

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2009

Fellow Cameroonians,

My Dear Compatriots,

During the year just ended, Cameroon – like most countries – witnessed a context still strongly marked by the global economic and financial crisis.

A year ago, when we were beginning to suffer its early effects, I stated that at first glance the impact of the crisis could be relatively limited, as far as we are concerned. I however added that one could not rule out the possibility of some sectors of our economy being affected.

Generally, these assumptions were proven true. Our financial sector resisted fairly well. On the other hand, our timber, aluminium, cotton and rubber exports declined owing to a drop in commodity prices. This slowdown in our economic activity was not without consequences: tax and customs revenues dropped and this affected employment. As was foreseeable, foreign investments were deferred and there was a credit crunch.

On the whole, our economy was weakened, but its foundations were not shaken, as in some major countries.

Some productive activities, particularly in agriculture even improved. However, our GDP growth rate stagnated all the same. In 2009, it declined compared to the previous year.

Under such circumstances, what was the appropriate thing to do? As I have said on several occasions, we had to stay on course, to take urgent measures to cater for the population segment most exposed to the economic slowdown and anticipate the crisis. That we did by reducing the prices of essential goods, supporting consumption and resuming substantial recruitments into the public service. This was no easy task for, in view of the dwindling revenue, we had to maintain fiscal discipline as strictly as possible so as to avoid jeopardizing the future. These efforts earned us the understanding and support of the International Monetary Fund which in the

course of the year provided us with considerable financial assistance to cope with our difficulties.

The global financial crisis undoubtedly slowed down investments from developed countries. This delayed the implementation of some of our major projects. Perhaps we should have been more dynamic in carrying them through before the recession hit our foreign partners. In any case, we pursued negotiations with companies that were willing to partner with us in implementing our development programmes in the prospect of a global economic recovery.

I had hoped that we would take advantage of this “time-out” to revive activities in non-export driven productive sectors and infrastructure, using our investment budget and HIPC resources. Although some progress was made, notably in the domains of education, health and roads, one cannot but note that we fell short of our objectives, particularly in the energy sector.

In reshuffling the Government, I therefore had to issue firm guidelines in order to give a new impetus to our economy in anticipation of a return to growth. In this regard, I believe encouraging signs are beginning to show with improved oil and other commodity prices.

It may not be too early to draw some lessons from the consequences of the crisis for our country, a crisis - remember - for which we are in no way responsible. As I said earlier, the sectors that suffered the most are commodity exports whose prices are fixed without our involvement. We therefore need to progressively free ourselves from such dependence by, where possible, setting up processing industries which would have the advantage of creating jobs.

The second lesson to be learnt is that the fundamentals of our economy resisted fairly well. Our savings performance was not affected. Investors did not withdraw. In short, we weathered the storm with limited damage and are ready to resolutely forge ahead once again when the global economic recovery will gain momentum.

My Dear Compatriots,

Our focus on the economy did not induce us to overlook the furtherance of our democratic process which remains one of the two major thrusts of our policy of greater achievements for Cameroon. We have worked diligently to start up ELECAM. Given that its mandate has already

been defined and its management put in place, it had to extend its network nationwide. This process is under way and may require some adjustments. Ultimately, we will have an electoral mechanism that will make the results of upcoming polls unchallengeable.

At the same time, we have also methodically initiated the next phase of the decentralization process, namely the transfer of jurisdiction and resources to local authorities. This phase will be no less delicate, as we will have to put theory into practice. Failure is not an option, as this means nothing short of giving Cameroonians at the local level the possibility of participating in the management of their own affairs. We have now paved the way for the establishment of the Senate.

Democracy however also means protecting public funds. That is why we started waging a merciless war against corruption. No one should expect us to stop midway through. We will continue to the very end, no matter what some people might say.

Similarly, a climate of insecurity will not be allowed to take hold and disrupt the lives of our fellow-citizens in urban centres and rural areas. We are determined to use all the necessary means to stamp out organized banditry and highway robbery.

I also seize this opportunity to denounce systematic contestation by a minority of our compatriots who readily resort to lie-telling and slander. Undoubtedly, they would rather our country plunged into all forms of chaos for them to achieve their aims.

Furthermore, and despite crisis-related difficulties, we have pursued our actions in the social and infrastructure domains in the broadest sense.

New health centres have been opened and other health establishments are in the pipeline. A general social security scheme is being studied.

Facilities, notably road and urban infrastructure, have been constructed to improve the living conditions of our populations.

In the near future, work will begin on a number of sports facilities, in addition to the recently inaugurated Yaoundé sports complex.

In 2009, the school and university system modernization policy led to the creation and construction of new primary, secondary and higher

education institutions. Thousands of teachers at all levels were recruited; a special allocation in the amount of 4 108 000 000 CFA F has been instituted for University research. It will be increased in 2010. To improve the quality of human capital and rise to the challenges of the future more efficiently, I have decided to grant, as from 1 January 2010, an overall annual allowance of about three billion CFA francs to the best students in Cameroonian Universities.

In the domain of basic infrastructure, we will in 2010 be launching the construction works of the Lom- Pangar hydro-electric dam, the Kribi deep-sea port, the Memve'ele dam, the Kribi natural gas power plant, the Mekin mini hydro-electric power station on the Dja, the rehabilitation and extension of water supply systems in Yaoundé, Douala and several other towns and localities throughout the national territory, and the modernization of the road networks in most of our towns.

Regarding the mining sector, we will in 2010 start the construction of the Nkamouna cobalt, nickel and manganese mine, diamond mining at Mobilong and the rehabilitation of the ex-Cellucam site for the start of activities of the Edeatech science and technology park. We will speed up the process that should lead to the mining of bauxite at Minim-Martap-Ngaoundal and iron at Mballam. As concerns Bétaré-Oya gold, industrial mining started in 2009. To stimulate growth in the rural world, an Agro-pastoral Show will be held in Ebolowa in 2010.

Also worth mentioning is the laying of the foundation stone of the Olembe social housing programme which will comprise 10 000 housing units by 2013. A similar project should soon be launched at Douala, in the 8 other regional headquarters and in the university towns.

My Dear Compatriots,

You can therefore see that with all these projects, Cameroon undoubtedly has a bright future. Such a promising future is however possible only with the participation of each and every one. It can only be the fruit of our joint effort.

This means that each and every one of us must know that he or she has a role to play to create the conditions conducive to doing business, attracting investments and implementing the investment projects which are requisites for the development and progress of our country.

The development and progress to which we aspire require that we should be capable of giving priority to the common weal. This does not concern only the public authorities; it also concerns all Cameroonians without exception.

My Dear Compatriots,

Our country's participation in world affairs intensified in the year now ending. This reflects our constant determination to assert our presence and make our voice heard in the concert of Nations. It also reflects our external partners' esteem for our country. The various trips that I have made also afforded me the opportunity to discover that our Diaspora which is of remarkable quality supports our efforts and remains, despite the distance separating us, very attached to our country.

I may be revisiting these issues subsequently. Today, I would rather invite you to reflect on an event which will forever remain memorable in the history of our Nation.

Half a century ago, our country's destiny changed suddenly. On 1 January 1960, our independence was proclaimed. As from tomorrow, we will therefore be celebrating the 50th anniversary of our accession to sovereignty.

I need not underscore the importance of this event. A chapter of our history was being closed and another being opened to be written by us.

Let us however remember that before independence came, some had been dreaming about it, had fought to obtain it and had sacrificed their lives for it. Our people shall forever be grateful to them.

What were we to do with the legacy inherited from them? Build a Nation from groups whose differences outnumbered their commonalities and whom the colonizers had lumped together within arbitrary boundaries. Building a Nation means forging the desire to live together as well as the desire to continue to assert the legacy received. This is a daunting challenge which fifty years have not been too much to meet.

My Dear Compatriots,

Well, I believe that we have met this unprecedented challenge. Today, there is a Cameroonian Nation. Our national unity is not an empty word. To prove it, when the Indomitable Lions excel in international

competitions, which Cameroonian does not feel extremely proud, regardless of his or her place of origin?

That is why the 1st of January 2010 must be for us all, not only a day of contemplation in memory of those who have passed on, and who helped build our Nation, but also a day of joy, for what might have seemed an impossible dream has become a reality.

Does this mean our job is done? Of course not! For, we owe a future of justice and prosperity to this nation of ours. Such is the meaning of the action we are carrying out at the service of our country and which we will pursue regardless of the obstacles we may encounter on our path.

For Cameroon, 2010 will therefore be the year of the fiftieth anniversary of its independence. The celebrations will naturally culminate in our National Day on the 20th of May, with the holding of the “Yaoundé Conference” during which eminent personalities will debate on Africa’s place in the world. We will thus have given this very memorable event, its true political, social and cultural dimension.

My Dear Compatriots,

The fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2010 is a prelude to the fiftieth anniversary of Reunification which we will be celebrating in 2011.

These two milestones, charged with emotions, memories and symbols urge us more than ever before to consolidate our achievements, foremost among which are national unity and peace, and to strive further and together to build a great and beautiful country.

My Dear Compatriots,

It is now time for me to extend to each and every one of you my most sincere wishes for good health and happiness in the New Year.

Happy and Prosperous New Year 2010

Long live Cameroon.