

HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE

Yaounde, 10 February 2011

My dear young compatriots,

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of our independence, which will be followed this year by that of our reunification, was for all of us and for you especially, an opportunity to relive the process of our liberation, but also and above all, to project ourselves into the future. It is obviously the latter aspect that concerns you the most.

I told you last year that I was convinced we were on the verge of a recovery of our economy which, you know, has suffered the lag effects of the global crisis. I believe that I am being vindicated.

This year we should, indeed, return to our pre-crisis growth rate and perhaps do even better. Many of our major projects should be launched. Let me mention a few of them.

- In the energy domain: the Lom Pangar, Memve'ele and Mekin hydroelectric dams and power plants and, hopefully, the Kribi natural gas plant.
- Regarding road infrastructure: upgrading of our urban road networks and construction of new roads in most of our regions.
- In the mining sector: the expected start-up of our projects.
- With regard to water supply and distribution of electricity: continuation or implementation of ongoing or planned works.
- Concerning transport: the first phase of construction of the Kribi deepsea port.
- In the social sector: the launching of extensive housing schemes, new health facilities and building of school, university and sports facilities.

This renewed activity should not only improve the living conditions of our people, but also substantially boost demand for labour with different skill levels. Hence, it would produce bright prospects for employment and put us in a better position to combat unemployment, a scourge unfortunately plaguing mostly our youth.

There is another factor that can give us some optimism. Increasing global demand for commodities of mineral or plant origin should prompt us to boost their production. Our mining projects mentioned earlier on will provide an initial

response. But, above all, I am counting on our agriculture broadly speaking, to supplement production. I said so very recently in Ebolowa, but permit me to come back to it briefly.

Indeed, our agriculture has significant production capacities that can be enhanced. Such is the case of cereals like rice and maize and our cash crops, mainly cocoa and coffee, but also our industrial crops, namely cotton, palm oil, rubber, sugar cane and bananas. A significant increase in the production of these crops would not only help balance our external trade, but would inevitably lead to demand for labour and reduction in unemployment.

I do believe that in our current situation, the solution to our unemployment problem lies here. If our agriculture proves capable of making this "leap forward", it will offer a wide range of jobs, from the simplest to the more skilled. That is why I urge our youth not to turn away from working the land which guarantees stability and fulfilment. This obviously does not mean we should neglect industrial activities and services which also generate employment and show promise.

My dear young compatriots,

This struggle for employment is merely another aspect of our battle for development. And you are those who in the coming years will have to wage it ... and win it. To do so, you will need to be armed with all the necessary skills which you have acquired in school and university. This is of course the guarantee of your personal success, but also and above all, the performance of a civic duty to your country. You will thus be showing her your gratitude for the efforts she made for you throughout your studies.

These efforts will be pursued. Even if, temporarily, the State has had to curtail certain budgetary allocations, it remains committed to giving priority to education in general and each type and level of education in particular.

As concerns basic education, the fundamental objective remains extending access to education and improving its quality. At the same time, actions undertaken to build school infrastructure and provide equipment and support to private education will be pursued. Special attention will be paid to completing primary education to ensure the irreversibility of literacy.

As regards secondary education, a reflection should be undertaken to identify priorities based on available resources. The main orientations will however remain strengthening educational opportunities and increasing infrastructure.

Regarding higher education, professionalization remains the watchword, without neglecting the extension of the LMD system. Synergy between the

university and enterprise should be taken into account in the spirit of the proposals of the recent forum on this issue. Furthermore, it is clear that the policy adopted to strengthen social governance within the university will be extended. I want to recall that a special effort was made in 2010 for the benefit of university research and academic excellence. These allocations will be increased in 2011.

My dear young compatriots,

As I told you last year, youth participation in development is not only a matter of intellectual and technical competence. It also requires a civic and patriotic commitment.

In this regard, an important fact should be mentioned. I did recently sign a decree on the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Civic Service for Participation in Development Agency. This body is mandated to mobilize energies for :

- economic, social and cultural development of our country,
- fostering national pride and patriotic feelings, and lastly,
- promoting a sense of the common weal, civic spirit and culture of peace.

These measures concern youth aged 17 to 21 years who are required to undergo a mandatory service period of 60 days and volunteers a period of 6 months. The Agency will extend its activities nationwide. A budget has already been provided for the Agency which could soon go operational.

The commissioning of the Agency and rehabilitation of Multipurpose Youth Development Centres that contribute to extra-curricular training should provide our youth leadership and citizenship guidance required for their social integration. The preparation by the Ministry of Youth of a "guide to education for citizenship" serves the same purpose.

Another milestone worth mentioning concerns the deployment, at all levels of our administrative set-up, of organs of the National Youth Council. The Council, which has prepared its three-year action plan, should be able to play its role as an interface between government, development partners and civil society, on the one hand, and all of our youth on the other.

By a fortunate coincidence, the effective commissioning of the Council comes just when the African Youth Charter has been ratified. The main objective of the Charter, I recall, is to strengthen youth participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. The celebration in 2011 of the International Year of Youth will afford us a timely opportunity to promote ownership of the provisions of the Charter by our youth.

Regarding the integration of youth into the economy, the State, alongside actions by the National Employment Fund, has continued to support programmes designed to give the greatest possible number of young people opportunities to start a working life. Such is the case of the Project to support rural and urban youth and the Project for the integration of youth through the manufacture of sports equipment. These two projects have enabled the integration of several thousand youth into economic life, the launching of hundreds of micro-activities and junior-enterprises and the creation of dozens of cooperatives.

My dear young compatriots,

The start-up of the major structuring projects mentioned above, will generate many jobs.

Meanwhile, I have instructed the Prime Minister to launch, this year, a special recruitment into the Public Service, of twenty-five thousand young graduates.

But as I said earlier on, I am counting mainly on the revival of our growth to stimulate employment.

My dear young compatriots,

I am aware, believe me, of your worries about your future. I can imagine the disappointment of those who, after studying for many years, have difficulty finding employment commensurate with their qualifications. The discouragement of those, who, without qualifications, can, at best, only expect precarious jobs. The feeling of injustice of those who, having lost all hope, believe they are social outcasts.

To all of them, I say they should not despair, for our recovery is on the way. And I will cite the example of the emerging countries now breaking growth records and which yesterday were experiencing internal upheavals, extreme poverty and oppression. We, who are enjoying peace, stability and democratic progress, now have every opportunity to build together a just and interdependent society. That is why, like last year, I am asking you to have confidence in the future because we are nearing our goal.

Happy Youth Day to you all,

Long live Cameroonian youth,

Long live Cameroon.