

**ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF STATE ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION
OF 2011 NEW YEAR WISHES BY MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS**

Yaounde, 5 January 2011

Your Excellencies,

The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Representatives of International Organizations,

One year ago, at this same period, after the shocks it suffered from 2007 to 2009, the world economy seemed to have found some form of balance. The measures taken by major industrialized countries to rehabilitate their banking system and revive growth as well as the resolutions adopted with a view to regulating economic and financial globalization were reasons for, if not optimism, at least some degree of confidence in the future.

It should be acknowledged that our hopes were somewhat dashed.

Admittedly, economic growth has returned, to varying degrees in Western countries, has been firmly sustained in emerging countries, and has more or less reached its pre-crisis level in developing countries such as Cameroon. But it is clear that the dysfunctions which led to the crisis have not been resolved permanently and the risk of slipping back into similar crises cannot be completely ruled out.

It is not surprising that major countries which dominate the world economy have given priority to their more immediate problems, namely budget deficits, national debt, currency fluctuations, and trade imbalances. We should not forget that these problems are all fallouts of the crisis.

No wonder that under such circumstances, problems affecting primarily the countries of the South, such as regulation of world trade, commodity prices and especially development assistance, are relegated to the background.

In this regard, the recent G20 summit in Seoul did show that the lofty goals of previous meetings of the same kind had been revised downward. The main contemporary problems were raised. Unfortunately, decisions were deferred or, more precisely, entrusted to the IMF for consideration. In any event, it can be understood that putting the world economy back on track will take time.

In such a context characterized by a kind of withdrawal to national or special interests, what can and what must a country like Cameroon do? Definitely, not remain passive and await solutions which, at worst, will be imposed on it or, at best, will take the form of unsatisfactory compromises.

First and foremost, I believe we must free ourselves from the dependency that has developed over the years in various sectors of our national economy.

For instance, we import large quantities of food products, and this upsets our trade balance. Very recently, I addressed my compatriots about this issue, encouraging them to invest more in the various sectors of our agriculture. By so doing, we would be able not only to ensure our food security but also to export even more to our neighbours.

We are also energy dependent.

Since we have not sufficiently harnessed our huge hydro-electric power potential, we rely on fossil energies to run our thermal power plants. Such energy is not only environmentally unfriendly but is also costly and detrimental to our external trade. Our intention is henceforth to systematically develop our hydro-electric sites. The efforts being made to supply energy will in the long run benefit our companies and people currently suffering from electricity shortages.

Our country does not however intend to resign into cautious protectionism.

With its traditional partners of the European Union, Cameroon maintains a relationship of trust that is mutually beneficial, has been consolidated by substantial assistance and is based on a series of time-tested conventions. The relationship which is intended to become a true "partnership" must obviously take into account the specific problems of a developing country. And the resulting agreements will have to accommodate our chances of developing into a modern economy.

Such is the position I defended in Tripoli, during the recent African Union-European Union Summit. I particularly stressed that concerted actions between Africa and Europe would enable us to influence the debate on global economic and financial regulation.

Similarly, to play their role, the major trade negotiations with WTO which are now stalled, must strike a fair balance between the interests of major industrialized countries and those of emerging countries and the countries of the South. These countries, whose economies are still fragile, are ill-equipped to withstand international competition from overnight.

Such fragility is reflected in the difficulties that our countries have achieving the Millennium Development Goals. I addressed this issue at the high-level meeting on MDGs in New York last September. I underscored Goal N° 8: "develop a global partnership for development".

For me, clearly, it is only through such a partnership that what is probably THE problem of the 21st century, namely reducing global poverty can be resolved. I revisited the issue at the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. On that occasion, I laid special emphasis on the "duty of solidarity" of the international community with the disadvantaged countries. As far as our continent is concerned, such solidarity could take the form of a "Marshall Plan" for Africa.

This will obviously not prevent any of our countries from making its own efforts. That is what we have embarked on with the implementation of our Ten-Year Growth and Employment Strategy Paper. Our efforts will be directed mainly to agriculture, energy, water supply, mining projects, and road and port infrastructure. We thus hope to make progress towards emergence and, consequently, roll back poverty and reduce unemployment.

In the same vein, I think we should take more advantage of opportunities offered by regional integration.

We are definitely making progress at the institutional level as was seen during last year's Bangui and Brazzaville summits, and there is every reason to be satisfied.

It would now be desirable to implement the regional economic programme we adopted with utmost celerity. We must learn lessons from the implementation of successful bilateral projects, such as the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, to develop sub-regional projects based on the complementarity of the resources and needs of our economies.

For instance, it is clear that inter-State communication within the CEMAC region leaves much to be desired and that the construction of modern road links between our countries could boost trade and development. And this is just one of many examples.

To achieve our goals, we can count on the international organizations which are willing to provide us with their advice as well as their support.

Such is the case of the IMF and World Bank which are ready to follow up and support our efforts.

It is equally the case of the various agencies of the United Nations, development banks, as well as assistance and cooperation funds that accept to finance our projects.

The same applies to multilateral groupings such as the Commonwealth and Francophonie which, like recently in Montreux, afford us the opportunity to pose our problems.

We have not however overlooked our bilateral economic relations.

I am thinking of cooperation with our traditional partners of the European Union, in particular, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain that continue to lend us their support.

I am also thinking of relations with China, whose contribution to our development is gaining momentum.

Lastly, I am thinking of our relations with Japan, South Korea and India, as well as Brazil and Turkey, with whom we exchanged fruitful visits at the highest level last year. As you have noticed, this list includes most emerging countries. This is not by chance. Rather, it is the expression of mutual understanding, based on solidarity and common interests.

Naturally, I cannot fail to mention the ever-increasing contribution to our development of private investments from the United States of America, Canada and Australia, among others.

Our participation in international life was not limited to development-related issues. We also took part in discussions on major contemporary political problems.

Last September, in New York, Cameroon's representative presented our views before the 60th Session of the Conference on Disarmament which was presided over by Cameroon.

For my part, I stated before the United Nations General Assembly that it was unfair for Africa not to have its rightful place in world affairs and that it should be better represented within the world decision-making bodies, particularly the Security Council. I also championed this cause before Mr. Ban Ki-Moon during his stay in Yaounde last June.

Through the many contacts I was able to make last year with various distinguished personalities, I noted with satisfaction that the idea of a fair representation of our continent within the Security Council was gaining ground.

I am equally delighted to note that the authority of the African Union is growing from strength to strength, under the leadership of its present management. I have observed that it is increasingly being called upon to arbitrate or to defuse delicate situations. To me, this augurs well for the easing of the long-standing tensions in Somalia, Sudan and East DRC. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to wish for the appeasement that occurred in Guinea to serve as an example to the other brotherly and friendly country, Côte d'Ivoire, in overcoming its problems.

Before concluding, I would like to come back briefly to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of independence of a number of African countries.

For Cameroonians, this celebration, in the presence of many Heads of State and distinguished personalities, was a rare moment of joy and pride. It was also a time of reflection, within the framework of the Yaounde International Conference, on the past and perhaps more on the future. The Declaration adopted at the end of this important meeting is indeed a roadmap for Africa today and tomorrow. The issue of putting in place a mechanism to follow up the said Declaration is on the agenda of the upcoming African Union Summit.

In Libreville, Brazzaville and Abuja, I noted the same enthusiasm in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of independence.

In Nice in June, Paris in July and New York in September, I was able to observe that the importance of this event had been felt far beyond our continent and that the celebration of the liberation of African countries had resonated worldwide.

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The foregoing is proof, if proof were needed, that in a half century, the world has changed significantly. For better or for worse? There are two conflicting theories.

For my part, I observe that:

- no generalized conflict occurred during that period;
- dependent peoples were able to affirm their rights to self-determination;
- no one denies that hunger, disease and misery must be combated wherever they exist;
- wherever local conflicts occur, the international community intervenes in a bid to settle them, etc.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that:

- a significant segment of humanity continues to live in poverty;
- development assistance is inadequate;
- the current economic and financial system remains largely inequitable;
- global governance remains in the hands of major powers;
- respect for human rights is far from being universal;
- new threats to peace and security are growing, such as terrorism, piracy and international crime.

Not to mention natural disasters and epidemics which, like in Haiti, have brought suffering on an entire people, a people to whom we provided relief commensurate with our means.

What can we conclude from this?

You may recall that last year before you, I raised the question as to whether or not one should be optimistic about developments on the international scene.

Over several decades, during the Cold War era, we experienced a bipolar world founded on the balance of nuclear terror.

For the past twenty years, we have lived in a unipolar world that has not reduced political and economic inequalities.

Following the recent economic and financial crisis, if one dare say, it seems a multi-polar system is progressively being put in place, with the advent of emerging countries that are rightly claiming a more important role in global governance. At the same time, developing countries, notably African countries, are attracting more attention on account of their natural resources, thus prompting them to demand to participate in major negotiations where their interests are at stake.

I have the feeling that this situation, which is new in several regards, raises hopes for the advent of a fairer and more interdependent international order to which the peoples of the planet have aspired for several decades now.

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

The time has now come for me to thank your Dean for the good wishes and very kind words addressed to my Wife and to me on your behalf, and also for his encouragement, which I highly appreciate.

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

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

Thank you for your kind attention.