

DECLARATION ON ACCESS TO CITIZENSHIP FROM THE GBABANDI PLATFORM



Introduction

Cameroon has made commitments at the international level that require respect for the human rights of Cameroonian citizens and indigenous peoples in particular, including under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the Sustainable Development Goals; and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The legal provisions that make up the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are a mixture of several binding international legal instruments. According to these different legal and political instruments, the right of access to citizenship must be recognized and respected. On the other hand, in terms of exercising this right there are many difficulties in Cameroon. We, indigenous forest peoples, suffer more and more violations of our human rights due in particular to the lack of the documents required to prove our status as citizens. This disturbing situation foreshadows a future where we, indigenous peoples, will always be frustrated in our experiences of education, participation in decision-making bodies, the freedom to go and return to the national territory, the right to work, and participation in political life.

These shortcomings are linked to several difficulties that we face. To note a few:

- Large distances to registry offices to deposit birth declarations;
- Increasingly complicated procedures to obtain national identity cards, both administratively and financially;
- The complexity of obtaining birth certificates for adults.

1. Right to a birth certificate

Everyone living in Cameroon is entitled to a birth certificate, but in general the situation is not yet satisfactory for all of Cameroon's population and the situation of indigenous forest peoples in particular is much more worrying. More than half of the indigenous population lives without a birth certificate; this is a reality for both children and adults.

The indigenous forest peoples ask that the State of Cameroon take special measures -through programmes- to assist us in the establishment of birth certificates for children and adults. To enable communities to effectively follow up on births and to allow the establishment of birth certificates, we ask that:

- The State opens secondary civil status centres close to indigenous communities;
- The State trains, empowers and formalises indigenous leaders as agents of the registry offices to collect birth registrations in indigenous communities;
- The State establishes simple, and free procedures that are adapted to indigenous peoples for obtaining birth certificates and national identity cards for adults without any of the above-mentioned documents;
- The State develops training and capacity building programs for traditional birth attendants and community relays with the aim of systematizing birth registrations between indigenous communities, town councils and civil status officers;
- The State removes the costs associated with obtaining birth certificates;
- That there be capacity building campaigns for staff of registry offices/ town halls on the particular situations of indigenous peoples in relation to birth registration procedures.

2. Right to a national identity card

Every citizen has the right to a national identity card, and we indigenous forest peoples want this principle to be a reality for us. We face several challenges in the process of establishing national identity cards. The procedures for obtaining this official document are an obstacle for us in many ways, and as a result we are exposed to many violations of our human rights.

The State should at all levels ease procedures for establishing national identity cards for indigenous peoples through special measures appropriate to the contextual realities of indigenous communities.

3. Participation

It is not possible to ensure an effective participation of indigenous peoples, if their citizenship is not yet guaranteed. Indigenous forest peoples need to be informed, involved and participate in development programs and projects that affect indigenous peoples.

We, indigenous forest peoples, want to participate in the management of public affairs of our country and we want the State to put in place accompanying measures to this effect. Inclusive participation by all according to the 2030 Agenda requires taking into account indigenous forest peoples' cultures to better integrate our aspirations into government programs and budgets. Because our culture is tied to how we manage our lands, our chieftaincies, our education and our way of life. All of these elements must be taken into account to ensure our effective participation in the inclusive management of public affairs of our country.

Conclusion

Without wanting to pretend to ignore the efforts made by the State of Cameroon such as the support programmes for indigenous peoples, we want nevertheless to raise that what is being done is still unsatisfactory. Consequently, we wish that the State redoubles efforts for accompanying measures and that the State eases administrative and judiciary procedures to enable our full enjoyment of our right to citizenship.

The Gbabandi member organizations have signed as follows:

- ABAGUENI
- ABAWONI
- ADEBAKA
- ADEPA
- ARBO
- ASBAK
- BUMA BO KPODE
- CADDAP
- OKANI