

**PRESENTATION OF 2010 NEW YEAR WISHES
BY MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF STATE

Yaounde, 6 January 2010

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

Addressing my compatriots a few days ago, I dwelled on the consequences of the crisis for Cameroon. I believe it is important to revisit them before you, for all countries, rich or poor, have been affected to varying degrees.

Of course, we must commend the concerted effort made by the major countries to offset the adverse effects of the crisis on the financial system and real economy of the world, thus averting a global disaster comparable to that of the 1930s.

Having said that, it may be noted that the actions taken by States of the North were aimed mainly at avoiding the bankruptcy of their banking sectors and the paralysis of their economies. While it may be a good thing that we have averted a chain reaction which could have ruined the most fragile economies, we must not however forget that we have been victims of certain dysfunctions for which we were not in any way responsible.

For, as I said, we have not been spared by the crisis. Our exports have declined. Commodity prices have slumped. Our growth has stagnated.

A number of questions now arise. Is the crisis over? Can it return? When will economic revival come?

Undoubtedly, the major countries which dominate the world economy are now aware that the World was on the brink of a disaster and that strong measures should be taken to prevent the recurrence of the events that led to the crisis. That is what the London G8 and Pittsburgh G20 participants set out to achieve. New guidelines have been formulated to control the global financial system and check speculation and fraud.

World trade having been affected by the crisis, it will also be necessary to review its functioning in order to take into account the risk of a return to protectionism and the slump in commodity prices.

Lastly, it seems that the problems of underdevelopment have been fathomed and that efforts are being made to resolve them.

The question now is whether the regulation which is in the pipeline and the intentions as expressed will materialize. The IMF's role at the centre of the mechanism as regulator of the system and lender is a good sign. We must however avoid being overconfident as we cannot rule out the possibility of repeating past mistakes.

Meanwhile, early signs of recovery are beginning to show. Oil prices are rallying. Financial markets are picking up despite a few hitches. Is it merely a swallow or really a summertime of recovery? It is definitely too early to answer this question. In any case, we must be ready for it without forgetting that the by-products of the crisis, namely inflation, deficits, debts and employment will sooner or later need to be resolved.

One may wonder if the damage caused by the crisis and the fear of a possible resurgence have not aroused amongst leaders of the major countries, the feeling that there is a need to immediately address the problems on which the future of the world depends and in this regard to avoid the familiar rhetoric. If such is the case, then, as the saying goes, a disappointment is sometimes a blessing in disguise.

In actual fact, there is no shortage of major challenges: the food crisis affecting a billion humans, global warming and its corollaries, namely greenhouse gas emissions and pollution; risk of nuclear proliferation; spread of major pandemic diseases; persistent threat of terrorism; dwindling development assistance and inadequate representation of emerging countries and developing countries in international bodies, just to name a few.

This begs the following question: are we about to witness a new era in international relations?

In my opinion, certain signs suggest this. The G20 meetings, which extended consultation not only to emerging countries but also other major stakeholders of the global economy, seem to pave the way for a more equitable globalization and better consideration of the interests of the South. The different summits, notably on the food crisis and climate change may be seen as serious initiatives to prevent the disasters threatening humanity, representing a break with the usual rhetoric.

Of course, this great change, if it comes, will take time. However, at this point, it is important that a majority of States are taking a new approach to the challenges of our time, and one can detect signs of responsible commitment and a real determination to succeed.

Another important factor is what has occurred in recent months. Since the election of President Obama, the first world power seems more willing than before to follow the path of dialogue and consultation. Contacts have been made with players hitherto deemed to be pariahs. In

general, the approach to major international issues seems to be more open and, concerning in particular the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, the determination to break the stalemate is more visible. Similarly, as regards emerging countries and developing countries, various signs suggest that their interests and aspirations are better understood. There is also a prevailing impression that unilateralism is on the decline and the action of the United Nations is being given its due recognition.

This all augurs well and if this trend were maintained, one may expect, in the long run, an improvement in the international climate and progress in resolving the problems that have remained pending for several decades.

The Dean, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For our part, we have tried to be part of the ongoing change. At the United Nations, as each year, I championed the cause of populations of the South affected by the crisis but which did not benefit from the same support as in countries of the North. I noted that this situation was all the more unfair as the latter were in no way responsible for the dysfunctions which disrupted the real global economy. I also indicated that the behaviours that caused the crisis actually reflected a violation of well-known ethical rules in the domain and recalled that on this issue, I had warned the international community several years earlier.

In Copenhagen, I took a stance on climate change for which we are not responsible either, but which requires us to protect our forests without the proposed compensation being commensurate with our export losses. Of course, this aspect of the problem should be better taken into account.

At the sub-regional level, after taking stock of the institutional evolution of CEMAC, we evaluated the repercussions of the crisis on our States and ways of addressing them, during an extraordinary summit held in Libreville. As far as I am concerned, one of the best ways is to close ranks and move resolutely towards economic integration. To that end, we will need to put order in our financial institutions and implement our regional economic programme. The solutions to the other problems should follow logically.

I seize this opportunity to say how pleased we were to welcome to Yaounde the new President of Gabon, Mr Ali BONGO ONDIMBA, and more recently the Presidents of Chad and CAR, Messrs Idriss DEBY ITNO and François BOZIZE. During these visits, we reviewed issues of common interest in a brotherly and supportive spirit.

We have also held sustained dialogue with multilateral and bilateral players: with the European Union which remains our leading partner in terms of official development assistance and whose constant support we appreciate; with the IMF and the World Bank whose role, I repeat, will be of vital importance for our country's economic revival; with the Commonwealth and the Francophonie which cooperate with us in various domains; and with the agencies of the United Nations which are heavily represented in Cameroon.

At the bilateral level, we had the opportunity in 2009 to strengthen our ties with the countries of the European Union, notably France. Following the visit of the French Prime Minister, François FILLON to Yaounde, which saw the signing of three agreements modernizing our relations in various domains, I paid an official visit to France during which I held in-depth discussions with President Nicolas SARKOZY and various personalities of the political and business circles. These contacts augur well for relations between our two countries.

I must also mention with satisfaction the positive evolution of our relations with China and Japan whose exemplary assistance is contributing to our development in various major sectors.

I will specially mention the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI who honoured us by visiting Cameroon in March as part of preparations for the Second Synod for Africa. This visit – the third in 25 years of a Supreme Pontiff – clearly shows the attachment of the Holy See to our country and beyond that, to our continent. It was an occasion for fruitful discussions, friendly contacts and also great public enthusiasm.

Of course, Africa remained the focus of our major concerns. An Africa which is suffering, which is struggling to develop and find its place in the concert of Nations. Even if certain tensions seem to be easing, too many African countries continue to experience painful situations as in Somalia, Eastern DRC and more recently Guinea Conakry.

We certainly support the efforts of the African Union and regional organizations, but it is clear that our resources are inadequate. My question is: will the international community remain indifferent to Africa's woes? I do not want to believe that.

I am convinced that the hostilities, within or between States are largely attributable to underdevelopment. This is where we must act, and only the International Community has the means to do so.

The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

You may feel that I have been over optimistic throughout this address. I believe that one needs to be so, if things must change. Permit me to quote an early 20th century French historian who, although extremely conservative, said “optimism is the faith of revolutions”. Now is the time to thank your Dean for the warm wishes extended to me on your behalf and for his friendly words of encouragement which I highly appreciate. Since he will be leaving us, I wish him well as he pursues his brilliant career.

Furthermore, I would be much obliged if you would extend my wishes to the Distinguished Authorities that you represent.

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

Thank you for your kind attention./-