

**TOAST BY H.E. PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE STATE DINNER OFFERED
IN HONOUR OF H.E. FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE,
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC**

Yaounde, 3 July 2015

The President of the French Republic,

My Wife and I are pleased to welcome you to Cameroon, more especially, to this building which symbolizes the unity of our country and our people.

I welcome you with great pleasure in the name of the relationship that is etched in time, and the strong and true friendship existing between France and Cameroon, the French people and the Cameroonian people.

Your visit is a special honour to the Cameroonian people. It bears testimony to the long-standing and strong friendship binding our two countries.

Mr President,

From history and from my experience of relations between men and between States, I have learnt that what matters most between friends is not the time spent together.

I strongly believe that what matters most is the mutual respect friends have for each other, the quality, depth, sincerity and richness of the ties.

The relationship between Cameroon and France is special, and even singular and deeply rooted in time.

It must be recalled that France was here before Cameroon's independence. It was from Cameroon, the first territory to join free France, that French troops stationed in Equatorial Africa set out to re-conquer and liberate France. In that struggle, Cameroonians shed their blood.

When the German protectorate ended, France and Great Britain first ruled Cameroon as a mandated territory under the League of Nations and then as a trust territory under the United Nations. France therefore witnessed our aspirations for sovereignty.

As a key witness to our quest for freedom, France knows the history of our struggle for independence and is aware of the high price that Cameroonians paid. It is not France, which has journeyed with us since our independence, that will be tutored on why Cameroonians hold their national unity so dear.

Cameroon's unity has been built on its geographical, ethnic and cultural diversity. It is such diversity that gives my country its rich and varied character. The distinctive pride of my compatriots is also due to this diversity.

Mr President,

With valuable help from friendly countries, including France, we have laid the foundations of a free, democratic and prosperous Cameroon.

France supports our efforts to build a modern State. Hence, it is only normal for us to count on our ally of all times, both in our march towards emergence and in our crusade against corruption, terrorism and insecurity.

Mr President,

We cannot fail to mention the significant progress we have achieved in promoting democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, and human rights protection. We have also been able to progressively establish credible institutions. However, as in all endeavours, the learning process, which took several centuries in old democracies, has not always been without hurdles.

What is indisputable is the democratic culture which is becoming deeply rooted in Cameroon. However, we remain cautious in order to avoid highlighting, all too often, the downside more than the upside.

Current events clearly show that our relationship is marked by frankness, pragmatism and realism. Who would dare affirm that, even so, the relationship is not at its best?

For my part, I avail myself of this opportunity to salute the excellent cooperation and friendship ties existing between us and between our peoples.

This friendship is invaluable for us at a time when our planet has to deal with terrorism, the immigration peril, violence, global warming and, it must be acknowledged, a lingering economic crisis.

Human aspiration for more freedom and the enjoyment of innovation is legitimate. Unfortunately, all too often, it leads to tragic disillusionment. Therefore, the concerted action of States seems to be the only way out; provided, this time around, human dignity takes centre stage in every activity. This is absolutely a moral imperative, given that the human person must never cease being the rationale behind everything.

Such are Cameroon's opinion and vision.

Mr President,

At the end of the last century, my country was hard hit by a severe economic crisis. Frankly, coming out of the crisis was no easy task. By the way, we still bear the stigma of structural adjustment and, somehow, the burden of accumulated debt. Support from our friends and multilateral partners helped to boost our own efforts and ease our sacrifices.

In the new dispensation, Cameroon sought to consolidate its traditional relations with its long-standing partners. At the same time, we have resolutely embarked on diversifying our partnerships, as the global environment is now more open to competition.

Mr President,

In terms of security, France's action is and remains paramount and crucial especially within the United Nations Security Council. Your commitment to peace preservation and crisis and conflict resolution, especially in Africa, has remained constant. In Mali, it is mainly thanks to France that there is now hope for a return to normalcy. Even closer to us, your country is making a very valuable and highly appreciated contribution towards restoring Statehood in the Central African Republic and stamping out Boko Haram.

Mr President,

As you know, Cameroon is not only waging a war against the Boko Haram sect, but is also affected in many ways by the crisis in the Central African Republic. In terms of humanitarian needs, the atrocities committed in this country have led to population displacement and an influx of refugees. Several French nationals were taken hostage due to this situation. Fortunately, they have all been released, thanks to the concerted and effective action of our services. It is in no one's interest for chaos, which breeds insecurity, jihadism and various forms of fundamentalism, to take hold of the Heart of Africa, a continent of opportunities.

I believe this is the appropriate time for France to continue its all-out lobbying of other great powers. We believe the UN Security Council should make a firm commitment to ending this tragedy.

Cameroon hails you as a President with firm convictions and a strong sense of justice. Know that, like you, we believe that more needs to be done to address the root causes of various scourges.

This applies more specifically to misery and poverty, breeding grounds for uncontrolled migration and various forms of fundamentalism.

I welcome the holding in Paris next December of the summit on global warming which is affecting us in Africa.

I therefore accept your kind invitation to come to Paris.

Before I conclude, allow me to extend greetings to the members of the delegation accompanying President HOLLANDE and to wish them a pleasant stay among us. These are ladies and gentlemen who, I know, are working selflessly for successful cooperation between our two countries.

My wife and I now invite you to raise your glasses in honour of the President of the French Republic, Mr. François HOLLANDE and to France-Cameroon friendship.

Thank you.