NHRIs could only make meaningful contribution if their establishments meet certain standards and principles governing their existence and performance. Some of these principles which are considered in this presentation include: independence, participation, accountability, transparency, accessibility and efficiency.

1. Independence

An independent NHRI is able to fulfill its mandate without interference from other quarters. This independence is guaranteed by its creation by law, a sufficient budget and also a stable tenure of office.

The NCHRF is created by law No. 2004/016 of 22 July 2004. It was modified in 2010 to give it more independence by law No. 2010/004 of 13 April 2010 which took away voting rights from members representing the government.

The budget of the NCHRF is inscribed in the state budget but until now the institution has not been given a baseline budget but subventions. The envelope is too insufficient to effectively function. This is coupled with delays in the disbursement of the funds. A reform of the law proposes that the budget should be defended in Parliament.

The tenure of the office of members is guaranteed by the law which spells out circumstances under which their membership can be revoked.

2. Participation

Meaningful and free participation of members and staff in decision-making processes contributes to the overall stability of an NHRI.

At the NCHRF, members meet in four working groups; they also meet in a monthly meeting of Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of these Working Groups as well as in two ordinary sessions per annum. Besides these they meet in ad hoc committees to examine specific issues.

As for staff, they meet weekly in coordination meetings to discuss activities and other issues relating to the life of the institution. All of these keep Members and Staff abreast with happenings and in the heart of decision making.
Concerning activities, Members and staff are implicated in carrying out activities in their various areas of specialization.

3. Transparency

It is important that NHRI’s are transparent especially in the management of finances and in their procedures. It is good to show that procedures such as recruitments, treatment of complaints and other files are transparent both to the staff, members and the public in general.

At the NCHRF, the elaboration of the budget is participatory right from the outset as every unit concerned is asked to provide elements. The final draft budget is approved in the Session. The budgets for activities are prepared by the various services, endorsed at various levels of the hierarchy and finally approved by the Chairperson. As for the investment budget, small projects are handled by the internal tender’s board, while larger projects are taken care of by tender boards in the Ministry of Public Contracts.

There is transparency in the appointment of Members and the recruitment of staff. For Members, they are selected by their socio-professional bodies following their own internal procedures, and there have never been changes in the choices during confirmation by Presidential Decree. Members have been seen to be human rights activists and defenders. As for staff recruitment, it is done by a Jury comprising members of the commission and external consultants when deemed necessary.

For the treatment of files and complaints, the services are free of charge and files must be treated within a reasonable timeframe.

4. Accountability

Accountability in the NCHRF can be viewed from the angle of financial and managerial accountability. Given that the sources of funding are the state and donors, there is an imperative for accountability to the state and to development partners.

The state has tried to handle accountability by detaching a finance controller and an accountant from the ministry of finance. The financial records of the NCHRF are kept by the accountant of the Ministry of Finance who at the end of this year, reports to the Minister. Financial reports are also sent to donors who fund some activities. For more efficient action, control should be a posteriорi as opposed to being a priori.

The Commission also renders account in its reporting. Each activity ends with a report, which contains recommendations to the competent authority. Each year, annual reports are produced including an activity report and a report on the situation of human rights in Cameroon, to render account of its activities to the public.
5. Accessibility

This implies that the NCHRF is physically accessible and that information is readily made available to the public.

For now the NCHRF has offices in 7 regions out of the 10 regions of Cameroon. Work is ongoing towards the construction of a befitting headoffice building and another branch office in the Far North region.

The law obliges the NCHRF to popularize by all possible means instruments relating to human rights and freedoms and forge a human rights culture through education, information and the holding of conferences and seminars.

Accessibility to information concerning the contact and the work of Commission is made available through brochures, posters, calendars as well as through human rights clinics. Human rights sensitization tools are also developed containing various human rights as well as treaties ratified by Cameroon. The library and the website also contain useful information for the public.

6. Efficacy of action

The work of the Commission can be evaluated by the impact it has in building a human rights culture and the subsequent respect for human rights.

Today human rights is no longer an abstraction in Cameroon be it for the man on the street, the school child or the professionals. With the programme on the teaching of human rights and the informal educational activities, Cameroonians are eager to claim their rights. The forces of law and order are receiving human rights courses and violations such as torture and harassment of citizens are on a decline.

The NCHRF is working hard to extend formal education in human rights to the tertiary level of education and lobbying with government to speed up the work on the action plan so that human rights can be better felt in the state machinery.

Efficacy is hampered sometimes because files could take more time, requiring field investigations which cannot be carried out due to budgetary constraints. It may also be due to administrative bureaucracy delaying feedback to correspondences or disbursement of funds by the State treasury.

7. Non discrimination

The law enlarges the composition of Members of the Commission to twelve socio-professional components of society. This aims at touching a reasonable section of society through their representatives present in the Commission.
In the recruitment of staff, reasonable attention is given to geographical representation.

With a large mandate and a limited budget, the NHRI is forced to make a choice on which issues to address each year. This means that not every problem can be addressed at the same time.

As a palliative to this, the NCHR works closely with CSOs representing the various components of our society so as to touch on a greater part of the society. The NCHR also tries as much as possible to honour the solicitations of Civil Society by taking part in their activities.