

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2011

- **Fellow Cameroonians,**
- **My dear compatriots,**

Here we are on the threshold of the first phase of our “long march” towards becoming an emerging country.

The recent presidential election has laid a solid foundation for this purpose. You voted for stability and peace, thus confirming your sound judgement and sense of responsibility. No matter what some people might have said, the poll was fair and reflected the will of the majority of our people who - I must emphasize – refused to heed calls for street protests. I take this opportunity to reaffirm that the dysfunctions noted and which, anyway, were not likely to cast doubt over the outcome of the election, will be corrected before the next election.

As I promised, the period now beginning will essentially be devoted to the stimulation of growth. By the way, we have no choice. Either we move on and have reason for hope, or we mark time and our problems will only worsen. Indeed, it should be realized that, like most African countries, we are caught in a pursuit race between our development and our population growth. To win the race, we must implement the “new impetus” I proposed during the election campaign.

What have we lacked so far to revive our economy?

I believe that, in the past, government action suffered from a lack of the entrepreneurial approach and the administration from inactivity. We must overcome this inertia which has caused us so much harm.

Corruption is another insidious and dreadful enemy. It does not only cart off a huge chunk of public funds, but also causes delays in the implementation of projects which are indispensable for our country's economic recovery. I have, on several occasions, said that we will continue to wage a relentless war against this scourge. The establishment of the Special Criminal Court, which will speed up the trial

of pending cases and, hopefully, the refund of sums misappropriated, demonstrates our resolve in this regard.

In addition to the difficulties we have faced and continue to face in stimulating growth, I must, to be fair, mention those arising from the global context. Without dwelling on inequity in the terms of trade, structural adjustment constraints and the consequences of the recent economic and financial crisis, I believe I can, without distorting the truth, say that excessive deregulation, disruptions caused by speculation and the decrease in official development assistance have compounded the task of countries like ours.

The point here is not to look for excuses for our poor performance, but simply to recall the facts. If one can, legitimately, express disappointment at the effects of globalization, one might also get worried about the slow pace of ongoing negotiations within bodies such as the G8, the G20 and the WTO, negotiations whose avowed goal was to clean up the global economy and finance, to make world trade more equitable and ensure greater solidarity between the North and the South. But it can be seen that the problems of the western world, particularly sovereign debt, override those of developing countries.

Thus, we must increasingly rely on our own efforts and draw inspiration from the experience of emerging countries. To achieve this goal, I believe that we should consider recovery as a genuine national cause. All our economic players should mobilize, with the support of public authorities, to channel their efforts towards the one and only objective of ensuring Cameroon's economic take-off, in the vein of the new Asian "dragons" some thirty years ago. This economic "patriotism" could marshal all the country's vital forces. In saying this, I am thinking particularly of Cameroonian women whose dynamism is widely acknowledged, but also of the youth who, despite their competences, have difficulty working their way up to positions of responsibility.

We have the necessary assets to achieve this great vision.

We now have a roadmap, the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper, which sets the objectives for this decade, and our budget programming framework, which, in 2012, will hinge on efforts to further improve public financial management, particularly through the judicious collection of budgetary revenues and improvement of the quality of spending. Fiscal and customs incentives will boost investment. In the same spirit, the 2012 public investment budget has been increased

significantly. It will be allocated primarily to two major sectors: infrastructure and production sub-sectors. These measures, among others, reflect the State's determination to act energetically to accelerate our economic recovery.

I do not have, I believe, to dwell on our natural resources, which are well known. I will only recall the main ones:

- Agriculture, with vast expanses of land and favourable climatic conditions. It should be remembered that in Ebolowa I presented a brief outline of the "agrarian revolution" which must be launched at all costs during this seven-year term;
- Mineral resources, particularly iron, bauxite and cobalt, which will soon be exploited;
- Energy resources, hydroelectricity, oil and gas, the exploitation of which is underway or planned.

I will not fail to mention our numerous, hardworking and well-trained human resources who should find employment with the implementation of our major projects and acceleration of the professionalization of education.

Will these assets suffice to achieve our great vision? The question is worth asking.

Indeed, to take advantage of these favourable factors, we need to question the behavioural patterns responsible for our deficiencies or our failures. The foremost among them is the quest for personal benefit at the expense of the general interest which ought to be the golden rule of public service. The Supreme State Audit should be inflexible in this regard. Similarly, bad habits such as nepotism, influence peddling and fraud, which are widespread, should be eradicated.

Furthermore, we should not hide the fact that the "new impetus" we intend to spearhead will require of State services as well as civil society considerable efforts and devotion. This is the type of patriotism I mentioned earlier on because it involves nothing less than getting Cameroon out of the category of developing countries and raising it to the level of new emerging countries. It should be acknowledged that it is a long haul.

We have also to reckon with global economic trends which are now full of uncertainties... Against this backdrop, we have no choice but to

accelerate the development of our resources by launching our major projects as soon as possible. To finance these projects, we will, besides our public investment budget, have recourse to national savings, that is borrowing, international or other donors, and friendly countries.

I will not dwell on the major projects which I elaborated on before the National Assembly during my swearing-in ceremony, and which are included in the new Government's agenda. I count on this government - which I consider as a "government with a mission" - to devote all its energy and competences to the implementation of these projects. I will see to that personally.

- **My dear compatriots,**

I am well aware that the efforts I am asking you to make to support our common vision should not be without compensation. In fact, it is about time you reap the benefits of the sacrifices you have made.

If we succeed in vigorously reviving our economy, as I believe, the employment situation will ease significantly. The social strata most affected by unemployment, especially the youth, could gain access to employment and see their lot improve. We will do everything we can to achieve this objective. On the other hand, the State will continue to create openings into the public service as far as it can.

My other priority, as you know, is to improve the living conditions of our people which are not worthy of a country like ours. In this regard, the revival of growth should give us a greater leeway. Be it health, education, housing, social security, access to electricity and drinking water, rest assured that the commitments I made will be honoured as far as possible.

- **Fellow Cameroonians,**
- **My dear compatriots,**

That is a summary of the terms of the pact of confidence which I sealed with you on 3 November before the National Assembly. We are thus committed to making Cameroon an exemplary Republic, a Nation that is respected in the world, a fair State that ensures equal opportunities, a country where national wealth will be equally distributed.

This challenge is undoubtedly one of the most important we have had to face since the advent of democracy in our country. Time has come to decide whether we want to summon all our strength to revive our economy and provide adequate living conditions for the majority of our people.

For my part, I am convinced that together we can succeed. If, as I believe, I can count on you as you can count on me, I have no doubt that we will succeed.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that the fiftieth anniversary of our reunification, which took place, as you are aware, on 1 October 1961, will be celebrated with all the necessary solemnity. Because the anniversary of this historic event had to take place at the same time as the presidential election, we could not celebrate it when we would have liked. It will take place in Buea, as soon as possible, with the desired dignity and fervour because we should always remember that reunification was our Nation's first step towards its unity.

- **My Dear compatriots,**

It is now time for me to extend to you all, my most sincere wishes for health and happiness in the New Year.

Happy New Year 2012.

Long live Cameroon!