

## **HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE 46<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY**

*10 February 2012*

My dear young compatriots,

In my message to the Nation a few weeks ago, I reminded all Cameroonians that we are caught in a pursuit race between our development and our population growth. By this, I meant that there should be a correlation between wealth generation in our economy and our population growth such that the first may not only meet the needs of our compatriots, but also improve their living standards progressively.

Indeed, it does not suffice to undo the damage caused by successive crises – which is what we are doing - but to give a fresh impetus to our economic activity to attain the status of an emerging country, which is what we have embarked on.

I am by no means deploring our population dynamics. A strong and ambitious nation must rely on a youthful and large population. As I said moments ago, the wealth it generates should therefore be sufficient to meet its development requirements.

And of course, this concerns you primarily.

Without going into details, I wish to briefly revisit the meaning of the “fresh impetus” we are going to provide in order to achieve our goals. Since the said goals have been clearly defined by our growth and employment strategy, we will soon launch our “agrarian revolution” and implement our major mining, energy and infrastructure projects. In fact, some of them are already under way.

This will not only revive our economy, but also significantly boost employment opportunities, notably for the youth, be they certificate holders or not, who are now unable to find work. This challenge is so important that I have decided to make it a veritable “national cause” that should mobilize the country's vital forces as a whole, notably the youth who are particularly concerned.

This battle to become an emerging country – for it is indeed a battle – requires serious preparation on your part. In fact, the world we live in is a competitive world where only the best make it. In this regard, you are not

without assets. It is generally acknowledged that Cameroon is endowed with quality human resources.

The State will continue to support you to back up this good reputation by providing you with one of the best educational systems in Africa. In that regard, I wish to recall that the budgetary allocations of the ministries in charge of the different levels of education in the State Budget are among the highest.

I cannot elaborate here what public authorities are doing in the educational domain, but to give you an idea, I will provide an overview of the actions of the ministries that cover this domain. You will see that the numbers speak for themselves.

Before delving into the subject, I would like to say that I am aware of the objections that may be raised against creating numerous institutions and fields of study. Will the increase in quantity not be detrimental to the quality of education? The question is well worth asking. I personally believe that at the present stage of our development, we really had no choice.

In a country like ours, what should be expected from the educational system? On the one hand, that it should enable the large majority of the population to acquire basic knowledge. On the other hand, that it should help mould responsible citizens who are conscious of their rights and duties and their belonging to one and the same nation. These are the objectives we are striving to achieve, while recognizing that the outcomes sometimes fall short of our expectations.

Accordingly, we should, as soon as possible, start reflecting on the future of our educational system and consider devising far-reaching reforms that will be implemented only progressively.

Let us now look at what is being done on the ground.

Regarding basic education, in 2011, seven hundred new primary and nursery schools were established or rehabilitated. Hundreds of classrooms and administrative buildings were constructed and equipped, enabling greater school access for thousands of students.

Concerning the improvement of the quality of education, substantial efforts have been made in terms of teaching and recruitment of qualified staff.

Last year, about 7 500 teachers were recruited within the framework of the contractualization process, 500 Grade One teachers assumed duty and 2 200 new teachers entered the public service under the operation to recruit 25 000 young certificate holders.

Measures have also been taken to ensure the implementation of free primary education in government schools. The Ministry of Basic Education has also received much support from national and international bodies, notably the Chantal Biya Foundation, the Islamic Development Bank, the French Development Agency, the World Food Programme and Plan Cameroon.

As regards secondary education, the numbers also speak for themselves.

In 2011, 670 classrooms, dozens of workshops, multimedia facilities, halls for laboratory work and computer lessons, as well as offices, were constructed in technical and grammar schools. Over 13 000 teachers were recruited, of which 3 500 as part of the recruitment of 25 000 young certificate holders mentioned earlier on. 185 new schools, of which 66 technical and 119 grammar, were opened. At the same time, private secondary education received 700 million francs.

During the same period, special efforts were made to improve the quality of education. As concerns technical education, 21 new specialties were introduced and several partnership agreements signed with the production sector. Regarding general secondary education, the teaching of information and communication technologies, as well as computer science were introduced in curricula at all levels and will be included in examinations as from 2012.

The alignment of higher education with our universal policy is being pursued. Every Cameroonian, irrespective of his or her ethnic or social background, will ultimately find a place in our university system. We now have eight universities that are being supplemented over time, with the establishment of new institutes, faculties and advanced schools. We are therefore diversifying training so as to match Cameroonian universities with the needs of our society.

At the same time, we are increasing university infrastructure such as amphitheatres, libraries, laboratories, etc. and constructing buildings such as hostels and university restaurants to improve the living and working conditions of students, teachers and support staff. In addition, we continue to support the modernization of research and academic excellence by

granting various allowances and awards. Last but not least, we are pursuing the implementation of a process for the professionalization of higher education, in a bid to ease the entry of young graduates into the business world and self-employment.

In fact, professionalization or training, as the case may be, is a prerequisite to resolving the problem of youth employment. Emerging countries began by putting in place an efficient education system and urged their youth to acquire knowledge that is indispensable for rising to the level of the best. We must follow their example.

Besides, our youths, who are naturally gifted, will only benefit from drawing from the Latin saying “a healthy mind in a healthy body”. In this regard, Government has undertaken the construction of two modern stadiums in Bafoussam and Limbe, two multisport gymnasiums in Yaounde and Douala, as well as five community gymnasiums in our Regions, without forgetting the renovation of the Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda Parcours-Vita.

In addition to the huge efforts made in education and sports, the State is using its available resources to act directly for the benefit of the youth. Hence, in the past months, thousands of youths were recruited into the security services and, more recently, 25 000 certificate holders were absorbed into the public service.

I must also mention the initiatives of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education aimed at preparing our youths to participate in social life and facilitating their socio-economic integration. The National Youth Council was established and is expected to coordinate the activities of the various stakeholders. Also, it goes without saying that programmes such as the Rural and Urban Youth Support Programme (PAJER-U), the Socio-economic Integration Programme for the Youth through the Creation of Micro-enterprises and Manufacturing of Sports Equipment (PIFMAS) and the Community Multimedia Centre Project (REMUDEV) that seek to facilitate access by the youth to working life and that have helped to create hundreds of micro-enterprises and junior enterprises will be pursued.

I am also counting greatly on the National Civic Agency for Participation in Development and on Youth Promotion Multipurpose Centres to raise the awareness of youths on the importance of our efforts towards becoming an emerging country. In my view, this is an opportunity to once again call for economic “patriotism” as I have often done when referring to our economic recovery.

In fact, you should not content yourselves with acquiring knowledge with a view to ensuring your personal success. It is also your duty to be part of our common grand vision at the service of our country which assisted you throughout your studies. It will be a rightful contribution and a mark of good citizenship. Clearly put, I am counting on you to be the builders of the exemplary Republic to which we all aspire.

My dear young compatriots,

Last year I asked you to have confidence in the future. That was true yesterday. It is all the more so today.

Happy Youth Day to you all!

Long Live the Cameroonian youth.

Long Live Cameroon.