It would contribute immensely since it will be a universal crime with universal jurisdiction thus it will be possible to try leaders who have plundered the economy of their country in places which hitherto it would not have been possible to try them there. This would scare some of the leaders since they will be aware that they could be arrested and prosecuted anywhere in the world for the crime of grand Corruption. Furthermore, this kind of State corruption which Professor Kale describes as Patrimonicide will lead to individual Criminal responsibility and punishment which is the bedrock of international criminal law.

If we understand you correctly, granting universal jurisdiction on corruption crimes, as the eminent Professor demanded, means that a court in Cameroon could indict a foreign Head of State, for example, on charges of corruption?

If there are allegations, which can be proven in a Court of Law, then it could be possible.

Don't you think that Corruption in African countries is sponsored by companies and governments from Developed countries that lure African leaders into accepting bribes and other money laundering advantages in order to have access to raw geological wealth?

I am tired of this neo-colonialist conspiracy theory. If our leaders are not fit and proper to rule then they must resign. These are adults who are supposed to be patriotic and have the interest of their country at heart and if they can sell their country just like Judas sold Jesus then they are not fit to be leaders. The interest of the Country should supersede all other interest. No one argues that they should do business with multinationals but you

should do business whilst representing the best interest of your country. It’s just like a lawyer representing his Client in a Business transaction with the aim of getting the best deal for his client and not for himself.

When you look at the Expenses Scandal in Great Britain, Bernard Madoff's great financial scam in the US, activities of multinationals etc, don't you think that Civil Society Organisations have unjustifiably placed a lot of attention on Corruption in Africa whereas the phenomenon as it occurs daily in developed countries has serious repercussions on the development of our poor African countries?

The Bernard Madoff financial scam in the US and Expenses scandals in the UK show that corruption is a universal phenomenon and not limited only to Africa as some sections of the International Press want us to believe. That's why as an international phenomenon with cross border implications there is need to elevate this crime to an international level with universal jurisdictions. We, in the Civil Society, are fighting Grand Corruption in Africa because of the consequences and impact of corruption in the economy of the country. It is true that we cannot fight corruption without assessing the roles played by multinationals in facilitating corruption and also the role played by these same companies in the civil wars and destabilization taking place in Africa. However, we need to hold our governments accountable since they have a covenant with us and they must respect the covenant. It would be dishonest to describe as unjustifiable placing lots of attention on African Government. This is because the impact of Corruption on our countries is so huge. Just take the case of Cameroon and the amount of money alleged to have been embezzled or misappropriated by those in detention and by those already convicted. This did not involve any multinational but just share greed, graft and avarice on the part of this guys who plunder the economy of the country.

The Criminal Procedure Code has gone a long way in upholding the rights of the accused. The inclusion of the Right of Habeas Corpus and the presumption of innocence with the burden of proof on the accuser is very welcome.
I will advise University students/Graduates to be focused and ambitious. Hard work, commitment and dedication to whatever you do will lead to success. They should follow their dreams and not to be derail by the quest for fast money. I would also advise them to make the internet their first love by using it for constructive purposes. Search the net for schools, jobs, internships etc.

Barrister, what an impressive academic and professional background you have. You are a role model and success story to many of your peers and young Cameroonians. What advice could you give to young University Law Graduates in Cameroon who wish to pursue an international career like you while carrying on academically?

I will advise University students/Graduates to be focused and ambitious. Hard work, commitment and dedication to whatever you do will lead to success. They should follow their dreams and not to be derail by the quest for fast money. I would also advise them to make the internet their first love by using it for constructive purposes. Search the net for schools, jobs, internships etc.

Who were (are) your role models?

My parents had a lot of influence on my life. My mother Nchong

My parents had a lot of influence on my life. My mother Nchong Comfort Brown of blessed memory taught me humility and my dad always encouraged me as he had a lot of faith in my abilities...Apart from my parents, one person who influenced my life and who to me is my role model is Bate Bisong...Another person who is a role model to me is Nigerian Lawyer and legal luminary Chief Gani Fawehinmi

Comfort Brown of blessed memory taught me humility and my dad always encouraged me as he had a lot of faith in my abilities. Till date he still feels I have not completed my education as he wants me to ensure that I complete my PhD. Apart from my parents, one person who influenced my life and who to me is my role model is Bate Bisong, BB as he was fondly called inspired me tremendously. I have always been ambitious but when I met and came to know BB as a Teacher, big brother and friend, my views about life, education and social justice changed tremendously. To me, he is just the finest mind I have ever met and am sure he is my role model per excellence. His mastery of the English language, his love for books and reading has inspired me a lot. Another person who is a role model to me is Nigerian Lawyer and legal luminary Chief Gani Fawehinmi. I dream of becoming a lawyer in the model of Gani; a genuine defender and advocate of the rights of the underprivileged and downtrodden.

Buea is a growing city you love so well. You seem to be very popular around here and that explains the impressive turnout at the Symposium. What fond memories of this legendary mountainside city do you still hold on your mind, with regards to your education, the games that you played, adolescent adventures or the types of food that you ate and enjoyed while growing up?

I have wonderful memories of Buea in general and Great Soppo, in particular. I always think of the good old days before the advent of provincial or tribal hatred perpetuated by some Elites of the South West Province when we use to have intellectual sword play with icons like George Ngwane, BB, Kimbeng, Wache, Mbullai, Wasoloko, JK, Vallasis, Stevaus, Canute, Dibussi amongst others at a Bar known as Intellectual Spot in Great Soppo. Also think about the days of Parliament in Great Soppo wherein we discussed political issues from morning till night. Lastly, I will never forget my favorite eating house “Mami Ntube” of Great Soppo.

You have been reading The Success Story E-Magazine; could we have your impressions?

I first read about the Magazine from my Friend’s blog www.dibussi.com. After that I spoke with Dibussi and since then I have been a regular reader of the Magazine. It’s a truly great magazine and I want to thank you for the wonderful job you are doing. It’s rare to find a magazine that profiles those of us not working with the government.

Your last word to our readers, Barrister?

I am calling on all Cameroonians to advocate, respect and protect human rights in all its facets. I also urge readers of Success Magazine to be involved in the politics of our beloved Country. All Cameroonians must register for the forthcoming elections and should ensure that their vote counts.

Thanks for accepting to talk to our E-Mag despite your very busy schedule. We join our readers to wish you more success as you move ahead.

The pleasure is all mine. I want to thank you for given me the opportunity to express my views through your magazine.

Interviewed by George Enow Mbella-Martin

It’s a truly Great Magazine and I want to thank you for the wonderful job you are doing. It’s rare to find a magazine that profiles those of us not working with the government.
Success stories from The Mbororo-Fulani Community in Cameroon

“In recent years, Mbororo people are becoming sedentary because of declining cattle wealth that has left a great number of them impoverished. They are now facing a new way of life and rather than retreating, they are renewing their efforts to make accelerated progress towards meeting the challenges of this global village. The number of the new generation who have emerged and are making significant strides is limited. Currently we have only 40 Mbororos employed by the government and more than a hundred in the private sector. We have just two Ph.D holders, and one MD. In the academia, currently we have two Ph.D candidates, 15 students at the Masters’ level and 60 B.Sc. In the Diaspora, there are 12 Mbororos in the US, 6 in the UK, 1 in Germany and 7 in South Africa. Most of the Mbororo people in the Diaspora are in academics or business.”

“MBOSCUDA has also done a lot to empower Mbororo community in income-generating activities especially women and youths. This has gone a long way to increase their sources of income. Today, you can see Mbororo women do gardening, cultivation of maize as an alternative source of family income, tailoring and petit trading while youths go in for driving, motor mechanics and trading in provision articles, textile, second-hand dresses and shoes.”

“Among the cultural features that I admire most is Mbororo hospitality and the tranquility of Mbororo compounds. Throughout the many years of research in the North West region, I have always felt highly welcome and at home in Mbororo compounds. Mbororo families will do everything possible to accommodate you as their guest, and highly appreciate your effort of visiting them in their remote locations.”
Scribbles From The Den

Now in Print!


This collection consists of 49 insightful essays by leading Cameroonian blogger Dibussi Tande, which originally appeared on his award-winning blog Scribbles from the Den. These essays tackle some of the most pressing and complex issues facing Cameroon.

www.dibussi.com

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CONTACT
Tel: 22 06 28 38 76 15 82 87
Email: mmeke's04@yahoo.com
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