

50TH EDITION OF THE YOUTH DAY

HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH

Yaounde, 10 February 2016

My dear young compatriots,

The celebration of the National Youth Day always affords me a singular opportunity to address you.

This year, we are celebrating the fiftieth edition of the Youth Day, which is proof that the entire nation has been paying constant attention to youths for half a century now.

It cannot be an overstatement to say that our youths constitute a major asset for the nation's future. They are numerous and full of potential, dynamic and ambitious, conquering and creative.

In this regard, I wish to hail our young compatriots who have distinguished themselves lately through major innovations which are acknowledged by all. They took bold initiatives in the highly competitive domain of new information technologies and in many other domains such as agriculture.

They were not afraid. They were daring. Such has always been my recommendation to you. They were able to weather the deficiencies in our country which is still in the building process, and they have achieved the excellent results which we can all be proud of.

They are exemplars of personal patriotic commitment for our society. They deserve everyone's support. May they serve as a source of inspiration for those who are still hesitating or dragging their feet!

My dear young compatriots,

Patriotism is a virtue that some people might wrongly consider outdated. Even today, it remains a mark of responsible and nobly asserted citizenship for the nation.

Regardless of your role in society, you should be patriotic to deserve well of the nation: the farmer on his farm, the pupil or student in their studies, the workman on his work site, the teacher in the classroom, the doctor or nurse at the hospital, the researcher in his laboratory, the civil servant in his office, the trader in his shop, the mechanic in his garage, the sweeper at his workplace, the transporter driving his vehicle.

We should each ply our trade with patriotic love. Only then will we become forces of progress for our country.

In this regard, take the example of our youths who are engaged at the war front. For the past two years, they have been protecting our country from the terrorist threat. They are sustained and driven by patriotic love, often to the point of sacrificing their lives.

Their behaviour is unlike that of some other youths who do everything possible to get recruited into the public service and then desert their duty stations while continuing to receive their salaries. They represent examples of what should not be done.

Some youths join the public service just to obtain a service number, as they are fond of saying. These do not deserve well of the nation.

The unbridled quest for easy profit and wealth is a road to perdition that should be shunned by the youths.

It is proper for our youths to be imbued with republican and civic values. These should form the basis of a genuine commitment on every front, be it security, economic, cultural or socio-political.

My dear young compatriots,

I am fully aware of the difficulties you are facing. I know your doubts and worries. I know especially that you have difficulty getting a job.

Our capacity to create decent jobs is constrained by external factors related to the global economic environment, coupled with some domestic red tape. Nevertheless, we are not giving up. Our efforts over the past few years are starting to pay off.

The imminent commissioning of major infrastructures and the ongoing Three-Year Emergency Plan should consolidate such gains.

In the medium term, the launching of the extensive industrialization programme which I outlined on 31 December last year should create many job opportunities.

The development of our agricultural sector will be accorded a prime place. In this regard, I urge you to truly revolutionize your mindset. The soil has never betrayed anyone. Do not be afraid to take the plunge and become the agricultural entrepreneurs that Cameroon needs. It is a noble and rewarding trade in the so-called real economy.

I therefore I urge the elders to shoulder their responsibility: it is proper to urge the youths to work the land and it is unwise to dissuade them from doing so.

It is equally important to set a good example for them: urban workers should also undertake activities in rural areas. Through their actions and those of the Government, we should make our villages more youth-friendly.

It is not a matter of waiting to amass substantial resources. It is, first and foremost, a matter of determination and commitment. In agriculture, a little often goes a long way.

There are many Government programmes designed to support rural development. Obtain information on such programmes. You should be able to make the most of them.

In addition, there is another domain which I know you of the so-called "Android" generation hold most dear, namely the development of the digital economy.

To each generation, its historic challenges for the nation's future! I can say that one of the major challenges for our youths is to manage to keep abreast of the astounding phenomenon of the digital economy.

I urge the entire nation to resolutely mobilize and support the numerous initiatives undertaken by our youths in this area:

- The Government should systematically and effectively continue setting up appropriate infrastructure, but also cleaning up and properly regulating this key sector in the interest of the national economy and the development of youth employment.
- Public or private training institutions are called upon to fully play their role. They must identify the new trades and tailor their syllabuses accordingly.
- Large enterprises and other public and private entities should set the example by progressively carrying out their own digital switchover.
- Financial institutions definitely stand to benefit by developing specific programmes to support youth-initiated projects in this new economy.

It is through such collective commitment that we will be able to rise to the challenge of digital transition.

These two sectors, namely agriculture and digital economy, require us to continue with and step up the professionalization of our secondary education.

In higher education, the various stakeholders have been mobilized to progressively provide the job market with human resources that meet the new requirements.

Enterprises are not seeking out for just graduates, but a labour force that is well trained in specific trades and that is constantly adapted to global trends.

To meet this expectation, I am pleased to note that the Government has opened three Pilot Centres of Excellence in Douala, Limbe and Sangmelima, at the cost of about 21 billion, to provide retraining and skills upgrading for senior technicians and other skilled workers.

The economic integration of youths is thus a constant concern. Our actions will continue with greater momentum to enable our youths to make the most of the numerous programmes and projects that are underway or in the pipeline.

To that end, I have just given instructions for the launch of a three-year "Special Youth" plan worth CFAF 102 billion in total.

This plan should facilitate and accelerate the economic integration of our youths. We should all take a keen interest in it. In so doing, I believe, you will be demonstrating your "economic patriotism".

Furthermore, I believe that you could reap much benefit from the good citizenship education programmes offered by the Civic Service Agency for Participation in Development.

This very timely initiative has already set up hundreds of local committees countrywide. You should sign on and enjoy its benefits.

My dear young compatriots,

I gave you a hint about it. The sky is gradually clearing up. The clouds are dispersing progressively.

I am aware that you, more than the other population segments, are affected by unemployment. I, however, urge you to look to the future with more confidence. Of course, we have not yet reached our goal, but we are making progress against all the odds.

More effort is definitely required from us to achieve stronger, more stable and more sustainable growth. We will undoubtedly continue to encounter obstacles along the way; however, it behoves us to overcome them resolutely and bravely with everyone's participation.

I have just outlined all the benefits you can reap from working the land, from our new-found industrialization and also from the digital economy.

Thus, through your active participation, you are expected to inevitably and progressively take the nation's future into your own hands, under the benevolent mentorship of the elders, in a properly organized blending of generations.

To that end, you should have faith in the future, despite the challenges.

Rest assured that I will spare no effort to support you in your determination to succeed.

Happy Youth Day to each and every one of you!

Long live Cameroon's youths!

Long live Cameroon!