

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY H.E. PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT-ELECT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON ON THE OCCASION OF THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Yaounde, 3 November 2011

- **The President of the National Assembly,**
- **The President of the Supreme Court,**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**
- **My Dear Compatriots,**

Allow me, first of all, to thank the President of the National Assembly for bidding me welcome and for his words of encouragement at the beginning of this new term of office.

In this Temple of democracy, I also wish to once again thank all Cameroonians for having renewed their trust in me. It goes without saying that such trust will be an invaluable moral support to me in the discharge of the heavy responsibilities awaiting me in the coming years.

The oath I have just taken before you, that is “before the Cameroonian people” in accordance with the provisions of Article 7 of our Constitution, is, in my opinion, highly symbolic. It is an expression of absolute loyalty to the institutions of the Republic and a personal commitment to perform the duties of Head of State as set forth in our Constitution.

As in the past, I therefore personally and solemnly undertake to discharge these important responsibilities for the good of the Cameroonian people.

- **Honourable Members of Parliament,**

As I said soon after the proclamation of results, I do fathom the immensity and difficulty of the task to be accomplished during this new tenure. I presented its main thrusts during the election campaigns. However, I would like to revisit before you some points to which I attach special importance.

Over time, our democratic system has been gradually taking root, consolidating and improving. The work of the National Assembly is a good example of this. It is the scene, in committees or in plenary sessions, of

serious – sometimes very heated – debates which are evidence of the vitality of the institution. Far from being a mere “rubber stamp”, it plays a key role in our democratic life. It must continue doing so. I am pleased to have this opportunity to congratulate its President and all its members.

The National Assembly will soon be backed by a Senate. Legislative power will thus be exercised by a complete Parliament where regional and local authorities will also be represented. Furthermore, the decentralization process, which is being implemented in a satisfactory manner, will be seen through with the full transfer of powers and the establishment of the regional councils provided for by our Constitution. Consequently, we will have a mechanism that guarantees better participation of citizens in public affairs, with proper balance between the State and regional and local authorities. We will also have to set up the Constitutional Council which is an essential organ for the functioning of our institutions.

On the whole, I think we have reason to be satisfied with the progress made in our democratic process. Measures have been taken to guarantee the regularity and transparency of elections. The exercise of public liberties and the respect of human rights are increasingly guaranteed. It is true that systematic criticism, by some people, of government’s actions has not disappeared, but the determination to establish a constructive dialogue seems to be gaining ground. That is a good sign and I hope that we could reach common ground on issues of national interest.

However, I must say that individual behaviours are not always consistent with the solidarity which is supposed to be the hallmark of a democratic society. More often than not, self-interest takes precedence over the general interest. Such a mindset is the cause of social ills such as fraud, corruption and even delinquency.

Although unemployment, poverty and inequalities may partly explain the decline of public morality, we must react even more firmly against such criminal behaviours, including the unacceptable behaviour of some irresponsible motorists who cause real massacres on our roads.

Indeed, it is our duty to continue building an exemplary Republic by combating corruption and consolidating democracy.

In this regard, I want to reaffirm my determination to continuously improve our electoral system. In two decades, a lot has been done to hold free, fair and transparent elections. No one can validly gainsay the fact that in Cameroon the legitimacy of the powers that be comes from the sovereign people. Although progress has definitely been made in electoral democracy, it remains that some adjustments have to be made to our electoral body to

improve its functioning. Therefore, as in the past, we remain open to suggestions and recommendations.

The exemplary Republic we are building is a Republic open to constructive criticism, without claiming to have a monopoly on the truth. The exemplary Republic is a Republic of freedom, tolerance and civic responsibility.

And I must say that I am counting on the participation of each and every one, notably youths and women, to give Fresh Impetus to all sectors of activity and to successfully accomplish the mission entrusted to me.

I now want to address what will undoubtedly be one of the main challenges of this seven-year term, namely accelerating the revival of growth.

But first, let us, if you please, look back. Not very long ago, our budget management was characterized by numerous slippages. We had difficulty ensuring the regular payment of salaries and pensions of State employees and debt servicing. Structural adjustment constraints limited our ambitions. We had to negotiate to reach the completion point of the HIPC initiative.

Today, we have streamlined our public finance. The reduction of our debt has afforded us additional leverage. Henceforth, we have a long-term vision which outlines the various stages of our march towards the status of an emerging country and the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper which will guide us over the coming years. In a nutshell, we know where we are going and we are free to make our choices.

Although the recent economic and financial crisis did not call into question the fundamentals of our economy, it did slow our momentum at the time when we were getting ready to launch our major agricultural, mining, energy and infrastructure projects. I am pleased to be able to say now that, notwithstanding a global context still marked by sluggishness and unusual upheavals, most of these projects will soon see the light of day and will radically transform our country's economy.

I don't think it is necessary to delve into the details of these projects which I have often talked about. However, I think it is necessary to stress some of the actions we are going to undertake because the acceleration of the revival of economic growth depends on them:

- Let us begin with agriculture, in the broad sense of the word, which is the mainstay of the bulk of our population. As I said in Ebolowa and Maroua, we must carry out our "green revolution" and we will. By boosting our entire

production, we will not only be ensuring our food security but also increasing our exports and reducing our imports. Doing so will require that we should leave the beaten path, change our methods and use modern means. Just one example: implement in Cameroon or within the CEMAC zone, an extensive fertilizer production programme commensurate with the needs of our agriculture sector.

- Now, a few words on energy. You are aware of the importance I attach to it. You are equally aware of the inconveniences energy shortage causes our populations as well as our industry which has been weakened by it.

Our projects are now on track. The Lom Pangar, Memve'ele and Mekin dams and their corresponding power plants will become reality in the coming years. Other projects will follow with the harnessing of the waters of the River Sanaga. The nightmare of energy shortages will then become a thing of the past. However, we need to determine the cause of the setbacks experienced. Blame must be apportioned between poorly managed projects and failed commitments.

- Once the energy deficit problem is resolved with backup from the exploitation of our gas deposits and our thermal plants, we will be able to revive our industries through our mining and agricultural resources. Hence, we will be better positioned to process our raw materials, with the twin benefits of obtaining surplus added value and reducing our imports. Our country will then have a befitting industry.

- Agriculture, energy and industry have a common denominator, namely an infrastructure network adapted to a growing economy. This network has been substantially improved very recently. New road, port facility, railway, telecommunications and optical fibre connection projects are under way or about to start. They will help not only to facilitate trade but also to open up remote areas and thereby strengthen national unity.

- But, you may be wondering how such huge investments will be financed. As a priority, we will approach national and foreign private investors. If the projects are well studied and are profitable, agreements can be concluded. We will also turn to friendly States that have confidence in us. Finally, we could use our own investment budget and the savings of our citizens. Who was not impressed by the ease with which our debenture loan was raised?

I would now like to address social issues.

We should have the courage to acknowledge that the living conditions of a segment of our population are very difficult, particularly in rural areas and

around urban centres. The bulk of those concerned are small farmers, jobless people and youths unable to find work, retirees and elderly persons without resources. Our country is no exception in Africa. Even in developed countries, poverty is on the increase.

Insufficient wealth creation, high population growth, an unfavourable international environment and inappropriate development systems are the principal causes of a situation that has pushed hundreds of millions of people worldwide into exclusion. In Cameroon which is perhaps not the worst off, we are striving to seek solutions commensurate with our means.

Unemployment, a veritable social plague, is the most difficult problem facing us. The State is creating jobs in the public sector according to its means. Over the past few years, the State has absorbed thousands of youths into the public service, notably in the army and security forces, education and health. The recruitment of 25 000 graduates, which I announced, is under way.

However, as we know, that is not the real solution. It is only by reviving and accelerating growth that we will gradually overcome the problem of unemployment. It is through the major projects and the Green Revolution that job opportunities will be created for a large number of people. This is why I undertake, for my part, to implement them as soon as possible.

Another important dimension of this problem concerns professionalization of our education system. The reform is ongoing and there is reason to believe it will yield the expected results.

I will not dwell on the special efforts made to increase the number of schools of various levels and expand our network of universities. Like me, you can see the results. I am confident that in time, we will enjoy the dividends of such efforts in terms of employment.

Facilitating access to health care and quality medicines is another way to improve the living conditions of our population, in particular the most disadvantaged. Undeniable progress has been achieved in this regard. However, it remains inadequate. That is why we will continue to open new health centres and provide our hospitals the technologically advanced equipment they often lack. As much as possible, we will expand free treatment or, at least, reduce its cost, for pandemics or childhood diseases. The establishment of a health insurance scheme within the framework of our social security system will facilitate access by the disadvantaged to health care.

It is true, much remains to be done to provide Cameroonians with sufficient electricity and drinking water, which are a sine qua non for acceptable living and health conditions. I daresay that with the implementation of the energy projects I mentioned earlier on, and the ongoing water supply programme, the situation, from this perspective, will improve significantly.

Housing remains our priority action. The programme to construct 10 000 social housing units will be reactivated, in consultation with the private sector and the other national and international partners.

I will briefly review our external policy since you know its major thrusts: support to the ideals of the United Nations and the objectives of the African Union, maintaining relations of good neighbourliness with the States of our Sub-region, support to integration within CEMAC, strengthening of our bilateral cooperation with our traditional friendly countries. Furthermore, we will make every necessary effort to ensure Africa's fair representation within the organs of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council. We will equally support initiatives with a view to giving a "humane face" to a globalization that has not always met expectations.

- **The President of the National Assembly,**
- **The President of the Supreme Court,**
- **Members of Parliament,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Such is the gist of what I wanted to tell you as this seven-year term begins.

Seven years ago, in this very hall, I said before you that two conditions needed to be fulfilled for us to make economic and social progress:

- firstly, it was necessary for our country to continue to live in peace and stability;
- secondly, it was indispensable for us to come together, beyond partisan barriers, to carry through our great vision for society that will make our country Cameroon, the place to be for all.

These conditions still apply. However, I should add that progress made in recent years must give us additional confidence in our future, a future of peace, liberty, prosperity and unity.

We must all strive towards this future. As such, for the new generations, we would have preserved our achievements, all our achievements, in peace and in stability.

We must not fear the future. Everything depends on us, on our determination to serve our country.

- **My Dear Compatriots,**

By placing my tenure under the banner of Major Accomplishments, I am inviting you all to be more daring, more creative and more innovative.

To you of the Cameroonian Diaspora particularly, who are graduates of greatest institutions, plying your trade in world class firms, you who are excelling in the high-tech sectors, the time has come to put your skills at the service of your country.

As I take the oath, this day, before the Cameroonian people, I am convinced that TOGETHER, Cameroonians from all towns and all villages, at home and abroad, without any discrimination whatsoever, can, better still, must resolutely transform Cameroon into an emerging country, that is:

- a country that creates wealth and distributes it equitably,
- a country that offers everyone equal opportunities for self-fulfilment,
- a country with strong and sustainable economic growth,
- a country with strengthened food security,
- in short, a country that ensures each and every one's wellbeing.

TOGETHER, we can, we must meet this challenge. I have committed myself to it. You have committed yourselves to it. The Cameroonian people have committed themselves to it. It is now time for action.

Thank you!

Long Live the Republic!

Long Live Cameroon!