

HEAD OF STATE'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO THE NATION

Yaounde, 31 December 2017

Fellow Cameroonians,
My Dear Compatriots,

During the year just ending, Cameroon confirmed to the world, within a difficult context, the soundness of its institutions, the resilience of its economy and its attachment to national unity.

Indeed, our country demonstrated a remarkable capacity to meet the numerous challenges it faced in the sporting, security, economic or social domains.

Credit for such accomplishments goes first and foremost to you, the Cameroonian people! An overwhelming majority of you, whether from the North or South, East or West; whether Anglophone or Francophone, have always demonstrated courage, dynamism, patriotism and, above all, maturity.

Congratulations to you!

My Dear Compatriots,

The adverse global economic situation due notably to falling commodity prices has negatively impacted economic growth and social progress in our country. It has also caused cash flow problems which have severely affected Government contractors, particularly small-and medium-size enterprises.

As part of its efforts to address this situation, in June 2017, the Government concluded an economic and financial programme with the International Monetary Fund backed by an "Extended Credit Facility". This programme is expected to have a positive impact on our growth as from 2018.

To this end, we will maintain our efforts to optimize public revenue collection and streamline public spending. Special attention will be paid to the situation of SMEs especially in terms of settling the debt owed them and improving their access to bank loans.

We will also maintain our resolve to implement our major projects, with a special focus on road infrastructure. Community outreach services, notably water, electricity and health care will be given special attention.

Our country's health map is getting denser each year, with the construction of about one hundred health centres, subdivisional medical centres and district hospitals.

We will continue our efforts to provide quality and universal health care to our population. In this regard, I have instructed the Government to finalize discussions on ways to progressively establish a universal health coverage system.

Remarkable progress has been achieved in implementing the projects included in the Three-year Emergency Plan. These are projects which foster true social progress within our communities. Such efforts will be continued.

The Government's sustained action to increase the number of schools and universities make Cameroon a major pool of quality human resources in Africa. Similarly, we will step up our efforts to create jobs, particularly for our youth. In this regard, the completion of major projects such as the Port of Kribi, which will soon go operational, opens up bright prospects.

The IMF review mission fielded from October to November 2017 rightly hailed the resilience of our economy and our performance in implementing the programme concluded with this institution. This, you will agree with me, augurs well for our goal of achieving emergence.

My Dear Compatriots,

In the sports domain, the year which is drawing to a close brought us great victories which should be hailed. Our Football Indomitable Lions brilliantly lifted their fifth continental trophy. Our National Women's Volleyball Team did us proud by emerging as the African Champion right here in Yaounde. On various stadiums worldwide, our flag was raised high and our national anthem resounded thanks to our sportsmen and sportswomen. The Cameroonian Nation, through me, extends its hearty congratulations to them.

As you are aware, in 2019, our country will host the large continental football family on the occasion of the Africa Cup of Nations. Beyond the purely sporting aspect, this will avail us an opportunity to offer our guests Cameroon's warm hospitality. I have no doubt that, like our athletes, our population will rise to the occasion and showcase Cameroon at its best.

Our country will be ready for this grand celebration of friendship. I have made a commitment to that end.

My Dear Compatriots,

The issue of security was not the least of the challenges Cameroon had to address in 2017.

The Boko Haram terrorist sect continued its attacks against our country. Thanks to the bravery of our soldiers and the courage of our population, we inflicted heavy losses on this criminal group and annihilated its expansionist dreams. Definitely, vigilance remains the watchword. In collaboration with our neighbours and international partners, we will sustain our efforts to totally eradicate this terrorist group.

We also scored remarkable victories combating hostage-taking on our eastern border. We will step up efforts in that regard, and relentlessly track down the criminal groups involved.

In the North-West and South-West Regions, socio-professional grievances, which the Government nonetheless strove to address adequately, were exploited by extremists seeking to impose their secessionist plans through violence.

We all witnessed the seriousness of the spillover. The symbols of the Republic were desecrated. Our children's education was compromised by criminal arsonists who did not hesitate to burn down schools and attack students. Economic and social activities were disrupted by irresponsible strike calls imposed on the population through threats, intimidation and violence. Bomb attacks were carried out. Many of our compatriots lost their lives in violence perpetrated by secessionists. Members of our defence and security forces were assassinated in cold blood in the line of duty.

I would like to invite you to spare a thought for all our fellow citizens who lost their lives in this crisis. On behalf of the entire Nation, I would also like to extend our heartfelt condolences to all the bereaved families.

As I reminded you recently, it is my duty to ensure republican order, social peace, the unity of the Nation and Cameroon's integrity.

In this regard, I have issued instructions that all those who have taken up arms, who perpetrate or encourage violence should be fought relentlessly and held accountable for their crimes before the courts of law.

The security operations conducted to that end have already yielded excellent results. They will continue unabated, but without excesses. I congratulate the defence and security forces on the bravery, determination, restraint and professionalism they have demonstrated thus far.

I am aware that the wish of every Cameroonian of good will is to see an end to tensions in the North-West and South-West Regions and a return to normalcy. The vast majority of Cameroonians aspire to live together in peace.

Bearing in mind this aspiration, I set up the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism which will play a key role in promoting our togetherness.

It is in the same light that, at the onset of the crisis, I requested the Government to engage in a constructive dialogue with English-speaking teachers and lawyers to seek solutions to their demands. The Government took many actions following the dialogue, even going beyond the initial demands. Others are ongoing or in the pipeline.

I should make it very clear that, to my mind, dialogue has always been and will always remain the best means of resolving problems, so long as it is strictly in line with republican legality.

My Dear Compatriots,

My conviction that our fellow citizens desire greater participation in managing their affairs, especially at the local level, has been strengthened by the consultations I have held and the many opinions and suggestions I have received.

In this regard, it is my firm belief that fast-tracking our decentralization process will enhance the development of our Regions.

To that end, I have ordered the implementation of the necessary measures to speedily give effect to this major reform.

In the same vein, the completion of the establishment of the institutions provided for in the Constitution will contribute towards consolidating the rule of law and open a new page in our democratic process.

The year 2018 will be an important election year. All necessary measures will be taken to ensure that elections are held in peace and security.

My Dear Compatriots,

As you can see, our Nation is facing multiple challenges which we should address together in fraternity, with due respect for our institutions and in a spirit of national concord.

In this light, Cameroon is a precious legacy for each and every one of us.

Let us remain worthy of our legacy, of a united Cameroon, standing tall, proud and jealous of its freedom.

Happy New Year to you all!

Long live Cameroon!