



General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 September 2005

Original: English

Sixtieth session

Item 73 (b) of the provisional agenda*

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

Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

In its resolution 59/183 of 20 December 2004, the General Assembly welcomed the activities of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa at Yaoundé and noted with satisfaction the support provided for the establishment of the Centre by the host country. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue to provide their full assistance for the proper functioning of the Centre. The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its sixtieth session.

The present report provides an overview of the activities carried by the Centre as a contribution of the efforts by the United Nations to promote human rights and democratic principles and values in the Central African subregion, and the most significant developments since September 2004, the date of the last report to the General Assembly (A/59/403). The activities carried out by the Centre during the period from October 2004 to September 2005 include training, provision of technical assistance and advisory services to Governments in the subregion, support to civil society organizations, support to peace processes, dissemination of information and documentation on human rights and democracy, as well as development of partnerships with the Economic Community of Central African States and United Nations agencies operating in Central Africa.

* A/60/150.

** This report is delayed in submission to reflect updated information.



Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	1–5	3
II. Activities carried out from October 2004 to September 2005	6–35	3
A. Human rights activities	6–25	3
B. Activities related to democracy	26–31	7
C. Information and documentation	32–35	8
III. Development of partnerships	36–44	8
A. Collaboration with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)	36–38	8
B. Collaboration with United Nations agencies	39–44	9
IV. Conclusion	45–46	10

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa was established in 2001 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/55 A of 1 December 1999, at the request of States members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The Centre operates under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

2. The mission of the Centre is to contribute to the enhancement of capacities in the promotion and protection of human rights, and to support the creation and/or strengthening of national institutions. The Centre also strives to contribute to the development of a culture of human rights and democracy in Central Africa for the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of sustainable peace and development.

3. The Centre became fully operational in March 2001. In June 2002, it was officially inaugurated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Centre has entered its fourth year of operations. It is at present composed of three international professionals supported by a national officer: the director, a regional adviser on democracy, a human rights officer and a national officer. An associate expert funded by the Netherlands was just recruited and will join the Centre in September 2005.

4. In the fulfilment of its mandate, the Centre provides advice and technical assistance to Governments and civil society, runs programmes and organizes workshops on issues within its mandate. The Centre assists various partners at the national and subregional levels in strengthening capacities in the fields of human rights and democracy. In this regard, the Centre has developed an internship programme for graduate students and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the Central African subregion. This activity has now been further strengthened by opening up possibilities for interns from other regions and continents with the view to enhancing cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences.

5. Support for the Centre's activities is provided through the regular budget of the United Nations. Nevertheless, the process of raising extrabudgetary resources to augment projects and activities within the context of the OHCHR annual appeal for funds has enabled the Centre also in 2004/2005 to launch, with the assistance of France, a successful capacity-building project for civil society. OHCHR provides full assistance for the proper functioning of the Centre in the fulfilment of its mandates.

II. Activities carried out from October 2004 to September 2005

A. Human rights activities

Training

6. In accordance with the activities foreseen as described in the previous report (A/59/403), the Centre organized the following subregional training programmes:

(a) From 27-29 June 2005, the Centre, in collaboration with UNAIDS and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda conducted a capacity-building workshop

for civil society representatives drawn from all member States of ECCAS on the subject: The Role of Civil Society in the Fight against discrimination and stigmatism on People living with HIV/AIDS. The Seminar ended with a declaration and code of conduct as well as the establishment of a network of HIV/AIDS activists in the subregion. Prior to this, it is to be recalled that the Centre had conducted the following training activities;

(b) In collaboration with the UNESCO subregional office in Central Africa and with the contribution of other partners such as UNDP-Cameroon and UNIC Cameroon the Centre organized a one-day workshop on “Media, human rights, culture and education in Central Africa” in Yaoundé for the human rights week of 10 December 2004. The aim was to sensitize leading media personalities, diplomats and key players in government and civil society as well as academia to enable them to advocate for the promotion and protection of human rights in the subregion.

Advisory services and technical cooperation

7. The Centre continues to provide technical cooperation to Governments and national institutions, upon request. Already established national human rights institutions have benefited from this assistance, for example, in Cameroon. Those in the process of being formally established, such as those in the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea, have also requested the assistance of the Centre and been provided with modest support.

8. Furthermore, a two-day working session was held in June 2005 in Malabo with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Equatorial Guinea on follow-up to the projects for a human rights training designed by the Centre. This is scheduled to be implemented during the years 2005 and 2006, pending release of the required funds by the Government of Equatorial Guinea. In this context, the Centre has continued to follow up on the joint assessment mission it jointly carried out with the European Union Commission to Equatorial Guinea in December 2004, with a view to bringing technical and methodological support for the evaluation of the human rights situation in the country. The mission met political, administrative and judicial authorities as well as the civil society and political parties. This was followed in June 2005 by a joint mission by the Director of the Centre with the Embassy of the United States of America in Cameroon, accredited also to Equatorial Guinea, for further sensitization on human rights and democracy. The latest mission has culminated in the launching, by the President of Equatorial Guinea, of a social development fund to assist communities with the benefits derived from oil revenues.

9. More civil society organizations in the Central African subregion have forged partnerships with the Centre, benefiting from available expertise in the promotion and protection of human rights.

10. The culture of collaboration with civil society organizations was this year marked by the joint launching, on 27 January 2005, of the United Nations campaign for the dissemination of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in police stations of Cameroon. The NGO Nouveaux droits de l’homme Cameroon, as well as the Government Delegation for National Security, have played a key role in contributing to this United Nations effort.

11. On 3 February 2005, the Yaoundé Centre took the lead in helping the Association of Social and Cultural Development of Mbororo-Cameroon to organize and facilitate a subregional seminar in Yaoundé on “Human rights and indigenous women in Central Africa”. The participants were drawn from Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Kenya and Cameroon. Participants were fully sensitized on United Nations mechanisms relating to rights of women’s indigenous associations.

12. The Centre is also providing support to the human rights women journalists’ network in Central Africa. This network was created by participants of the Brazzaville seminar held in March 2004 dedicated to women journalists involved in the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the subregion.

13. On 22 April 2005, the “Vieira De Mello Prize”, for Human Rights in Central Africa was launched by Nouveaux droits de l’homme Cameroon, with the support and contribution of the Centre. Researchers in human rights institutions, eminent activists and youth coordinators have benefited from this award. The highest prize for the year 2005, granted under the chairmanship of the Centre, was awarded to President Thabo Mbeki for his outstanding contribution to the peace processes in Burundi and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

14. As a follow-up to the seminar for Pygmy communities held in Yaoundé and Sangmelima Mekas, Cameroon held in November 2002 on “Minorities and indigenous people’s rights”, the Centre, in collaboration with the OHCHR Anti-Discrimination Unit in Geneva, organized seminars on the role of civil society in the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in Yaoundé from 12 to 14 July 2004, and in Libreville in July 2005.

15. Within the framework of the OHCHR-UNDP Assisting Communities Together (ACT) Project, the Centre in 2004 has awarded bursaries of US\$ 5,000 each to three NGOs working in the field of human rights and peace advocacy. The process of selection of beneficiaries for similar assistance in 2005 is under process.

16. At the request of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the Subregional Centre has scheduled a mission to Senegal from 7 to 9 September 2005 to evaluate the project “Vivre au Sénégal”. The mission of evaluation is working in collaboration with the managers of the project and its beneficiaries.

17. A mission to Togo is scheduled in September 2005 to evaluate a similar project of the Voluntary Fund being implemented by the Ligue togolaise des droits de l’homme. This is a follow-up to the Centre’s evaluation services in relation to projects implemented by the Trauma Centre and “Fondation Idolé” in Cameroon since 2004.

Internship programme

18. Since 2001, the Centre runs a continuous three-month internship programme for graduate students, human rights activists and representatives of Governments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations involved in the promotion of human rights and the rule of law in the subregion.

19. The fourteenth group of interns drawn from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Congo, Germany and United States of America completed their training at the Centre in July 2005. These consisted of lawyers and human rights activists that had outstanding records.

20. The Centre continues to receive several inquiries and applications for internship from abroad, notably Canada, France and the United States. While the subregional Centre's internship programme is destined primarily to nationals of ECCAS member States, consideration is given to requests from outside the region as a way to build partnership and enhance cross-fertilization of ideas with centres of excellence outside the subregion. To date, 42 interns have benefited from the training programme of the Centre.

Human rights education

21. As indicated in the last report, in the framework of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004, a sensitization project, entitled "Human rights progress and challenges", has been set up and now is fully implemented. The programme targeted several groups, including students at Yaoundé I University, the Catholic University of Central Africa, researchers, the military, parliamentarians, civil society organization leaders and lawyers. As in the past, this year again the focus has been on:

- Human rights: progress and challenges;
- Minorities and indigenous peoples' rights;
- Democracy in Central Africa.

22. The pilot project that was started in 2003 to assist the establishment of human rights clubs in high schools has continued in 2004/2005, to be replicated at selected schools in the subregion with a view to enhancing the development of a culture of human rights and democracy in school environments.

Support to the peace processes

The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

23. The Centre has been requested to represent the Office at several major events. Since April 2003, the Centre has continued to assist, through the office of the Resident Coordinator, the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, established to pursue peaceful ways of implementing the ruling of the International Court of Justice on the land and maritime dispute between the two countries, during its sessions held in Yaoundé.

The International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region

24. Following earlier visits in 2003 to the Centre by the joint United Nations-African Union team led by Mr. Ibrahima Fall, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region and the workshop on the integration of human rights in the process of the International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region, held in Yaoundé from 17 to 19 May 2004, collaborative efforts have been intensified also in the period 2004-2005 in the preparations for the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. The Centre has actively participated in all the subsequent intergovernmental and technical meetings held up to September 2005.

25. In the framework of the follow-up to this conference, a consultant was engaged by OHCHR and deployed to Yaoundé as of July 2005 to enhance the integration of the human rights component in the process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

B. Activities related to democracy

General aspects

26. The democracy programme of the Centre that became operational with the arrival of the Regional Democracy Adviser in November 2002 has now suffered a setback with the secondment of the incumbent to the Department of Political Affairs and the pending recruitment of a replacement. The democracy programme focused mainly on the promotion and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law as a tool for conflict prevention in Central Africa. This is a priority attention for the coming year.

27. Partnerships with universities, research institutions and civil society organizations in Central Africa, the ECCAS secretariat and United Nations entities in the subregion are continuing. The close working relations with the Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations that began in 2005 are encouraging.

Conflict prevention

28. The Centre continues to assist ECCAS in the drafting of technical papers related to the ECCAS early warning and conflict prevention mechanism and regional political integration. The Centre is currently following up on the deliberations of the seminar on peace, security and governance in the Great Lakes region, jointly organized by the International Peace Academy and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, in partnership with the African Dialogue Centre for Conflict Management and Development Issues (United Republic of Tanzania), the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, the Yaoundé Centre, and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (South Africa).

29. Specifically, the need to ensure that the forthcoming International Conference on the Great Lakes Region succeeds in addressing the root causes of the conflict in the region from regional and domestic perspectives, and the involvement of civil society and women's groups in peacebuilding processes remain priority areas of the Centre.

Electoral processes

30. The Centre assisted the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) during the holding of the national dialogue in the Central African Republic. In this regard, consultations that started in 2003 between the Centre and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Bangui continued right up to the end of the election process in May 2005.

31. In collaboration with UNDP and the Commonwealth Secretariat, consultations and assistance in country needs assessment and in further consolidation of the

democratic process in Cameroon, particularly as concerns voter education and mechanisms of registration, were strengthened during the period under review.

C. Information and documentation

32. The Documentation Unit set up in November 2001 publishes and distributes the Centre's quarterly newsletter, *Bulletin des droits de l'homme et de la démocratie*. Thus far 14 issues have been published. The Centre also continued to issue several other publications, including periodic reports, quarterly bulletins and training materials.

33. The last quarter of 2004 and the whole of 2005 have witnessed a significant rise in the number of visitors to the Documentation Unit, which provided services to more than 1,500 persons in the current year. Main users include members of the media, university students and researchers, and the general public from the subregion and beyond. The Documentation Unit has intensified dissemination and distribution of relevant human rights materials from OHCHR and other reliable sources in the region (300 NGOs have benefited from this). In view of the growing public demand to access documentation resources, the Centre's human rights database and country profiles in the field of human rights and democracy in Central Africa have been further developed. Sister agencies, institutions of excellence and other international organizations continue to benefit from the services of the Documentation Unit.

34. The website of the Centre launched in June 2002 (www.un.cm/rights) continues to be visited by thousands of users. This medium of communication is now being upgraded.

35. The Documentation Unit has strengthened partnerships with different subregional and international institutions such as the International Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems (HURIDOCs), the Clingendael Institute, the Danish Centre for Human Rights and the International Institute for Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, to facilitate information-sharing and capacity development. The Documentation Unit has also benefited from useful publications offered by the International Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims.

III. Development of partnerships

A. Collaboration with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

36. In accordance with the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in July 2002 between the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General of ECCAS, the Centre continued, also in the year under review, to provide advice and technical assistance to the ECCAS secretariat. The Centre has also continued to provide support to the ECCAS secretariat in the designing of a legal framework for information management concerning the freedom of movement for recipients from the subregion. This mainly concerned confidential information and data protection for Community travel documents to be issued in the future.

37. In line with the now well-established tradition, the Centre represented OHCHR at the eleventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of ECCAS held on 26 and 27 January 2004 in Brazzaville and at subsequent follow-up meetings in the subregion. It has continued also to involve the ECCAS secretariat in all its subregional activities during the year under review. Through its civil society capacity-building project, the Centre has contributed to the emerging partnership of ECCAS with civil society organizations in the subregion.

38. Following the call made at the eleventh Summit in Brazzaville for a stronger United Nations presence in the subregion, the Centre actively participated in the dialogue during the meetings of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The forum, which is organized by the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, remains a useful tool for consultations on matters related to the protection and promotion of human rights as well as to the maintenance of peace and security in the subregion.

B. Collaboration with United Nations agencies

39. The strong partnerships with United Nations agencies in Cameroon and in the subregion, including the Economic Commission for Africa office for Central Africa, UNAIDS, United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNESCO and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture have gone a long way in supporting the efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Central African subregion.

40. The visit of the UNAIDS Executive Director on 10 February 2005 has reinvigorated the follow-up work on the round table on HIV/AIDS that was held in Yaoundé at the end of last year. In a region that is among the most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the role of the Centre in the sensitization process cannot be underestimated.

41. On 6 and 7 December 2004 and in May 2005, the Centre took an active part in the deliberations of the United Nations Country Team (UNCTs) in Cameroon and in Gabon, which focused on the mid-year review of the implementation of UNDAF as a joint UNCT effort. This interaction has enabled the preparation of joint programmes on the rule of law.

42. The Centre is actively involved in the work of the UNCTs in Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, particularly in Cameroon, by taking on rotation basis the presidency of the regular meetings, which provide a useful forum for sensitization and coordination of cross-cutting human rights and democracy-related issues. It has used this opportunity to highlight issues of human rights mainstreaming, with a special emphasis on Action 2. As a result of the fruitful interaction with United Nations agencies represented in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, human rights focal points have been designated within the country offices of the various agencies. Continuous exchanges of experience are now taking place between these focal points.

43. Following the Subregional seminar on civilian-military cooperation during democratic transitions, organized with the collaboration of UNCT, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Burundi and OHCHR, which took place in Bujumbura in September 2004, BONUCA organized another two-day

seminar in December 2004 with a view to sensitizing key leaders in the country prior to the general elections that were held in May 2005.

44. The active participation in the Centre's programme, as resource persons, of the Secretary-General of ECCAS, the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Central African Republic, the Director of OHCHR New York office and other eminent human rights activists reflects to no lesser extent the increasing recognition of the role of the Yaoundé Centre in the peacemaking process in the subregion.

IV. Conclusion

45. **Through the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has indeed contributed to the increased recognition of the need to uphold and promote human rights and democratic principles by various stakeholders of the subregion. Networks of civil society organizations and media professionals have increased, enhancing further the efforts at promoting human rights and the rule of law.**

46. **The number and frequency of requests for technical assistance submitted to the Centre continue unabated, while resource constraints pose challenges to future activities. Thus, the allocation of additional funds should be envisaged to enable the Subregional Centre to respond positively and effectively to the growing needs in the promotion and protection of human rights as well as in developing a culture of democracy in the Central African subregion.**
