

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
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**OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMPLAINTS
MANAGEMENT AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION
MECHANISM — SEAH (SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE AND**

JUNE 2024

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Decree No. 2008/220 of 4 July 2008 on the organisation of the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development assigns to the General Inspectorate for the Assessment of Service Operations (IGEFS), under its Title IV, Article 5(3), among other missions:

- the control and assessment of the functioning of central and deconcentrated services, supervised establishments, affiliated bodies and the programmes and projects within the Ministry's portfolio;
- informing the Minister and the Delegate Minister on the quality of the functioning of Services;
- the assessment of the application of organisational techniques and methods and of the simplification of administrative work.

For several decades, the State of Cameroon has undertaken actions to help reduce the share of the informal sector in national economic activity and to generate tens of thousands of jobs each year in the formal sector. To this end, it has acted not only through the recruitment of several thousand young people into the civil service, but also through the creation of numerous Programmes and Projects aimed at improving people's living conditions.

For the operationalisation of these Programmes and Projects, the Government, through certain ministerial departments including MINEPAT — which has around thirty in its portfolio — has been called upon.

In order to support the Government in strengthening the performance of public action towards the overall development objectives pursued by the SND30, MINEPAT, through its internal audit structure, has undertaken to set up mechanisms to support victims of sexual abuse and harassment. This mechanism highlights the **Complaint registration tools; the handling mechanism** and **the framework for the protection of whistleblowers and victims of harassment**.

I. TOOLS FOR REPORTING COMPLAINTS FROM VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE AT MINEPAT

The MINEPAT General Inspectorate has developed and made available to users and staff requesting services at MINEPAT four modern tools for operationalising the **Incentive Mechanism for Reporting and Protection of Whistleblowers**. These are the **toll-free number 1531** (available free of charge Monday to Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) ; the **WhatsApp numbers (6 88 13 07 28 / 6 53 09 55 05)**; the **reporting boxes** and a **CELCOR web page** (www.minepat.gov.cm/celcor/).

These same tools also receive reports relating to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). Complaints of this nature follow a specific, survivor-centred process (section II-4) and give rise to dedicated care (section IV). This component builds on MINEPAT's signed SEAH instruments: the SEAH Prevention and Response Policy, Implementing Circular No. 000084, the SEAH Code of Conduct and the SEAH Action Plan. A SEAH focal point is designated to receive and refer these reports, under reinforced confidentiality.

I.1 – The toll-free number



It is one of the crucial tools designed and made available to the general public. It guarantees the confidentiality and safety of persons wishing to report cases of corruption or reprehensible behaviour. The **1531** is a **free and confidential call** reachable Monday to Friday from **7:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.** It is **open** on the CAMTEL platform. It is simple and easy to memorise. The service provided by this line is delivered by General Inspectorate staff on a pre-established rota.

I.2 – The reporting box



It is the fundamental tool in our reporting arsenal, as it offers an ANONYMOUS, CONFIDENTIAL and ACCESSIBLE means of reporting suspicious behaviour. It is fixed at the entrances of the buildings housing all MINEPAT structures. It is visible to all users and its position offers a degree of discretion when reporting. It has the advantage of not

requiring the user to own a mobile phone. It also has the clear advantage of displaying other tools on its front face, in particular ***the toll-free number*** et ***the web page***.

I.3 – The WhatsApp numbers



+237 6 88 13 07 28 / +237 6 53 09 55 05

WhatsApp

It is the tool of the moment, suited to its time (the digital era). It is the channel accessible to the greatest number and affords a degree of confidentiality to whistleblowers. It is simple and easy to use for Android phone users. One simply saves one or both numbers in one's phone and instantly sends a message, an audio or video recording, a photo, etc. Its use fosters a rapid flow of information, enabling the collection of attachments as well as informal and accessible exchanges.

I.4 – The CELCOR web page

www.minepat.gov.cm/celcor/



This tool is just as important as the others, as it is of invaluable and essential worth not only for obtaining information but also for reporting acts of corruption. It is accessed at: www.minepat.gov.cm/celcor/ , there you will find information on anti-corruption legislation at MINEPAT.

In sum, the four reporting tools developed by the General Inspectorate are powerful levers to encourage the active and responsible participation of MINEPAT staff and its external stakeholders in the fight against corruption within MINEPAT. Their use reflects our collective commitment to building a transparent and honest working environment.

II. MECHANISM FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS AND REPORTS

The MINEPAT Anti-Corruption Unit has established a mechanism for handling complaints and reports that follows the guidance of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) in particular and the guidelines of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). Overall, the handling of complaints and other reports rests on three fundamental phases: **analysis of reports, verification and reporting**.

II.1 – Analysis

It consists of processing the information received, whether from calls to the toll-free number, the WhatsApp numbers, the website, the reporting boxes, or submitted directly to the secretariat of the General Inspectorate or to the Anti-Corruption Unit.

Here, the allegations received are examined first by the Inspector General or the Chair of CELCOR, and then by all the staff and members of the Unit during a special session convened for the purpose, or by duly assigned members of the Unit.

The aim of this step is to assess the credibility of the allegations made. Where they appear credible, they are retained for the next step, which consists of verifying whether the reported acts were actually committed.

II.2 – Investigation

It consists of conducting field verifications or investigations. The aim is to seek evidence of the potential alleged cases of corruption.

To this end, and depending on the case, sessions will be convened to design the field data-collection tools. These will include terms of reference, questionnaires and other interview guides depending on the subject of the report.

A field team will thus be formed with the necessary expertise, which may be sought from outside the Unit.

During fieldwork, investigations may be carried out at sites or offices, or the persons implicated may be summoned to answer for the alleged facts. All these steps make it possible to collect evidence that will facilitate the reporting phase.

In general, the conduct of field missions follows the principles set out in the MINEPAT Internal Audit Guide (GAI), available at the General Inspectorate.

II.3 – Report writing

This is the final step of the complaint-handling process. It allows corrective measures to be proposed for established acts of corruption.

Thus, depending on the case, proposals for corrective action are submitted to the high attention of the Minister/MINEPAT for sanction.

These corrective measures may be administrative or criminal sanctions, depending on the case. The Minister decides whether it is appropriate to refer the matter to CONAC, CONSUPE or other external oversight bodies.

The conclusions of the General Inspectorate may also be the subject of further investigations for other oversight bodies.

II.4 – Specific handling of SEAH-related complaints

Complaints relating to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are handled through a distinct, survivor-centred pathway. On receipt, they are referred to the General Inspectorate, which conducts the investigation under reinforced confidentiality. Anonymous complaints are admissible and an acknowledgement of receipt is issued within twenty-four hours.

The investigation respects the survivor's informed consent and uses no confrontation liable to expose them. Any measures and sanctions are submitted to the high attention of the Minister, in accordance with the SEAH Policy and the SEAH Code of Conduct. This pathway takes precedence over the ordinary procedure where the latter would expose the survivor.

III. FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF WHISTLEBLOWERS AND VICTIMS OF CORRUPTION

Acts of corruption to be reported are governed by the Penal Code. The latter protects the whistleblower in its **Article 134-2: “a person solicited in active or passive corruption proceedings is exempt from prosecution if they report the corruption facts to the judicial authorities”**

The whistleblower should therefore take precautions when collecting information for the report. After reporting, they should exercise discretion in order to ensure their own protection.

In addition, the persons involved in handling the report are bound by the principles and rules that guarantee the protection of the whistleblower, in particular their identity and consequently their person. They are also bound to respect ethics and professional secrecy in the investigation of the report.

The Inspectorate also uses pseudonyms or fictitious names for whistleblowers in its reports. In addition, the General Inspectorate promotes the duty of ethics and professional secrecy, the effective handling of every report, and disciplinary proceedings against anyone who breaches the confidentiality of the investigation, in accordance with Article 94 of the General Statute of the State Civil Service.

Staff are reminded that legal provisions are set out in Article 304 of the Penal Code to punish malicious reports. Whistleblowers are therefore encouraged to provide true, verifiable information in order to facilitate the conduct of investigations.

IV. CARE AND PROTECTION OF SEAH VICTIMS

Beyond the protection of the whistleblower described above, victims of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment receive specific care, in accordance with the SEAH Policy (section VIII) and the Implementing Circular.

This care is triggered within seventy-two hours and includes, as needed:

- referral to medical services, with priority access to care in cases of sexual violence;
- psychosocial support;
- legal assistance;
- measures to protect the survivor and, where appropriate, support for their reintegration.

Confidentiality, informed consent and freedom from retaliation are guaranteed at every stage. No personal information relating to a SEAH survivor is disclosed.