

HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH

Yaounde, 10 February 2010

My dear young compatriots,

As you are already aware, 2010 will not be just another year. It does indeed mark the fiftieth anniversary of our accession to sovereignty.

This memorable event is certainly of great significance to all Cameroonians in that it restored their dignity as humans and citizens. However, for you, dear young compatriots, it must have special significance.

It would indeed not be surprising if you, who were born two or three decades later, considered this the normal and somewhat inevitable outcome of a historical process. Perhaps! Nevertheless, as I recalled a few weeks ago, do not forget that it was at first an inconceivable dream for which youth like you struggled, sacrificed themselves and subsequently devoted their lives to building a State and forging nationhood.

During this half-century of exercising our sovereignty, many things have changed, no matter what some people might think. Take a look at the photographs taken at the dawn of our independence, that have turned yellow with age. Our cities were merely big villages, our roads dusty tracks. The majority of our people had no access to schools and let alone universities, as none existed then.

See how far we have come.

The first duty that loyalty to the ideals of the pioneers of our independence requires of you is to preserve and consolidate the achievements of the last fifty years.

First, concerning democracy, our country will soon have a complete democratic system. This is not the least of our successes. It will be your duty to continue to ensure its smooth functioning, in a spirit of tolerance and in line with the general interest. As you are aware, that is the only way to guarantee our stability and ensure our economic and social progress.

For the time being, however, you should make the most of the Nation's exceptional effort to improve our school and university system. In keeping with the moral contract that I entered into with you, huge resources have been mobilized to improve the opportunities and quality of training.

Unlike last year, I will not dwell on what has been accomplished, as you can see for yourselves that new primary and secondary schools have been constructed, thousands of teachers have been recruited at all levels, various infrastructure have been built to improve the living conditions of students and teachers, new faculties, institutes and laboratories have been opened, measures have been taken to professionalize the different levels of education, funds have been released to ease research and encourage the best students, etc. This list is not exhaustive.

Bear in mind that the promises made to you have been kept. In total, for several years now, about one-fifth of the State budget has been devoted to the development of the educational sector. This effort will be pursued in 2010.

Dear young compatriots,

The skills you will have acquired and that will make you tomorrow's elite, should be placed at the service of your country's development. That will be your second priority. Accordingly, you should prepare yourselves to that end.

I am, indeed, convinced that in the next few months, our major development projects, that had been delayed by the crisis and, we should say it, by the inertia of some government services, will be revived. The domains concerned include energy, mining, industry, water, infrastructure, and agriculture. We will therefore need more engineers, economists, doctors, teachers, statisticians, technicians, and specialists in various areas.

Such revival should be a powerful lever to reduce unemployment that is the main problem currently facing our youth. Indeed, I have always believed that the real solution to this problem would come from an upturn in our economy. However, apart from the actions undertaken by the National Employment Fund, we have not ignored those proposed by the Rural and Urban Youth Support Programme which has generated thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities and the Youth Socio-economic Integration Project which has helped set up 35 production co-operatives.

This notwithstanding, the participation of the youth in development is not solely a matter of technical competence. It also implies personal civic commitment. Such is the purpose of the Youth Plan that has been submitted to the Government for approval and the National Youth Council that is taking shape with the recent election of its governing bodies. You now have a

dialogue and consultation forum that will help mainstream your aspirations in development strategies. The National Civic Service for Participation in Development, whose constituent instruments will soon be approved, will add its operational component to this mechanism.

The commitment of the youth to development also has a moral and even patriotic dimension based on national solidarity and devotion to the general interest. These virtues should be nurtured in the different youth associations supervised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs. These associations will steer youths away from deviations that are now commonplace in modern society, notably corruption that has done so much damage and wrong to our country.

My dear young compatriots,

There are also other tasks which will fall squarely on your shoulders in the coming decades. They go far beyond our national boundaries. I am referring to the major challenges of the 21st century which are all serious threats to mankind and of which the international community became aware belatedly.

Firstly, climatic warming. This recently hit the headlines during the Copenhagen Conference. Although this conference did not achieve its initial objectives, it was however not a failure, given that participants recognized the magnitude and urgency of the problem. In any case, this issue will be a long haul.

Cameroon is concerned on two accounts. As a “victim”, so to speak, with the drying up of Lake Chad, desertification of its northern part and rising sea levels; and also as a stakeholder in seeking solutions since it is our responsibility to protect part of the Congo basin, the second lung of our planet.

You will therefore have a role to play in the quest for compromise and compensation within the framework of the negotiations which started in Copenhagen and will probably continue for a long time. Meanwhile, it would be advisable for you to be involved in various environmental protection campaigns, in particular, operation “Green Sahel” which is aimed at planting trees in vast areas of the national territory. Increased atmospheric pollution in our country, due to the intensification of automobile transport and industrial wastes, should also be your concern.

Secondly, you will have to address the problem of food shortage, which not so long ago led to social strife all over the world. Normally, our country which is clearly agriculture-based should not be concerned by this problem. Yet, we import large quantities of rice, maize and other grains which we ourselves could produce. In so doing, we surely jeopardize our foreign trade balance.

This is a paradoxical situation. We must revisit this issue altogether, develop rice and maize farming, revive plantain farming and foster the growing of other food crops. In that way, we would not only be able to feed our population, but also to sell our surplus produce to neighbouring countries. This, of course, will require opening up farm-to-market roads in some parts of our country, where farmers find it difficult to market their produce. We can easily imagine the incidence of such a policy on employment and the standard of living in our rural areas. Many of you could play a key role in this policy.

Thirdly, you must also contribute to the fight against pandemic diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria which are the leading causes of death in our country. To this end, the State has already made considerable efforts within the framework of its public health policy by building new health facilities and modernizing their equipment. The treatment of pandemics has been made more accessible. It is up to you to pursue the battle until these scourges are eradicated.

Lastly, and this will not be the least of your tasks, you have to take over the fight against poverty which affects nearly 40 % of our population. This inequality which concerns all aspects of life: feeding, health, education, livelihoods, etc., is intolerable in a society where human dignity is the topmost value. Although significant efforts have been made in recent years to roll back poverty, I believe that we will only overcome it through a stronger and sustained commitment.

Before concluding, I would have loved to join you in congratulating the Indomitable Lions on their performance at the recent Africa Cup of Nations. Fate decided otherwise. That notwithstanding, our national team, which is undergoing change, displayed great qualities. Let us give it time to mature and let us continue to have confidence in it. I am sure that during the upcoming Football World Cup, it will be capable of springing surprises.

I seize this opportunity to inform you that I intend to commission a study for the creation of an Advanced Football Training School which, in conjunction with the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and existing federations and academies, will be responsible for providing training and further training to young people who display an exceptional aptitude for our “king sport”.

My dear young compatriots,

I have dwelled on the urgent challenges that you will be facing in this century which will be your century. Other challenges will surely crop up. However, continuous scientific and technological advancement will provide you with new ways of confronting them.

You will thus need to address these challenges with confidence. With even more confidence as you will have faith in the future of your country and as you would have acquired the knowledge necessary for understanding the world of tomorrow.

Because, make no mistake about it, a new world, not to say a new civilization, is taking shape. To avoid being sidelined, you must be among the best. I know you can.

Happy Youth Day to all!

Long live the Cameroonian youth!

Long live Cameroon!