



MINISTÈRE DE LA COMMUNICATION
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION

BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION OF CAMEROONIAN WOMEN EXPERIENCING DISTRESS IN SOME MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

PRESS CONFERENCE

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY
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Distinguished Journalists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you all a warm welcome to this meeting during which our discussion shall center on a worrying issue which relates to the situation of some Cameroonian women who chose, at a given time, to settle in the Middle East.

But before getting there, allow me to acknowledge the presence by my sides, of **Her Excellency the Minister of Social Affairs and Her Excellency the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family**, who both accepted to join me for this meeting with the press.

Your Excellencies, welcome to the Ministry of Communication.

Distinguished Journalists,

As I said it earlier, the issue at hand today relates to the dramatic situation of some of our compatriots who, for socio-professional reasons, emigrate in Middle East countries ; the countries mainly concerned being Kuwait, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia.

Allow me to acknowledge the presence here, of four young ladies who have undergone this sad experience, and who have availed themselves to give a live testimony of their sad experience so that it may serve, as an alert and deterrence signal to all those who may be tempted to follow their example.

Dear Ladies, you are welcome among us.

As a matter of fact, for some time now, many Cameroonian women, mostly aged between 20 and 45, who have settled in this part of the world after having received a job promise, become victims of abuse and all kinds of ill treatments, bodily harm, and endless working days starting in the early morning hours and ending later in the night.

Most often, they are poorly compensated or do not receive any compensation at all, sequestered and therefore cut out from the external world. Their passports are confiscated upon arrival at their destination, and the women are subjected to accommodation and feeding conditions that are particularly precarious.

Regularly beaten and raped, these women are sometimes threatened with death, rejected by employers, either resold like mere workhorses or simply murdered.

Psychologically fragile and generally traumatized, some of them have found suicide as the only way out.

Distinguished Journalists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

By delivering this communication, one of the Government's aims is to send an alert message to the persons concerned and, in general, the public, of the serious dangers faced by our family members who, attracted by the illusion of a better world from elsewhere, soon become disillusioned and realize that the mirages of yesterday turn into dramas that are sometimes irreversible.

We therefore seize the occasion of this press conference to describe in a bid to unveil it, the modus operandi of these trafficking networks.

After establishing contacts upstream with recruitment agencies based in the countries of emigration, locally based lobbyists get in touch with the persons corresponding to the profiles required by their foreign mandators. These lobbyists offer the persons contacted and their families the false promise of well-compensated jobs abroad.

Actually, these young women are far from imagining that by accepting this offer, they have just fallen into the traps of unscrupulous raptors who are ready for anything to draw the maximum profit from their deportation to the unknown.

Once an agreement is reached with the victim or her family, the local trafficker is sure to have secured a sum of US dollars 2,000, that is about one million CFA francs, which is paid to him by his foreign accomplice.

This sum, which is paid to him in successive installments, is used to cover the chain of preliminary formalities, including medical check-ups, the issuing of an ordinary passport, the visa fee to the host country, the purchase of a one-way ticket from Cameroon to the host country.

The sum of 2,000 dollars also includes the remuneration of the local direct seller, to the tune of 800 dollars paid in two equal installments of 400 dollars each, the first being paid in advance and the balance upon taking possession of the victim by her cerberus abroad.

However, the local trafficker, who is not happy with such payment, always secures a second compensation from the victim or her family. This part of the transaction

sometimes appears to be more profitable to the trafficker than the deal with foreign agencies.

On arrival at the airport, the victim undergoes a medical cross-checkup at the end of which, if it is conclusive, the victim is collected, like a mere parcel, by the foreign agent.

Once collected, the victim is presented to her future employer by her recruiting agent. This phase takes place at the headquarters of the agency or its equivalent. It is worth noting that there can be several days of interval between collection of the victim at the airport and her presentation to the future employer. During this period, the victim is under physical sequestration.

When the potential employer deems the prospective employee is suitable for his desires, then the ordeal can start.

In case of rejection of the proposal by the potential employer, the foreign trafficker collects the victim and undertakes a second deal. The victim is then exposed on a public place dedicated to that purpose, and sold to the highest bidder.

That is, **Distinguished Journalists, Ladies and Gentlemen**, the modus operandi of this human trade, a real slave trade of modern times, and which, starting from an illusion of better living elsewhere, unfortunately turns out to be a real nightmare, an indelible trauma, and sometimes even leading to the death of the victim.

We have tried to say it here with the words we consider the most accurate, the most telling of the sad reality experience by our compatriots in these odysseys of another kind.

Let me on behalf of the Government, call on the vigilance and prudence of our compatriots and their families, who are each time exposed to the agony of an adventure, wherein, instead of experiencing the promised Eldorado, they end up living a real unbearable hell.

Informed of the situation, and conscious of its duty to assist and protect all citizens, even when they are found in a foreign land, the Government took all the necessary steps and actions to put an end to such a situation.

At the diplomatic level, and on Special Instructions of the **Head of State, His Excellency Paul BIYA**, a high level inter-ministerial mission led by the Minister Delegate at the Ministry of External Relations in charge of Cooperation with the Islamic World, was dispatched from February 22 to March 03, 2016 to the countries concerned by this phenomenon, notably, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

The main objective of this mission was to raise awareness of the power that be in these countries on the need to guarantee the rights of our compatriots who are being victimized and abused. Many contacts were then established both with administrations in charge of foreign affairs as well as those in charge of labor, police, nongovernmental organizations and recruiters' trade unions based in these countries.

At each level, the Cameroonian delegation met with representatives of our Diaspora, to measure the gravity of the abuses perpetrated on our compatriots.

It came out clear that the abuses inflicted on our compatriots were an infringement to the regulations in force in these countries in terms of the rights of workers or the protection of foreigners. In the event where some of the legal and regulatory provisions in force were likely to favor inhuman or degrading practices against foreigners, the governments of these countries took the firm commitment to put an end to such practices.

As for Kuwait, the 'VISA 20' granted to unprotected foreign workers and to our compatriots heading to this country to work as domestic workers, was purely and simply suppressed. Moreover, the powers that be in Kuwait have set January 20, 2017 as the deadline for this 'VISA 20' to be changed into an ordinary visa for immediate consideration by employers and subject to punishment for any default. Employers who had confiscated the passports of their domestic workers were equally compelled to immediately hand them back to their owners.

With regard to voluntary returns, the authorities undertook to compel employers found guilty of abuses to afford return flight tickets to some of our compatriots who had escaped from captivity and manifested their willingness to be repatriated.

As far as repatriation is concerned, locally based NGOs are relentlessly working in collaboration with the Government to provide home return requirements for those who have expressed the desire to return home.

Diplomatically speaking, many bilateral agreements have been initiated with some already reaching the signing phase, to guarantee more than ever before, the rights of Cameroonian workers who must have migrated in each of these countries.

It should also be underscored that ministerial delegations of these countries, notably those of Kuwait, have so far travelled to Cameroon to translate into concrete terms the willingness of their governments to radically put an end to abuses and other inhuman treatments inflicted on our compatriots in the course of their migration.

Here in Cameroon, security services have for the past months embarked on a veritable crusade against the organizations specialized in the recruitment and convoy of victims. Many of these organizations have been shut down and their promoters arrested, judged, sentenced and jailed.

In terms of raising awareness, many sector-based administrations and national NGOs are working with the social strata that are most exposed and targeted by traffickers, to drill and brief them on the danger signs to which they are often exposed.

In the same way, once they have returned to Cameroon, our compatriots who are victims of these abuses abroad are not left on their own.

Psychological counseling protocols and socio-economic reintegration mechanisms are set in motion to help them regain a normal life.

My colleagues here present - the **Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister for Women's Empowerment and the Family** will throw more light on each of these issues as the press conference unfolds.

That notwithstanding, it should be buttressed that every Cameroonian enjoys freedom of movement, in the event where he or she is not subject to any legal or judicial restriction of that freedom.

The government cannot therefore prohibit anyone from traveling to any country of his or her choice.

It is important to find the happy medium between the enjoyment of this freedom and the duty of prevention, then the protection, as the case may be, which is the responsibility of the State vis-à-vis each citizen.

In conclusion, I would like to assure you that the Government is continuing to work in this direction with utmost rigor and determination to guarantee the rights and security of our compatriots.

Thank you for your kind attention.