



Open letter on individual and collective responsibility in the face of hate speech and misinformation during the election period in Cameroon

Addressed to political parties, the media, ELECAM, public authorities, civil society and all Cameroonian citizens.

As members of the Multi-Stakeholder Coalition Combating Disinformation and Hate Speech during Elections in Cameroon, we once again urge the national and international community to recognise the severity of the escalating use of hate speech and false information. In light of these developments, we cannot remain silent or fail to fulfil our responsibility as a coalition. Despite considerable efforts by several national and international actors, we continue to witness with growing concern the proliferation of tribal hate speech and false information infiltrating public debate and poisoning the electoral climate. This trivialises the ideal of the nation state as a guarantor of peace and social cohesion.

In view of our monitoring and content analysis work, these abuses cannot be considered simple mistakes or isolated incidents. They are conceptualised and implemented, and are now being amplified by certain media outlets and public figures on social media in search of sensationalism. They are also being relayed by certain political figures who are complicit in their dissemination, either consciously or through calculation. By choosing to stir up division rather than reconciliation, these damning information relays not only undermine citizens' trust in the electoral process, but also the fragile edifice of our national cohesion.

Disinformation, whether in the form of fabricated rumours, distorted images, false polls or deliberately misleading headlines, has become a political weapon used for propaganda and manipulation, tarnishing the image of individuals (whether from the opposition or not) and public institutions. It is alarming that some of these actors are recognised media professionals, public figures, opinion leaders or 'influencers', and are often the initiators of false information that is skilfully relayed through recognised and accredited communication channels.

Hate speech is not limited to careless words; it reopens old wounds, exacerbates tribal divisions and establishes long-lasting distrust and resentment between communities. Each stigmatising statement carries the risk of turning a difference of opinion into an identity divide, pitting one part of the population against another and eroding the mutual trust that forms the foundation of any nation. If left unaddressed, such discourse normalises intolerance, justifies exclusion and, ultimately, legitimises violence. This weakens our institutions, undermines the stability of our republic and threatens what we hold dear: unity and solidarity among the people of Cameroon.

It goes without saying that every public official, member of the media, political figure, institutional leader, opinion leader, and citizen bears a moral and ethical responsibility for the annals of our history. No mandate, partisan calculation, or personal ambition should be used to justify the dissemination of hatred or lies to influence public opinion. We must collectively ask ourselves what legacy we want to leave for future generations: a divided and fearful society or

To this end, we urgently renew our appeal to:

Political parties have a particular responsibility for shaping the electoral climate and preserving peace and national unity. They must reject any strategy involving the manipulation, stigmatisation or exploitation of ethnic, religious or social differences. All messages, speeches and publications must be transparent, honest and sincere, focusing on programmes, projects and concrete solutions for collective well-being.

Political parties must not only speak out themselves, but also encourage their supporters and sympathisers to adopt responsible attitudes in public debates and on social networks, and to avoid arguments based on ethnicity, religion, gender or any other identity trait. Such vigilance and restraint are vital in preventing the escalation of tensions, encouraging constructive dialogue, and ensuring that electoral competition remains a space for democratic exchange rather than a source of deep division.

The media must fulfil their mission with the utmost professionalism and the highest ethical standards. They must never serve as a complaisant relay of hatred, prejudice or disinformation, regardless of the pressures or political interests at stake. This requires them to enhance their fact-checking mechanisms systematically, match information with reliable sources, and prioritise accuracy and facts absolutely. Furthermore, the media must adopt rigorous selection criteria for guests and speakers to avoid providing a platform for individuals or organisations that could incite division, spread rumours, or legitimise hate speech. By exercising this vigilance, the media will not only provide the public with fair and informed information, but also contribute to the preservation of social cohesion and peace.

Election Management Bodies (EMB) are urged to remain true to their mission, acting fairly and with strict impartiality, to ensure that the vote benefits the entire population and not the interests of a select few. They must regulate all practices that could compromise transparency or distort the democratic process, applying the rules equally to everyone and ensuring that each citizen, regardless of their place of residence, community or political orientation, has the opportunity to participate in free and fair elections.

Public authorities must act on the basis of fairness, justice and impartiality, prioritising the general interest over any partisan interest. This means intervening neutrally, ensuring security and access to information for all, and supporting initiatives that strengthen dialogue, tolerance, and national cohesion.

The National Communication Council (CNC) is called upon to fully play its role as an arbiter and regulator during the electoral period. It must demonstrate great firmness in handling complaints related to professional misconduct by media outlets and journalists who, at times, become complicit in spreading hate and disinformation. The CNC must apply the sanctions provided by law swiftly and fairly, without favoritism or bias, to uphold journalistic ethics and standards, and to deter repeat offenders. Its action is crucial for preserving the integrity of information and maintaining a peaceful environment conducive to transparent and credible

Civil society must continue to intensify its monitoring efforts by swiftly reporting misleading or hateful content and denouncing any attempt to manipulate public opinion. To this end, we encourage them to use online verification platforms such as 237 Check's WhatsApp platform, StopIntox. They must also promote media and information literacy by raising citizens' awareness of critical thinking, fact-checking, and the responsibility that comes with sharing content.

Citizens, including those in the **diaspora**, must adopt an increasingly vigilant and discerning approach to the information they receive, whether from social media, the media, or their loved ones. It is crucial not to share content that is questionable, misleading or hateful, even if it aligns with our views or affiliations. Public and digital debates should be spaces for reflection, dialogue and constructive arguments, not grounds for division or aggression.

We urge all Cameroonians to oppose hatred and lies, and to promote dialogue, truth and responsibility. Only by doing so will we be able to guarantee our children and grandchildren a stable, reconciled country that is open to the promises of tomorrow.

History will judge us by our actions as well as our silence. Cameroon is a shared resource whose future must not be sacrificed for the sake of partisan interests. Preserving our national unity and the peace and dignity of each individual is our imperative duty.

Done in Yaoundé, on September 25, 2025.

Signed by:

1. Association Civic Watch (Civic Watch)
2. Ordre des Avocats au Barreau du Cameroun
3. Paradigm Initiative
4. Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All (NewSETA)
5. KTDral Consulting
6. Eduk Media
7. Sisterspeak237
8. Junior Chamber International (JCI)
9. Cameroon National Youth Council (CNYC)
10. Action pour le Respect des Droits de l' Homme et la Dignité Humaine(ARDHU)
11. Big Steps Outreach Network (BONET)-Cameroon
12. StopIntox
13. Association des Blogueurs du Cameroun (ABC)
14. Global Initiative For Digital Inclusion and Communication (GIDICOM)
15. United Youth Organisation (UYO)
16. Local Youth Corner (LOYOC)
17. PAYNCoP

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