Press Release following the Monthly Meeting of the Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of the Working Groups of 25 March 2020

The monthly meeting of the Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of the Working Groups was held on 25 March 2020, in the conference room of the head office, under the direction of Dr Chemuta Divine BANDA, the Chairperson of the NCHRF.

In his opening remarks, the Chairperson observed the difficult climate in which the meeting was taking place, characterized by the limited available funding to the Commission, the ongoing socio-political unrest in some regions of Cameroon and the restrictions on freedoms necessitated to limit the spread of COVID-19, which constitutes a global pandemic of unparalleled magnitude. The Chairperson of the Commission then requested the participants to have a devout thought for the repose of the souls of those who have preceded us in the hereafter following the unfortunate events in our country, especially for the great musician Manu Dibango whose death demonstrates the reality of the danger posed by the Coronavirus and the need to curb its spread.

In this regard and in view of the threat posed by the Coronavirus and the deaths it provokes today and the restrictions it imposes on certain fundamental rights (freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and public demonstrations, right to a fair trial, right to security and safety of persons, right to work, right to education, right to health and right to a healthy environment), the meeting called for respect for the measures taken by the Government and the World Health Organization to combat the pandemic effectively. They hope that the Government will adopt further measures to reduce the potentially negative impact of response actions on the lives of vulnerable populations, including low-income people, rural populations, the sick, the disabled, internally displaced persons, refugees and prisoners.

With regard to the above-mentioned climate of socio-political tension, the Chairpersons and Rapporteurs expressed their deep concern at the ongoing terrorist attacks by Boko Haram against civilians in certain areas of the Far North Region, and at the deterioration of the security situation in the North-West and South-West Regions, characterised by loss of human life, destruction of public and private
property, exacerbating movements of displaced persons, with a negative impact on the development of the said Regions, as well as on the right to better living conditions (family, education, work, health, housing, freedom of movement).

They condemned all forms of violence observed in the crisis regions, such as the attack perpetrated by armed men on 7 March 2020 in Galim, Bambarous Division, Western Region, in which eight people were killed, including four civilians and four members of the defence and security forces, and the attack perpetrated in Bamenda on 8 March 2020, during the celebration of the International Women's Rights Day, in which one person was killed and seven injured.

The Chairperson went on to report on the progress of the investigation commissioned by the Head of State and conducted by the Minister Delegate of the Presidency in charge of Defence, to shed light on the incidents that occurred on 14 February 2020 in Ngarbuh village, North-West, which caused the loss of life, and with which he had the honour to be associated with. In this regard, the Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of the working groups welcomed the appointment of the Chairperson of the NCHR as a member of this Commission of Inquiry. They hoped that the results of the investigations carried out by this Commission would be rendered public and those suspected of recognized human rights violations would be brought before the competent courts.

Despite the difficulties mentioned, the Chairpersons and Rapporteurs welcomed the efforts made by the Government to address the deleterious security situation in the Far North, North-West and South-West Regions and reiterated their call for a lasting solution to the crisis there.