

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT PAUL BIYA AT A LUNCHEON OFFERED ON  
THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF AFRICAN STATES IN PARIS**

*Tuesday, 13 July 2010*

**The President of the French Republic,  
Heads of State,  
Representatives of Heads of State,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I feel honoured to take the floor on behalf of my colleagues at this luncheon offered on the occasion of the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our States in Paris.

Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking you for your kind words. I would also like to thank you sincerely for the excellent initiative in convening this meeting. It will enable us to revisit our common history so as to come to terms with it, reaffirm our determination to continue building our future together more than ever before.

Various celebrations have already taken place in some of our countries. Others will follow in the coming months. The participation of a former colonial power in the commemoration of a historic moment for each of our States gives an added dimension to the significance of the event.

You have done so with sincerity, faith and conviction. On these different points, Mr President, we share your vision in essence.

For any country, accession to sovereignty means laying a foundation. It marks the end of one era and the start of another. It is and will remain boldly engraved in the history of the country concerned.

Furthermore, independence has a double significance for us Africans.

Initially, it was synonymous with freedom, whether won, negotiated or granted. In that regard, our nationalist leaders, like those of Central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were the distant heirs of your great leaders of the Age of Enlightenment and the revolutionaries of 1789.

It equally entailed, for our predecessors, our elders, assuming responsibilities, being accountable for their actions, being liable to mistakes, becoming masters of their destinies, in short, regaining their dignity.

Such is the common moral legacy that we inherited. This is not surprising, given that we were all under the same power, irrespective of its form, either as a colony or a trust territory, its duration, from two centuries to a few decades, depending on the territories.

It is clear that colonisation was not a bed of roses. Fortunately, thanks to General de Gaulle and his understanding of History, it ended honourably. Since then, we have evolved progressively towards forms of government and methods of development that are adapted to our times.

Of course, we knew, on both sides, that our relations would change. Plunged in the “great ocean” of the international community, some amount of diversification of our relations with other countries, in our best interests became evident. For my part, I have never had the feeling that France has held it against us. That is why I object to terms such as “pré carré” or “Françafrique” often employed to qualify our relations. Mr President, you have yourself mentioned France’s opening up to other African States. This is confirmed by the participation of many non-French speaking countries at the last Africa/France summit in Nice.

Fifty years after independence, what assessment can be made of this long road we have travelled together?

Our presence here today is a first answer to that. However, to go further, I would say that it is especially an “aspiration to justice”, in all forms, which our peoples indisputably inherited from our common history. Indeed, this has often posed problems to us leaders. In addition, the use of a common language which remains an unparalleled instrument of communication and access to a prestigious culture which continues to develop as it diversifies.

On such common foundations, we have over the years been able to establish relations that are modern and void of complexes. In many areas, particularly with respect to global warming, food security and regulating globalization, our viewpoints are often similar or the same.

I will not fail to mention the development assistance to which France, despite its own difficulties, continues to be a leading contributor. The different pronouncements you have just made concerning aid are particularly significant in this regard.

Neither can we forget that France was a prime mover in negotiating the cancellation of the debt of poor countries, thus enabling most of us to return to growth.

Lastly, I believe that I do speak for my colleagues as I personally thank you for the initiative you have taken to grant the same retirement benefits to African ex-servicemen as their French comrades. Your decision will be unanimously welcomed not only by the persons concerned but also by all our public opinions.

As you did yourself indicate, the relation between France and French-speaking African countries can rightly boast of its "uniqueness". Apart from the purely sentimental dimension that goes with a common past, both happy and sad, that relation has been able to adapt to changing times and this has given it fresh impetus. By not pretending to be an exclusive relationship and by leaving room for opening up to other horizons, it is sure to stand the test of time and trivialization.

**Mr President,**

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like once more to thank you for affording us the opportunity to meet here in this beautiful city of Paris, which we know very well, and together commemorate a crucial moment in our common history.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I now invite you to raise your glasses to the friendship ties existing between France and Africa!

Thank you for your kind attention.