

Address by the Head of State in response to New Year wishes by the diplomatic corps

Yaounde, 6 January 2012

- **The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,**
- **Ambassadors and High Commissioners,**
- **Representatives of International Organizations,**

I would like, first of all, to thank your Dean for his very warm wishes and kind words addressed to me and my wife as well as the Cameroonian people on your behalf. I am also very touched by the friendly encouragement you have given me through him, for the discharge of my duties.

- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

I am pleased to meet you at this time of the year when hope prevails over pessimism and gloominess.

As far as Cameroon is concerned, the eve of this New Year brought great hope.

As you know, the year that has just ended was a milestone in the life of our country, marked by the presidential election of 9 October which, for the first time, afforded the Cameroonian Diaspora the opportunity to go to the polls to choose the President of the Republic. It was also the first election conducted by *Elections Cameroon*.

The Cameroonian people once again demonstrated their maturity. They voted in a dignified and free manner in an election which, despite rumours predicting all sorts of chaos, was conducted in peace and transparency.

The country remained calm. Cameroonians made their choice in the clearest possible manner.

You were first-hand witnesses to these moments in the life of our nation, and some of you even supported the process.

For our part, we have closed the presidential election chapter and are set on the path to becoming an emerging country. Our objective is to revive economic growth which will enable us to alleviate poverty and provide better living conditions for our population.

We know it will be no easy task, notably because the international environment is far from conducive. With the exception of the so-called “emerging” countries, the global economic outlook is uncertain. Several major western countries face stagnation or even recession. Moreover, in a globalized economy, the risk of contagion should not be ruled out entirely.

I am not trying to put globalization on trial. However, I cannot but observe that in recent years, speculation has upset the global financial system and that hasty trade liberalization has thrown international trade into disarray. In my view, it will be necessary to draw lessons from the mistakes of the recent past. There is also reason to hope that the major world economic powers will resume serious consultations to establish regulations that would mainstream the interests of the different categories of countries, namely industrialized, emerging and developing. Meanwhile, we realize that ongoing efforts are rather geared towards seeking solutions to the problems of the western world, namely budget deficits and sovereign debts.

As I told you last year on the same occasion, “the dysfunctions which led to the economic and financial crisis have not been resolved permanently and the risk of slipping back into similar crises cannot be ruled out entirely”. However, I have a feeling that something has changed. The big powers seem to be more keenly aware that the risk of a widespread recession cannot be ruled out and that only joint and concerted action would help avert it. We are yet to get there, but, in that regard, the spectre of the great depression of the 1930s has definitely played a decisive role.

In these times of uncertainty, Cameroon has no other alternative than to engage in the battle for economic recovery, using its own assets. Such is what I told my compatriots a few days ago. To win this battle, we will make every effort to overcome obstacles, namely inertia and corruption, but also to change our methods in order to be more efficient. Together, we will also strive to rally our population around this great national vision.

In this light, regional integration affords us opportunities which, so far, have been underused. While remarkable progress has been made at the institutional level, its benefits are yet to be seen at the economic level. The implementation of the regional economic programme is being delayed. Yet, so much remains to be done in order to make the most of the complementarity of our economies, link our countries through modern communication networks, implement major inter-State projects and projects in so many other domains. For instance, it is regrettable that trade within the CEMAC zone represents only an insignificant percentage of our overall external trade. Undoubtedly, there will be a need for stronger political will to accelerate the regional integration process.

In providing our “fresh impetus”, we will welcome continued support and advice from international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Assistance from development banks, funds and agencies will continue to play a vital role.

The support of the European Union, one of our key development partners, will remain decisive. We will appreciate such support all the more as its friendly member countries are themselves facing daunting challenges which, I hope, will not affect our budding partnership.

Similarly, we are also relying heavily on our bilateral relations to boost our trade and our cooperation ties with our traditional European and American partners.

At the same time, we will continue to develop our relations with China which is becoming a major partner for us, but also with Japan, India, South Korea, Turkey, Brazil and any other country or big private group willing to partner with us in implementing our major projects.

Our recent focus on our domestic affairs has not prevented us from observing and participating in world politics.

Of course, we have been keenly monitoring events in the northern part of our continent, now referred to as the “Arab Spring”. Obviously, one can only sympathize with the people’s aspirations to freedom and justice, while regretting the excesses that often occur during such uprisings. The present situation clearly illustrates the foreseeable challenges of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. It is hoped that our Tunisian, Libyan and Egyptian brothers will find a way out in all independence and in a spirit of moderation.

It was rightfully regretted that our continental organization only played second fiddle in dealing with these crises while the big powers were at the forefront. We are thus paying the price of our divergent opinions and our lack of resources. We need to draw lessons from this situation. The day we will start speaking with one voice, we will be better heard and better understood.

While life is returning to normal in Côte d'Ivoire and, hopefully, in DRC, tensions remain in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia. In this region, piracy continues to rage. It has also expanded to the Gulf of Guinea, including in our maritime space. With the measures we have taken, the consultations with neighbouring countries and cooperation with some western countries, we believe we will be able to contain it.

A particular form of terrorism continues to spread in the Sahel zone. Foreigners continue to be kidnapped, leading to clashes between the security forces of the countries concerned and the perpetrators of such acts. We are not indifferent to this phenomenon because of the relative proximity of the zone in question to the northern part of our country. We remain vigilant.

In the Near East and the Middle East, we notice regrettably that attempts to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are stalling, that tensions with Iran are worsening and that protests in Syria can only compound the situation. Should we then wait for the situation to get out of control to see the major powers and the United Nations – the only powers able to intervene – resolutely take on the matter holistically and try to seek a solution in keeping with international law and in the interest of the peoples of the region?

I also notice with regret that against expectations, the United Nations reform is at a standstill. Africa remains under-represented in the Security Council, and hence cannot sufficiently influence decisions concerning the entire international community, including those relating to its very own interests. In this situation which is unfair, there is also the risk of overlooking the positions of the parties concerned and making mistakes.

Before concluding, let me mention the Fukushima disaster and the earthquake of last year which respectively plunged Japan and Turkey into mourning, so as to highlight the courage and spirit of selflessness of the people of these two friendly countries in such tragic circumstances.

- **The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

The effects of the crisis for most of our countries should, in my view, lead us to the following two observations:

- On the one hand, it is clear that uncontrolled globalization in recent years is what has caused the dysfunctions we are currently witnessing. By giving free reign to speculation – or so to say, letting the fox into the henhouse– we could not but expect chaos and anarchy. Therefore, it is necessary to re-inject into the global economic and financial system, an adequate dose of regulation, without returning to protectionism ;
- On the other hand, it is now obvious that economic relations between States, be they rich or poor, cannot be based solely on the law of profit. Unless the Millennium Development Goals are deemed null and ongoing G8 and G20 negotiations outdated, the international community cannot renounce the commitments made towards countries of the South. Solidarity among nations must remain one of the fundamental principles of human society, in keeping with the spirit of the United Nations Charter.

- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

The time has now come for me to thank your Dean once again for the kind wishes extended to me on your behalf and for his words of encouragement which I appreciate.

In return, I would be much obliged if you would extend my wishes to the distinguished authorities that you represent.

I extend to you, your families and your loved ones, my most sincere wishes for happiness, health and success.

Thank you for your kind attention.