

Intervention of **Doctor SOH MBOGNE Hermann Thierry**, *Executive Chairman of Cameroonian Association for the Environment, Law, Decentralization and sustainable Development (ACE4D)*

Theme: The cultural dimension of the fight against illicit trafficking in firearms: the case of artisanal weapons used in traditional African ceremonies.

Traditional ceremonies in our African societies are often characterized by the use of home-made firearms. This use generally has three dimensions: a symbolic dimension, a mystical dimension, an economic dimension. For example, at the funeral of a deceased person to kill death and to show the social prestige of the deceased.

If, at the outset, the manufacture of these artisanal firearms was heavily reserved for certain castes under the guidance of the king and the technique of manufacture was passed down from generation to generation for cultural purposes, for two decades we have witnessed an uncontrolled proliferation of manufacturers of these weapons. Similarly, manufacturing techniques have improved and increasingly sophisticated weapons have begun to be developed with worrying lethal quality.

The objective of these clandestine manufacturers is no longer to contribute to the spread of the habits and customs of our ancestral societies, but on the contrary to enrich themselves by feeding gangs and other criminal organizations. They have created a climate of terror and insecurity within our communities and fuelled inter-communal conflicts, not hesitating to challenge the authority of the State.

With this in mind, our organization has undertaken to initiate a program that places particular emphasis on a cultural approach to the fight against the illicit trafficking of these firearms. It is articulated around several axes.

Axis 1: Sensitization of traditional leaders on the dangers of misuse of small arms for criminal purposes. Here we held meetings in the chiefdoms of the first degree and exhorted the chiefs to proceed to the identification of the manufacturers, their membership or not of the castes authorized to manufacture them, the nature of the weapons manufactured, their number, and the buyers.

Axis 2: Establishment of an organ within the chiefdoms with the mission of controlling the operations of manufacture and sale of said weapons.

Axis 3: Descent during cultural ceremonies to raise awareness of the dangers related to the criminal use of said weapons.

Axis 4: Collaboration with administrative authorities at the local level as well as authorities in the judicial chain with a view to denouncing, arresting and punishing traffickers who are generally well known within communities.

Axis 5: Assistance to victims of these weapons and to victims of inter-community violence.

Our actions have thus made it possible to achieve positive results:

1- Prohibition by traditional chiefs and administrative authorities of the manufacture and use of these firearms in traditional ceremonies

2- A modernization of traditions linked to the replacement of firearms by other sound instruments such as vuvuzela, trumpets, music simulating shots...

3-Conversion of most manufacturers to other professional activities

4-Reducing crime in communities

5-The establishment of a community watch cell.

6-Communicating in local languages on community radio stations about the fight against trafficking in firearms.

7-Referral to customary courts, follow-up of complaints and sentences handed down in connection with the manufacture, sale or use of firearms.Traditional chiefs have an important weight, they are respected, feared and have psychological control over their populations.The chieftaincy court is actually more legitimate in the eyes of the population.

Ultimately, it is important to integrate the cultural dimension in the fight against illicit trafficking in firearms by acclimatizing the fight to the cultural realities of the communities in which the traffickers are hiding.