

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2013

My dear compatriots,

The year 2013 gave Cameroonians genuine reasons to feel satisfied, thus paving the way for excellent prospects for the future.

Let me explain.

The senatorial elections of 14 April and the legislative and municipal elections of 30 September took place in a calm and transparent atmosphere. All observers confirmed this fact and I believe that it reflects the maturity of the Cameroonian people who have understood that achieving social progress requires stable institutions and sound policies. The few failings reported were not enough to challenge the validity of the said elections. In this regard, ELECAM deserves to be commended. The enhanced credibility of the legislative and municipal elections sufficiently justified the time it took to introduce biometrics into our electoral system.

I therefore believe that there is every reason for us to be satisfied with this new milestone in our democratic process. The marked increase in the number of women in Parliament and municipal councils is a further sign of progress.

In any case, having put in place the Senate and local and regional authorities, the establishment of the Constitutional Council within a reasonable timeline will complete the institutional structure enshrined in our Constitution.

Our political horizon is now very clear. It is time for serious and objective discussions on issues that are dear to Cameroonians which, as you know, are purchasing power, employment and living conditions. In other words, such issues constitute what our people legitimately expect from a prosperous and equitable economy and a just and interdependent society.

Of course, this is no revelation to us. In recent decades, we have spared no effort to improve the living conditions of Cameroonians. This has been achieved despite the often tense political context, the economic crisis and threats to peace. Significant progress - perhaps still unevenly shared - has been made.

Let me mention just two examples, namely health and our major projects.

With the resurgence of malaria in its most severe form which affects infants, we have approached international partners for assistance. With their help, we will be able to secure free treatment of this pandemic for under-five children. Furthermore, I am pleased to announce that our country's health map will soon have three additional referral hospitals, namely the Yaounde National Emergency Centre, the Douala Gynaecological, Obstetric and Paediatric Hospital and the Sangmelima Referral Hospital.

Regarding our major projects, those of the first generation are, as you know, either ongoing or in the start-up phase.

Concerning second-generation projects which will be implemented as from 2015, the related studies and financing are currently under negotiation. These include notably power generation, transportation, water supply, road and highway infrastructure as well as industrial and mining facilities.

As you can see, our economy is picking up and some kind of national consensus on the goal of economic emergence is discernible. I believe that we should muster all our energy to champion this cause and summon all our strength to ensure growth. In fact, it seems that our efforts alone, no matter how laudable, will not suffice to make Cameroon an emerging country in 2035.

International financial institutions have sounded this friendly warning to us; and it is in our interest to heed it. In 2013, our growth rate stands at 4.8%, and thus below our forecast of 6.1%. Of course, there is nothing so dramatic about this, yet it clearly indicates that we need to redouble our efforts.

Our growth is currently sustained by buoyant oil revenues and public appropriations. Private investments remain inadequate. We still need to improve the business climate, but this certainly does not spare us from pursuing ongoing structural reforms and further strengthening fiscal discipline.

Definitely, there is still room for improvement in the effectiveness of our economic policies. We have a growth and employment strategy which guides us towards achieving our goals. But, how come then that in some sectors of our economy, State action often seems to lack consistency and clarity? Why is it that in many cases, decision-making delays still constitute a bottleneck in project implementation? Why can't any region of our country achieve a public investment budget execution rate of over 50%? Lastly, one can rightfully question the usefulness of certain project monitoring committees which are unable to take any decisions.

What we need in the coming years is a real contingency plan. With the GESPP, we have a trend chart. Now is the time to act.

Our short-term priorities are well known, namely: to correct our growth curve by creating jobs and maintain a high level of performance over several years in a row. To this end, we need to set timelines on our roadmaps and strictly adhere to them.

It will be absolutely imperative that we address the causes of our weaknesses by removing sticking points, areas of dispersion and duplication.

Would we be unable to do what some other countries comparable to ours have done or are doing? I do not think so. We have talented, resourceful, well-trained and enterprising men, women and youth, who are capable of meeting these challenges. We have abundant and diverse natural resources as well as modern and democratic institutions. Our country is peaceful and stable. What then do we lack?

I think we need to improve in two key areas: prioritizing general interest and coordinating our efforts.

Though attached to our communities of origin - which does not prevent us from being fervent patriots whenever national honour is at stake - we are an individualistic people, more concerned with personal success than general interest. Our administration remains susceptible to private interest, which is most often in conflict with national interest. Such trends must not be tolerated in a modern state.

At one stage of implementation or another, most of our major projects involve the skills of various services. I am not sure that there has been effective coordination between them. Clearly, therefore, there is a need for improvement in this regard.

My dear compatriots,

I would now like to draw your attention to a problem that has reached disturbing proportions in recent months – that of insecurity in our country. Not long ago, we were striving to overcome “ordinary” insecurity. Simply put, we fought minor and organized crime in urban areas and “highway robbers” in remote rural areas.

For some time now, a new form of crime referred to as cross-border crime has reached a worrying scale, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

This has been brought about by the presence around our borders of armed bands, driven by extremist ideologies and lured by profit. They do not hesitate to cross over to our territory where they commit various atrocities. This phenomenon is not entirely new. However, it has witnessed a fresh upsurge as not long ago there was an attack in Kette Subdivision in the eastern part of our country. Elite units have been deployed to the area to check such incursions.

Over the months, in the Far North, such criminals have kidnapped foreign nationals for ransom. Memories of the abduction of the French family MOULIN-FOURNIER are still fresh. Thanks to our cooperation with the Nigerian authorities and French services, we were able to secure their release. More recently, a French priest was manhandled and taken to Nigeria. I strongly condemn such unspeakable acts perpetrated in the quest for gain against defenceless persons, including children.

Of course, we are doing our best to prevent and combat such acts, and we will not relent.

I congratulate the élite units ensuring security in these areas and urge the local population to cooperate with them as necessary.

For some time now, terrorism has also become rife at sea. Its motivations are mainly financial, but the methods have not changed. They consist in inspecting ships to loot the contents and kidnapping crew members for ransom. Cameroon has witnessed this in its maritime space.

The phenomenon has expanded to the entire Gulf of Guinea, such that the maritime trade of countries located in this area is being compromised. There was a first response at the Summit on Maritime Security and Safety in the Gulf of Guinea, held in Yaounde last 25 and 26 June.

It is clear that, whether on land or at sea, security, which is first and foremost a national issue, also has a collective and even international dimension. It should not be underestimated. Where it is not guaranteed, anarchy settles in, abuses become rife, economic and social progress grinds to a halt. Examples of such forms of breakdown in societal values, unfortunately, abound in our continent and even in our immediate external vicinity.

While it is true that the affected areas of our territory are very limited, we remain on the alert. Our security forces on the ground can intervene at any time. This is an opportunity for me to stress that each one of us must be aware of the benefits of living in a stable country where institutions are functioning normally, where the security of people and property is guaranteed, and where every citizen can nurse hopes of a better life.

The current situation in the Central African Republic demonstrates the possible consequences of instability and disorder. Massacre, looting and displacement have become the order of the day in that brotherly and friendly country. It was the duty of, and an honour for, Cameroonian troops to participate in the operations of the multinational force aimed at restoring security and protecting people within the territory of our immediate neighbour.

My dear compatriots,

We are somewhat at a crossroads. Growth is within our reach; our budget is viable; our public debt is sustainable; in short, our economic and financial situation gives us every reason to hope for prosperity.

- It is either we take the easy road by postponing reforms, in which case in 10 or 20 years time we shall have had such a cumulative delay that we can hardly meet the needs of our people.
- Or we set high goals for ourselves, and adopt strict collective discipline, in which case we will embark resolutely on economic emergence.

I suggest that we adopt the latter option, that of sacrifice and courage.

At a time when we are beginning to see many concrete signs of our democratic, economic and social progress, I invite you to embrace a new spirit of patriotism. I believe we can do a lot better.

I am not asking for your sweat, or blood, or tears; rather, I am merely urging you to commit yourself wholeheartedly to this new phase of our Grand National plan.

At the dawn of this New Year, I would like, on behalf of you all, to address our Indomitable Lions.

Dear Indomitable Lions,

You have qualified for the final phase of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. We want you to follow in the footsteps of your illustrious predecessors of the glorious campaigns in Spain in 1982 and Italy in 1990. Give us a thrill once again. The Cameroonian people are with you.

To conclude, I am pleased to announce the release of Father Georges Vandenbeusch.

Thanks to the action of our services, backed by Nigerian and French authorities, this priest, so devoted to his mission, has been freed today.

My dear compatriots,

I would now like to extend to you all, my best wishes for good health and happiness in the New Year.

Happy and Prosperous New Year 2014!