

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2021

Fellow Cameroonians,

My Dear Compatriots,

This year, the coronavirus pandemic has yet again featured among the major causes for concern worldwide.

The disease has not been eradicated despite significant efforts by the scientific community and governments.

It is noted that the virus tends to adapt to our environment over time, as evidenced by the emergence of new variants, thus making control of the pandemic particularly challenging.

Unfortunately, it continues to plunge families into mourning, disrupt social life and create economic distortions.

Should we then despair and yield to pessimism? Obviously NO.

We learn from history that this is not humanity's first epidemic, and it is undoubtedly far from being its last.

By the way, I am confident that we will overcome the coronavirus in the same manner as previous epidemics.

For my part, I will spare no effort in ensuring that the requisite measures to stem its spread in our country are actually implemented.

The response strategy implemented by the Government is yielding excellent results. Over the past two years, it has helped to save lives and to curb the spread of COVID-19 in our country.

Accordingly, it should be continued and, as appropriate, improved to better adapt to the mutations of this dangerous virus.

Hence, the need to stay alert and to continue observing the rules of hygiene and preventive measures such as wearing a mask in all public places or physical distancing.

However, given the virulence of the virus, vaccination is definitely an additional preventive measure.

In many cases, a full vaccination course helps to avert severe complications of the disease, which are generally fatal.

That is why I urge each and every one to get vaccinated and not to pay heed to the conspiracy theories that abound on social media about the coronavirus vaccine.

Indeed, combining preventive measures with vaccination will enable us to break the chain of contamination of this virus and return to normal life more speedily.

My Dear Compatriots,

Notwithstanding the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic-related health crisis, we have remained focused on the target we set within the framework of our National Development Strategy for the 2020–2030 period.

Despite its adverse impact on the economic fabric, we have relentlessly continued implementing our transformational projects, thanks to the sustained mobilization of non-oil revenue, the implementation of domestic budget consolidation measures and support from our development partners.

Fiscal reforms, particularly in the taxation and customs sectors, have boosted our capacity to mobilize funds from the international financial market.

The credibility of Cameroon's signature thus helped to successfully refinance the Eurobond and to conclude a new Economic and Financial Programme with the International Monetary Fund.

Thanks to financial resources mobilized both within and outside the country, substantial investments have been made to complete the first- generation transformational projects.

These include:

- completion of the first phase of the Yaounde-Nsimalen, Yaounde-Douala and Kribi-Lolabe motorways. They have been operationalized under public-private partnerships;
- construction of 914 kilometres of asphalted roads;
- extension of the health map with the commissioning of the Ebolowa and Bafoussam referral hospitals, as well as the completion of that of Garoua;
- implementation of projects to achieve energy self-sufficiency through continuation of construction work on the Nachtigal dam and completion of the hydropower transmission line from the Memve'elé dam.

Works are ongoing to interconnect the Northern and Southern electrical grids. The implementation of this project will contribute to a sustainable reduction of the energy deficit in our country's northern regions.

At the same time, there was a need to continue ensuring private sector competitiveness in a macro-economic environment severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is common knowledge that the pandemic has led to rising sea freight costs, thus directly increasing the price of essential goods.

Aware of the huge sacrifices made by national economic operators to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, I instructed the Government to reduce by 80% the sea freight transportation cost to be included in calculating customs duties.

The Government must also continue discussions with the private sector to identify further measures that can be implemented.

By the way, if we have to meet the growth challenge, we must strive to reduce our imports and increase the volume of our exports by boosting domestic production.

In any case, it behoves us to create conditions for more robust, sustainable, inclusive and employment-generating growth, particularly for our youths who are and will remain the primary beneficiaries of ongoing reforms in various areas.

Considering the measures taken, we have reason to be optimistic about economic recovery and an uptick in our growth rate to 4.2% in 2022, from 3.6% in 2021. This positive outlook is consistent with that of a global return to growth as announced by the relevant international bodies. Our country has the capacity to make the most of this situation.

My Dear Compatriots,

Despite the challenges faced by our country, we continue to be respected on a global scale.

The trust Cameroon enjoys among our partners is the result of our constant efforts to ensure that the country remains the haven of peace and stability that it has always been.

To this end, we have stepped up our efforts to maintain peace and security nationwide.

Boko Haram's sporadic incursions into the Far-North Region in recent months have been met with stiff resistance from our defence forces. Once more, I wish to pay them a well-deserved tribute for their courage, commitment and professionalism.

I take this opportunity to commend the full mobilization of the nation's lifeblood, the population and vigilante committees,

that are contributing decisively to the success of our popular defence strategy.

I am pleased to note that a large number of our compatriots who had joined armed groups have accepted my peace overture.

Many Boko Haram members have laid down their arms and are being catered for in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Centres in the Far-North Region. The same holds true in the North-West and South-West Regions where many members of armed groups continue to surrender.

However, many of our compatriots remain within the ranks of armed groups. They continue to engage in criminal activities, increasing attacks with improvised explosive devices and murders of unarmed civilians.

The recent assassination of three students and a teacher of Bilingual High School Ekondo Titi added to their long list of abuses and atrocities.

I would like, once again, to reiterate Government's firm determination to restore peace in the regions that are under security threats.

It should be clearly understood that wherever the perpetrators and sponsors of such acts are hiding, they will be relentlessly tracked down and will face the full force of the law.

In this fierce fight against barbarism, I urge the Cameroonian people to step up collaboration with our defence and security forces in order to neutralize the fanatics of armed violence and to preserve the integrity of our territory.

Many of our compatriots have fallen in battle while engaged in this lofty civil and military defence task. May our determination to keep up the fight bring solace to them as their sacrifice for the Republic will not be in vain.

They are role models for our youths, whom I urge to shun indoctrination attempts by secessionist groups.

In this fight against terrorism, we plan to enlist the support of a wide range of partner States by debunking falsehoods about our country's human rights situation propagated within international circles by some of Cameroon's detractors.

My Dear Compatriots,

True to our commitment to peace and tolerance, we have continued to demonstrate openness and readiness for dialogue in order to call a halt to this crisis that has wreaked far too much suffering on our populations.

Thus, after holding the Major National Dialogue, we have continued to accelerate and deepen decentralization.

Regions, as regional and local authorities, were set up this year and are beginning to find their feet.

The North-West and South-West Regions have been granted special status to reflect their cultural and language specificities.

Overall, regionalization is being implemented countrywide and contributes towards increasing our fellow citizens' participation in the management of local affairs.

These democratic strides very clearly demonstrate that our country is irreversibly and resolutely engaged in the methodical perfection of its democratic process, in order to further meet the legitimate aspirations of the Cameroonian people.

I am fully aware that some people would prefer that we move faster in this area. However, we must avoid any kind of haste that may undermine our country's unity and our republican ideal. Surely, we will carefully and patiently do whatever needs to be done.

In all circumstances, we must promote constructive and regular dialogue between the various sociological components of

the Republic in order to mobilize them for our country's emergence.

My Dear Compatriots,

Lately, we have witnessed an upsurge in unpatriotic behaviour, the proliferation of hate speech and the posting of violent, obscene and shameful videotapes which have shocked the nation's collective conscience.

The persistent publication of "*fake-news*" in the mainstream or social media has contributed towards sustaining falsehood, thus preventing many of our fellow citizens from getting the right information on key issues.

Therefore, I appeal to your sense of individual responsibility and urge each of you to promote the culture of peace.

I call on the Government to step up efforts to raise awareness on the responsible use of social media by all social classes.

We must remain a patriotic, united and supportive people.

We must cherish peace and seek harmony at all times.

Let us resolve to actively ensure that these values promote living together to which our people as a whole deeply aspire.

Fellow Cameroonians,
My Dear Compatriots,

We are faced with specific challenges at the dawn of the new year. Our country will host the Africa Cup of Nations from 9 January to 6 February 2022.

In the run-up to the tournament, we have all witnessed the profound transformation that has taken place in the cities that will host AFCON 2021 matches.

The preparation of the tournament has helped to accelerate the infrastructural development of many of our cities.

Urban roads have been constructed or rehabilitated.

The technical capacity of existing health facilities has been upgraded. New hospitals with state-of-the-art equipment have been built in our regional capitals.

Ultramodern hotels have been built to accommodate official delegations, special guests and tourists who will visit Cameroon during the tournament.

We will continue implementing this investment programme by reducing the infrastructure disparities existing between the regions of our country in various areas.

It is unacceptable that some regions should feel forsaken, while others are progressing.

That is why I decided to create State universities in the three regions of our country that do not yet have one, namely the East, North and South Regions. Other infrastructure will follow, particularly in the airport, industrial and road sectors, in order to make each region a real development hub.

To that end, we must enhance public finance management governance by fighting corruption and embezzlement of public funds.

Therefore, all those found guilty of financial malpractice or illicit enrichment will face the consequences before the competent courts.

My Dear Compatriots,

As we prepare to celebrate African football, I urge Cameroonians to mobilize massively to make AFCON 2021 the most beautiful football jamboree ever organized on our continent.

We want it to be a great moment of brotherhood. It therefore behoves us to extend a warm welcome to the 24 sports delegations, officials and all those who will be staying in our country during the tournament.

Let us offer our guests the rich cultural diversity that has earned our country the nickname "Africa in miniature". Let us extend to them the hospitality they rightfully expect from us, and which is part and parcel of our traditions.

Thanks to the virtues of our people, particularly their courage and selflessness, we have not only overcome the ordeals encountered during this year that is ending, but we have also continued to forge ahead.

As a Nation, we have the duty and opportunity to remind the world that we are a united and indomitable people, capable of displaying this fighting spirit that has enabled us in the past to win great battles.

Before I conclude, I would like to call on our Beloved Indomitable Lions to do their utmost to ensure that they end this festival in grand style on the evening of 6 February 2022.

Let us rise to the challenge and remind the world that we are a great Nation.

Happy and prosperous New Year 2022.

Long live the Republic!
Long live Cameroon!