HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH ON THE OCCASION OF THE 48TH EDITION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

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Yaounde, 10 February 2014

My dear young compatriots,

Last year, under the same circumstances, I told you that I was aware of your doubts and worries about an uncertain future. But I added that we had reason to hope and that, to me, the country's prospects seemed brighter.

Recent trends in employment statistics seem to bear me out.

The 2013 forecasts for new jobs stood at 200 000. The number of jobs actually created was about 12% higher, reaching nearly 225 000. Private enterprises in various sectors, alone, provided 165 000 jobs. For its part, the Administration, through its different branches, provided 60 000 jobs.

Higher targets have been set for 2014. With the possible increase in the country's growth rate, we hope to create more than 250 000 new jobs. Of course, this will not benefit only the youth. However, one can surmise that they will be the main beneficiaries.

This vision stems from a logical analysis of the situation of our economy which is expected to grow by about 5% in the coming months. In this regard, I expressed my view a few weeks ago. I still believe that we can do better. I am strongly convinced that we will.

My dear young compatriots,

In this race for growth which, in 20 years, should set our country on the path to economic emergence, you have a vital role, a crucial role to play.

In the coming years, who will build our:

- major energy, agricultural and industrial projects;
- road, port and aviation infrastructure;
- water supply and electricity distribution works;
- thousands of low-cost houses;
- hospitals and health centres;
- primary and secondary schools and universities?

You, of course, my dear compatriots.

Therefore, you should right now start preparing yourselves seriously for this task, whether in primary school, secondary school or university. We need and will need thousands of skilled workers, qualified technicians, excellent engineers, competent accountants and salespersons, and so on. Our educational system at its different levels had already opted for professionalization. We will soon witness its impact, which you will find remarkable.

Those who have already entered the work force and who are practising the trades learned “on the job” will need more training opportunities. As we expect a revival of our economy, we should be capable of meeting the demand for many specialists in various trades. We can no longer be content with supplying mere labourers, leaving the best jobs to others. Such better-trained professionals will join the ranks of craftsmen who are in high demand.

Last year, using the example of motorcycle taxi riders who play an obvious social role, I underscored the need to organize this profession. I am pleased to note that government services, following consultations with stakeholders, have developed a collective mentoring programme. By so doing, motorcycle taxi riders will be able to participate more - and better - in our national development projects.

This programme involves various aspects of this profession, notably training, management and organization. Perhaps this experiment can be replicated in other informal sector activities.

My dear young compatriots,

I equally expressed my concern about the decline in public morality in our country. I deplored the fact that the youth, who are our most valuable asset, our future and the future of our country, have not been spared. I commend Government’s prompt response to this alert through the holding of an international conference on the theme in Yaounde. Its ambitious objective is to “make Cameroon an exemplary country”. This objective concerns us all to the utmost level: parents, teachers, religious authorities.

Respect for public morality also means commitment to national integration which is the cement of our Nation. Furthermore, it means attachment to the rules of democracy, a model that we have chosen in order to build a just and cohesive society. This affords me the opportunity to hail the high turnout of the youth in the election of 30 September and the election of some of their peers into the National Assembly and council executives.

I also wish to express my satisfaction with the refocusing of the activities of the National Civic Service for Participation in Development Agency. The new leadership in place should improve the mentoring of the first 6 000 volunteers trained. In this regard, I also wish to recall that in 2013, the Rural and Urban Youth Support Programme with its

Youth Socio-economic Integration Project through the Manufacture of Sports Equipment, contributed, through its supervision, to creating 1 000 jobs. These came to add to the 225 000 that I mentioned earlier on.

Regarding the general youth policy, I would like to welcome the election of new executives of the National Youth Council at both the national and local levels. Through these elections, which were conducted satisfactorily, the Cameroonian youth showed that they are part and parcel of our lofty vision which is to make Cameroon an emerging country by 2035. In this respect, the Government has established more than 400 multi-purpose youth promotion centres in subdivisions and divisions. Such mobilization will continue in the months ahead.

My dear young compatriots,

As you can see, things are happening in Cameroon. The momentum is building and it is irreversible. You will be its main actors.

Before concluding, I would like all of us to go fifty to sixty years down memory lane. This is History, you may say. Yes, but perhaps we have not learned all the lessons from it.

During that period of turmoil, those who dreamed of independence and national unity were young people like you. They differed in many respects: ideology, party, strategy and tactics. But the goal was clear: FREEDOM. And many engaged in this struggle putting their lives on the line.

Today, the stakes are different. Although the commitment I expect from you does not require you to make the ultimate sacrifice, it is nonetheless crucial. It is about enabling our country to reach a level of development such that every Cameroonian can: live decently on his work, raise his children properly, and have decent housing and protection from disease.

My young compatriots, such is the task before you.

When, in a few weeks, we celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Reunification which complements our Independence, I urge you to spare a thought for those who sacrificed their lives for you to be able to live in a society of freedom and progress.

Happy Youth Day to you all.
Long live Cameroonian youth!
Long live Cameroon!