

SPEECH BY THE HEAD OF STATE

In response to New Year wishes from the Diplomatic Corps

Yaounde, 9 January 2014

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

Though the crippling effects of the economic and financial crisis are fading, who would dare say that it is definitely behind us?

With a few exceptions, industrialized countries are still in recession or struggling to return to growth. Austerity policies based on public spending cuts and tax hikes are the order of the day. In many cases, the social fabric remains plagued by unemployment.

Emerging countries have not been spared by this downturn. They bear the brunt by opting for an inward-looking policy.

Developing countries are relatively less affected due to their limited integration into the global economy. They are striving to stimulate growth and emerge from being merely suppliers of raw materials by developing and diversifying their industrial sector.

Everyone has a vague feeling that the causes of the crisis have not truly been addressed. Therefore, a relapse is not to be ruled out.

For the time being, public opinion is content with this lull. In contrast, confidence which is indispensable for economic progress is yet to be restored. The major powers are giving no assurance of having adequately addressed the failings of the global economy, or of having understood the need for regulation. However, with the agreement reached by the WTO following years of negotiation, there is every reason to hope for the facilitation of trade, agriculture and development.

Under these circumstances of uncertainty though, it is not surprising that each State or group of States which is fortunate to have been spared by bankruptcy or recession should prefer to address the most urgent needs in a bid to restore equilibrium and growth. It seems such a long time ago since globalization heralded harmonious economic and financial development worldwide! Indeed, it has been a long time since solidarity ceased being the watchword in relations between industrialized and developing countries.

Is this a reason to lose all hope of restoring relations between rich and poor countries based on the principles of human solidarity? I do not believe so. I think that it will be possible to resume discussions on these issues once the turbulence of the crisis subsides. An example of this assertion is the debate that took place during the last United Nations General Assembly on development after 2015, the target year of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is heartening to note that despite the current difficulties, the international community has not lost sight of issues related to the conditions of living of the majority of people.

Unfortunately, human beings have their share of responsibility for the problems plaguing them, as evidenced by the tragic events rocking some regions of the planet.

I will begin with Syria which for so many months has been torn by a bloody civil war claiming countless victims. Mediation has failed. Negotiations between major powers at the Security Council have ended in stalemate. The agreement on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons is yet to pave the way for a genuine settlement. The situation is deadlocked. In addition, the conflict, which is causing hundreds of thousands of refugees to stream into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, could destabilize these countries and the region.

The situation in Iraq is far from stable. Recurrent attacks have already claimed thousands of victims. All efforts should be made to prevent Afghanistan from drifting along the same path when American troops withdraw.

The election of a new leadership in Iran has raised hopes for the normalization of relations between the country and the international community. Can one anticipate a lasting solution to negotiations on the nuclear capability of this great country?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted several decades. There seems to be hope for a two-State solution based on the mutual recognition of each other's right to exist. However, it is difficult to predict the outcome of the never-ending negotiations between the two parties under the auspices of the major powers.

Of course, they intervene in these conflicts either bilaterally or within the framework of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. Insofar as they have strategic national interests, it is inevitable for them to oppose each other when such interests are at stake. Yet, it is necessary for them to consider the concerns of the populations affected and their accession to the United Nations Charter when defining their positions. By so doing, they would earn more esteem and enhance the credibility of the Security Council.

The situation in Africa is hardly more encouraging. In North Africa where the “Arab Spring” raised great expectations, restoring equilibrium is proving difficult. In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in particular, transition to democratic forms of government remains challenging. It is hoped that these countries with early and brilliant civilizations will, through dialogue, restore harmony among the different components of their populations.

Closer to us geographically, our brothers in Mali had to deal with aggression by armed factions jeopardizing their territorial integrity and the foundations of their society. The situation was brought under control thanks to the intervention of France and Chad, with the support of ECOWAS and the African Union. However, the threat remains, as evidenced by several incidents in the Kidal region.

In fact, the threat extends far beyond the Sahel region, as seen in Northern Nigeria, CAR and even as far as Somalia and Kenya. Cameroon is not spared either, as attested by the hostage taking incidents witnessed lately in the Far-North Region of the country. Of course, we have always used all available means to ensure their release. Fortunately, we have succeeded. Once more, we would like to thank the French and Nigerian authorities for supporting our services.

In recent years, the African Union has examined security issues and developed a “peace and security architecture”. The events in Mali highlighted some gaps in the responsiveness of this mechanism. It will be necessary to pursue the review of this issue which we started last May. In fact, we have established the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). It is a new and, therefore, more effective rapid response mechanism.

The painful events that CAR has been experiencing for some time now have raised awareness that Africa should find the means to ensure its own security. France, through a United Nations mandate, intervened urgently to stop acts of brutality and strengthen MISCA which includes a Cameroonian contingent.

Faced with the worsening situation, we had to repatriate about four thousand of our compatriots. We want to salute the work of MISCA and Operation SANGARIS in protecting civilians and disarming the groups involved.

Each passing day reveals to us the complexity of the situation and the numerous humanitarian, security, law enforcement and administrative challenges to deal with. Hence, the pressing need for a holistic approach. Only a United Nations peacekeeping operation would effectively address such challenges. That is why this seems to be the right time to speed up preparations to transform MISCA into a peacekeeping operation, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2127.

At this juncture, I would like to mention the Paris Summit on Peace and Security in Africa in which I participated. The overall security issues on the continent were

discussed. I think the involvement of European powers - and especially France – , the United Nations and the international community is an expression of greater solidarity with Africa, and should thus be welcomed.

But terrorism is not limited to the continent. For some time now, it has reached the oceans, particularly the Gulf of Guinea. Countless ships have been boarded or crews kidnapped in this area.

To address this situation, an ECOWAS and ECCAS Heads of State Summit on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea was held in Yaounde on 24 and 25 June 2013. The summit appears to have met expectations. The Final Declaration provides for the establishment of an intercommunity framework for cooperation on maritime security. A code of conduct for the prevention and repression of acts of piracy was also adopted. Lastly, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed, providing for the setting up, in Cameroon, of an Inter-regional Centre for the coordination of measures taken by States.

Our diplomacy, which is mainly focused on affairs concerning our continent, also played its rightful role at the multilateral level, notably at the United Nations, but also at the continental, regional and bilateral levels.

In this regard, it should be noted that I paid an official visit to Paris at the beginning of the year to establish contact with the new French authorities. I also paid a state visit to Turkey in March. With the latter, which is becoming a major power, we signed various cooperation agreements which augur well for the development of our ties.

I also visited the Holy See at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Francis. During our discussions, I noted a broad convergence of views on topical international issues. Similarly, His Holiness and I share the feeling that in attempting to settle disputes and deal with migration issues, the international community should accord greater importance to human solidarity.

I also wish to recall that the process initiated by the Greentree Agreement came to an end in August. Our country has thus recovered its full sovereignty over the Bakassi area. The settlement of this case paved the way for strengthening friendly ties between Nigeria and Cameroon. It will remain, I believe, an example of dispute resolution in accordance with international law.

We also received in Yaounde special envoys from friendly countries, notably the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey - already mentioned - , eager to learn about our positions and to explore ways of boosting our trade. I also had the opportunity to meet with leaders of major international industrial groups willing to invest in our country.

I cannot conclude this overview before you who are informed and objective observers of the Cameroonian political scene without mentioning the various elections held in Cameroon in 2013.

First, I would like to tell you that everything possible, everything necessary was done to make them free and fair. If there were some failings, responsibility for them is attributable not to the government but to inexperience or inevitable human error. In any case, they did not affect the results. Besides, there were very few disputes which after examination, generally proved groundless.

I am very keen on setting the record straight, because it is very important for my country and for me personally, that our commitment to building a democratic Cameroon should not be called into question. Although, by definition, elections are an internal affair, the prominent representatives of the international community that you are, will appreciate, I hope, our determination to stay on that course.

However, democracy, lest it be perfunctory, must be accompanied by economic and social progress. This forms the very foundation of our vision of society. To achieve this, we rely primarily on our own strength, but also on cooperation with the partners you represent. I want to thank them for their great contribution to our development efforts. I would like to reaffirm that Cameroon will always welcome foreign investors, be they public or private. We will offer them win-win partnerships.

Before concluding, I would like to pay tribute to Nelson Mandela who passed away recently. He, who was the African conscience, is irreplaceable and will remain in our minds and hearts, and continue to illuminate our path to freedom and to embody the dignity of Africans.

- Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

It is now time for me to thank your Dean for the kind wishes he has extended to me on your behalf and for his encouragement which I appreciate. I would also like to thank him for his thoughtful and kind appreciation of my wife's humanitarian activities.

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

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

Thank you for your kind attention.