

47TH EDITION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH

Yaounde, 10 February 2013

My dear young compatriots,

On the occasion of the National Youth Day, I always make an appraisal of what Government has done for you in the areas of education, youth affairs and civic training, and inform you of our plans for the near future.

The theme chosen for this year's celebration: "*Youth: Civic Responsibility and Participation in the Development Process*" forms the basis of the message of hope I have for you, especially those of you who are in doubt, are disillusioned and have perhaps lost faith in their future.

I will first of all address the youth who are "under mentorship", namely those attending schools, colleges, high schools, universities or higher education institutes. For them, the State and their parents are making huge sacrifices. The budgets of the ministries concerned are among the country's highest. Thanks to such budgetary allocations, which represent more than 15% of the overall State budget, schools have been built, teachers recruited and free primary education provided. The youth in this group should be aware of the efforts being made for them by the national community, and the resulting obligation to succeed.

Of course, obtaining a certificate is not always a guarantee of access to a job. In this regard however, the State is doing everything possible by absorbing many young graduates into the public service and the security services.

I also want to directly address the youth who are not attending school, those who have dropped out of the school system too soon and graduates who have not yet found a job and who are losing all hope of ever finding one. In the best case scenario, they are engaged in some informal sector activity, often below their capacities. Others are not so lucky and wallow in idleness or vagrancy, and sometimes drift into delinquency. Those who have a job, be they handcart pushers, loaders, jobbers, motorcycle taxi riders, etc., may bear a grudge against society. I can also understand if they are tempted to be rebellious. But that would not be the right course to follow, for experience shows that this worsens problems without providing any solution.

I will now turn to teachers - many of who are youths by the way - to whom we have entrusted our children to be imparted knowledge which is vital for their integration into society and to be prepared for responsible citizenship. Those who are engaged in what, not so long ago, was regarded as a calling rather than a profession are - I am aware - sometimes discouraged. Salary levels, living conditions, particularly in the rural areas, or the debasement of the teaching profession, largely account for this situation.

It is clear that such problems are not peculiar to Cameroon and it is true that modern society has upset the value system we were used to. However, there is no use hiding behind a supposed "crisis of civilization" to find explanations or excuses. We must take responsibility for our weaknesses to be able to find solutions.

To the first group, namely youth attending school and graduates, I would say that the outlook over the next few years should be more positive. The recovery of our economy, driven by the implementation of our major projects and our agrarian revolution will inevitably generate new job opportunities. For instance, 200,000 formal sector jobs will be created in the year 2013. This should encourage our youth to study hard and be best placed to face the stiff competition that lies ahead.

Concerning those in the second group who, due to circumstances, are marginalized, I want them to know that I appreciate their courage in accepting the often difficult tasks to support their families. Rather than looking down on them, we should acknowledge their unquestionably useful social role. Take, for instance, the case of motorcycle taxi riders.

I know that this profession is not always highly regarded due to some "black sheep" who have joined its ranks. However, most of the youths involved are simply looking for a means of livelihood. Are we not happy that we can reach difficult locations quickly and cheaply? To avoid unbecoming conduct, there is clearly a need to organize the profession and consider providing training courses covering both the Highway Code, especially the wearing of helmets, and two-wheeler riding techniques.

Right off, I believe the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, in conjunction with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, is best suited to organize such training courses, either through existing structures involved in youth socio-economic empowerment or by establishing other bodies. To begin with, I enjoin these ministries to submit to me proposals in this regard.

What I have just said also applies to the other activities of the informal sector. Definitely, the experience of associations and non-governmental organizations in the domain of informal business mentoring and support should be seriously explored and developed.

To teachers, I want once more to say that I have much esteem for them and I understand them. They play a pivotal role in the training of our youth. That is why it is imperative for them to get back that "sacred fire". This could be achieved in two ways. Firstly, as I said last year on the same occasion, by starting a broad-based reflection on the future of our educational system, one

objective of which should be to rehabilitate the teaching profession. Secondly, by pursuing an open-minded dialogue on teachers' grievances, including their salaries. The education and training sector, you are aware, is one of my priorities. Things will improve gradually in a genuine partnership between teachers and their supervisory authorities.

It would be paradoxical that in Cameroon, teachers are not given their rightful place whereas the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences is planning to establish a Centre of Excellence in our country to build the capacity of our scientific community. This mark of trust by a prestigious knowledge institution should not only consolidate our own trust in ourselves, but also spur our youth to choose studies in the scientific and technical fields in which they are naturally gifted.

Lastly, I would like to address an issue that is dear to me and to which I have often drawn your attention. Moral standards are falling among our youth. It suffices to read the newspaper titbits to realize this. Well, may be the behaviour of some youths is to some extent only a reflection of our society. But that is not a good excuse. In fact, even if we succeed in improving the living standards of our population, ensuring the proper functioning of our democratic institutions, and maintaining peace and stability in our country, the peaceful and prosperous society we want to build will be undermined from within if such achievements are not backed by improved public morality.

That is why I urge you, the youth, to adopt morally upright and responsible behaviours. I equally call on your parents to assume their responsibility and to guide you on this path. It cannot be overemphasized that good citizenship is the foundation of every society. Our churches, our temples and our mosques should once more become true schools of good citizenship, rigour and morality.

Before concluding, I would like us to spare a thought for Kouokam Géraldine, a pupil of the Mbanga Evangelical School, who died a few days ago during the launching of the Youth Week.

Dear young compatriots,

You are the future of our Nation. All our hopes are pinned on you. Be worthy of the ambitions we place in you.

Happy Youth Day to you all!

Long Live the Cameroonian youth!

Long Live Cameroon!