

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE
TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2016

Fellow Cameroonians,
My Dear Compatriots,

The year 2016 which is drawing to an end was marked by many events of great significance for our nation.

This year we got off to a good start. Donors, including the International Monetary Fund, hailed the resilience of our economy despite an unfavourable context.

Our defence and security forces beat back Boko Haram and put it on the defensive.

Our country resolutely embarked on a new phase of its grand project to accelerate growth and create jobs and wealth.

As the months rolled by, circumstances put this positive momentum to the test.

Similarly, some social and political unrest occasionally seemed to undermine the very foundations of our togetherness; but, ultimately, we were able to hold our ground.

Therefore, I would like, first and foremost, to solemnly state tonight that, more than ever before, Cameroon is standing on its feet. A country that is ONE and INDIVISIBLE, proud of its cultural diversity and jealous of its freedom. A country that is replete with talented and enterprising people. A country that is endowed with abundant resources. A country that is looking to the future with confidence and determination, resolved to meet the challenges of ensuring social progress and prosperity for all.

As the year 2016 draws to a close, I must recall the unprecedented bereavement our country suffered during the Eseka railway disaster. It was a time of profound grief for the entire nation. Our people demonstrated solidarity during that tragedy.

The probe I have ordered will reveal the truth. I will draw the conclusions thereon, as promised.

My dear compatriots,

I would now like to dwell on the events that have unfolded recently in the North-West and South-West Regions. Physically and emotionally, we are deeply concerned about these events.

Due to the acts of a group of manipulated and exploited extremist rioters, Cameroonians have lost their lives; public and private buildings have been destroyed; the most sacred symbols of our nation have been desecrated; economic activities have been paralyzed momentarily.

You would agree with me that all of this is UNACCEPTABLE.

Our country does enjoy political and trade union freedoms which are guaranteed and governed by our laws and regulations.

Against this backdrop, every citizen can rightfully opine on any aspect of national life, including through duly declared peaceful strike action.

This is a fundamental civil right as desired by the Cameroonian people given that it is enshrined in the Constitution.

This right is inalienable in the model of democracy which I proposed to the Cameroonian people and which, TOGETHER, we have been building daily, patiently and resolutely.

It is unbecoming of some people to use this context of freedom to commit acts of violence and try to undermine our country's unity.

Under such circumstances, it is the State's bounden duty to restore order, in the name of the law and in the interest of all. To act otherwise is to jeopardize our democracy and allow anarchy to prevail over the rule of law.

I strongly condemn all acts of violence, regardless of their sources and their perpetrators. We will fully draw conclusions from the various inquiries being conducted on the matter.

Let me make this very clear: it is not forbidden to voice any concerns in the Republic. However, nothing great can be achieved by using verbal excesses, street violence, and defying authority. Lasting solutions to problems can be found only through peaceful dialogue.

All the voices that spoke have been heard. They have, in many cases, raised substantive issues that cannot be overlooked. I have enjoined the Government to engage in frank dialogue with the various parties concerned to find appropriate solutions to the issues raised. I urge them to participate, without any bias, in the various discussions.

However, we should never forget that we are walking in the footsteps of our country's founding fathers, our national heroes, who shed their blood to bequeath to posterity a nation that is united in its diversity.

Cameroon's unity is therefore a precious legacy with which no one should take liberties. Any claim, no matter how relevant, loses its legitimacy once it jeopardizes, even slightly, the building of national unity.

All Cameroonians, without exception, have embarked on building a united, inclusive and bilingual nation. This is a unique experience in Africa. Like any human endeavour, our experience is not perfect. There are aspects that can be improved. We should therefore listen to each other. We should remain open to constructive ideas, to the exclusion, however, of those that would affect the form of our State.

Besides the bodies that I instructed the Government to set up and which are already at work, we are ready to go an extra mile. We are willing to move in the footsteps and spirit of the architects of Reunification, and put in place a national entity which will be tasked with proposing solutions aimed at maintaining peace, consolidating our country's unity and strengthening our resolve, and our day-to-day experiences of LIVING TOGETHER.

And this should be done in strict compliance with our Constitution and our Institutions.

Do I need to repeat this? CAMEROON IS ONE AND INDIVISIBLE! It shall so remain ...

Its wealth and strength are derived from the diversity of its people, its cultures and its languages. Such is the pluralism that has earned our country the esteem, respect and admiration it enjoys.

Cameroon is a democratic country, a State governed by the rule of law. Its problems should be resolved within the ambit of the law and through dialogue.

Our compatriots want to live in peace and harmony. They should not be disturbed!

That is also why our country is engaged in the war against Boko Haram.

In this regard, I can safely say that in 2016, this terrorist group was driven to the wall. There seems to be hope that this shady terrorist group may not recover from the setbacks it has suffered. However, there is a need to remain vigilant; the possibility of isolated suicide attacks, like that of 25 December last, cannot be ruled out.

Credit for this positive development goes to our national defence and security forces, the Joint Multinational Task Force and cooperation with the Nigerian authorities. We should also commend the support given us by our international partners to whom I extend my thanks.

Also, I should mention the key role of vigilante committees which, thanks to their courage and devotedness, were, on many occasions, able to foil planned attacks. I must once again commend the Cameroonian people for their steadfast patriotism during these difficult times.

Yes, ordeals help forge national unity.

We must now ramp up internal security, reconstruct, organize the return of displaced persons, and revive the local economy. In short, bring back life and tranquillity to the affected areas. To that end, the State will do its utmost, while counting on the dynamism of the people and support from development partners.

Despite the burden of security spending, the Government has not relented in its effort to promote our economic growth.

Many of our major first-generation projects such as the Kribi Port, the Lom Pangar Dam and the Memve'ele and Mekin power plants are virtually operational or about to be commissioned.

To bridge the energy gap and end load shedding, other major projects such as the Bini à Warak, Menchum, Song Dong and Nachtigal power plants will supplement this programme. Our power transmission and management problems will be resolved with the establishment of the National Electricity Transmission Corporation.

The development of our road network is also progressing. An extensive road construction or rehabilitation programme is ongoing nationwide. I will mention only the most notable of them, such as the Yaounde-Douala and Nsimalen-Yaounde motorways where work is going on normally, but also the east or west entryways to Douala and the second bridge over the Wouri.

In the longer term, there are plans to create an inter-regional road and rail network to ease access to our mineral deposits and stimulate trade with neighbouring countries. Cameroon lies at the crossroads of two major economic blocks, namely West and Central Africa. Why therefore should it not seek to become the hub it is geographically predisposed to be?

The main objective of boosting our energy capacity and extending our road network is to create the best conditions for our country's industrialization. This is our major challenge for the coming decades. It will also confirm the positive employment trends observed in recent years. For instance, as at October 2016, 320 000 new jobs were recorded, representing an increase of nearly 20% compared with the previous financial year.

Given the overall gloomy economic situation, this performance is commendable. However, we should do better. To that end, we must improve the management of all the economies of our sub-region.

That is why I deemed it necessary to convene a meeting of all CEMAC Heads of State in Yaounde recently. This meeting enabled us to take measures to revive growth in our zone, while accelerating the integration of our economies and the free movement of goods and people.

Cameroon will fulfil its duty to that end.

In keeping with our ambition of achieving emergence by 2035, we are relentlessly working to increase our agricultural production, ensure the industrial processing of our raw materials and expand the digital economy.

The 2017 State budget truly reflects this resolve to increase momentum on these highly strategic sectors.

My dear compatriots,

There are many ongoing projects designed to promote social progress and prosperity in our country. Our assets are known to all. However, we are still having difficulty unlocking our potential.

It was in a bid to reflect on such difficulty that in May 2016, I initiated the International Economic Conference on the theme “Investing in Cameroon: Land of Opportunities”.

Besides important business meetings held during the conference, this unique initiative which was hailed by our development partners, enabled us to share extremely valuable experiences on the path to economic emergence.

In this interconnected world, we sought, in all simplicity, to get others’ views on our capacity to access the global economy.

The harvest has been bountiful in terms of the principles of the actions adopted to improve the business climate in Cameroon. This will be reflected in our institutions in the near future.

I have already expressed my view on this issue on many occasions: our progress is constrained by various forms of resistance or inertia.

We should remove such obstacles and create a sound and attractive business environment that accelerates progress in our country by aligning with the appropriate global dynamics. Responsibility here lies with the government. I will see to it resolutely.

Though I believe that the State should play the role of regulator and facilitator, and even investor in some specific domains, I also believe that the private sector should invest wherever there are opportunities.

At a time when diversification is a veritable lifeline for CEMAC economies, our investors should, for instance, take advantage of the opportunities offered by regional integration or various economic partnership agreements to which Cameroon is a signatory.

I am therefore appealing to the creators of our wealth to fully play their role in stimulating our economic growth in everyone’s interest.

The Cameroonian people who are beginning to reap the benefits of the sacrifices made over the years do not wish to return to austerity. I see with them.

This requires us all to put our hands on deck in perfect patriotic fervour, like our heroic Indomitable Lionesses.

For many years they gave their all without seeking vain and early glories; they demonstrated hard work, resolve, talent, and bravery; they won hearts through the quality of their performance in the game; they appealed through their moral quality and the ethics of the game which earned them the fair play trophy; they reflected Cameroon's great diversity as they defended the national colours; and though they did not win the coveted trophy of the 2016 women AFCON, they brought joy and pride to an entire nation.

Such an excellent demonstration of patriotic fervour is an appeal to everyone, each in his or her specific sphere, to defend Cameroon's future everywhere, in an exemplary manner.

My dear compatriots,

Before concluding, I would like to invite you to spare a thought for our soldiers and civilians who fell while defending our fatherland in 2016, as well as for the victims of the recent Eseka railway disaster.

I would now like to express the wish, for our nation, that the year 2017 would abound with the fruits of peace and harmony, progress and economic prosperity for everyone.

Happy and Prosperous New Year 2017!

Long live Cameroon!