

# HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE NATION

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*Yaounde, 10 September 2019*

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Fellow Cameroonians,  
My Dear Compatriots,

For close to three years now, the North-West and South-West Regions of our country have been going through a crisis that not only jeopardizes the safety and well-being of the population living there, but also has far-reaching consequences for the national community as a whole.

It should be recalled that the crisis was triggered by corporate demands made by lawyers and teachers calling for the translation of the OHADA Uniform Acts into English and the preservation of the specificity of the Anglo-Saxon judicial and educational systems in the two regions.

From the outset, and true to an option that I hold dear, I instructed the holding of dialogue between the Government and trade unions to seek appropriate solutions to these demands. The measures taken by the Government at the end of these consultations went well beyond the initial demands and include:

- the translation into English of the OHADA instruments which are now available in the two official languages;
- the creation of a Common Law Section at the Supreme Court to handle appeals filed against the decisions of lower courts in Common Law matters;
- regarding the training of judicial and legal officers, the creation of a Common Law Section at the National School of Administration and Magistracy. This measure was accompanied by a programme for the recruitment of English-speaking pupil judicial and legal officers and court registrars;
- the launching of the special recruitment of bilingual teachers in secondary schools;
- at the level of the judiciary, the stay of proceedings against some persons arrested in connection with the demands;
- the setting up of a national Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multi-culturalism to, among other things, carry out an in-depth review of all the sources of frustration suffered by our compatriots in the North-West and South-West Regions.

Decisions were taken subsequently to fast-track the decentralization process, with the creation of a new ministry devoted thereto. The upcoming regional elections will complete the process by enabling our compatriots nationwide to fully participate in the management of their local affairs.

My Dear Compatriots,

Despite the efforts made by the Government, radical movements, mainly inspired from abroad, have exploited and distorted the corporate demands. They have thus hatched a secessionist plan to partition our country. In this regard, they have formed and financed armed groups that have caused untold harm to the population of the North-West and South-West Regions.

The whole world has witnessed the atrocities committed by these armed groups: maiming, beheading, assassination of elements of the Defence and Security Forces, administrative authorities and defenceless civilians, destruction of public infrastructure and buildings, and burning of schools, hospitals, etc.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to once again extend my heartfelt condolences and those of the entire Nation to those who have lost loved ones in the crisis. I also wish to send a message of comfort to the wounded and all those affected in one way or the other. I want to assure them that they can count on the solidarity of the Government of the Republic and the Nation as a whole.

My Dear Compatriots

The atrocities committed by armed groups have forced thousands of our compatriots to seek refuge in other regions of the country and, for some, in neighbouring countries where they have been reduced to living under precarious conditions.

In the face of these intolerable acts, the Defence and Security Forces have taken energetic measures, often at the risk of their lives, to perform their duty of protecting citizens and their property.

These measures are currently bearing fruits with the improvement of security and the progressive resumption of economic activities in the two regions.

My Dear Compatriots,

Since the outbreak of this crisis, I have spared no effort, with the help of Cameroonians of good will, in seeking ways and means for its peaceful resolution.

In a bid to calm the situation, I even ordered the discontinuance of judicial proceedings pending before military tribunals against 289 persons arrested for offences committed during this crisis.

In the same vein, I extended a hand of peace to members of armed groups by calling on them to lay down their arms and benefit from the process of reintegration into society. A National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee was thus set up. Regional Disarmament Centres are gradually receiving many ex-combatants who willingly accept to lay down their arms. We will continue to make the necessary efforts to fully operationalize this process.

At the humanitarian level, I decided to launch a large-scale assistance plan for our affected compatriots of the North-West and South-West Regions. I also established a Centre for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action for its implementation. I wish to thank our international partners for supporting us in this initiative.

My Dear Compatriots,

The supposed feeling of marginalization by the people of the North-West and South-West Regions has often been advanced to justify this crisis. On this score, I wish to remind our compatriots in these regions, but also to those in the other eight regions of Cameroon, that marginalization, exclusion or stigmatization have never guided the work of the various governments I have formed since I became president of our country. Though no human endeavour is perfect and, in a developing country like ours with multiple challenges and limited resources, many needs are still to be met, in all the regions.

With the massive support you gave me during the last presidential election, I intend to work relentlessly, with all the sons and daughters of our country, towards meeting the challenges we are facing in order to improve the welfare of our population, especially in terms of infrastructure, water and electricity supply, healthcare delivery and youth employment.

My Dear Compatriots,

On 4 January this year, I made a vast government reshuffle, particularly with the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Head of Government. As usual, the choice of these officials was mainly guided by their human and professional qualities, their competence and experience. However, I would like to underscore that as faithful as I have always been to the regional balance policy, I chose a Prime Minister who hails from the South-West Region. His predecessor who served in that key position for nearly ten years

was from the North-West Region. In fact, since 9 April 1992, Prime Ministers, Heads of Government, have been appointed from among the people of those two regions.

Despite all this, some people will continue to talk of marginalization of the people of these regions. It must be acknowledged that such is human nature and there will never be enough duty posts to satisfy all the regions, divisions, sub-divisions, towns, villages, families and citizens of our country. Any choice that is made will always cause joy whenever one is honoured, and disappointment when one is not.

It is, however, crucial for us to change our mentalities in this regard. Though it is necessary to consider regional balance in new countries with a diverse sociological composition like ours, it should be recalled that ministers and other officials are not appointed to serve only their regions, villages or families, but to serve the entire national community. They must serve the general interest and not specific interests.

That is why since I came to power, I have and will continue to wage a ruthless war against corruption and the embezzlement of public funds, and to promote good governance.

My Dear Compatriots,

Since the outbreak of the crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions, the term dialogue has never been so much talked about, used and even misused.

In and out of the country, people have made proposals and suggestions. Some are realistic while others are clearly less so. There has been a barrage of advice. Some smart, others based on interests. Some people dared to issue injunctions.

There have also been multiple and varied initiatives, most of them made by people of good faith, by countries or organizations that are truly concerned about the future of our country and the well-being of our people. I wish to thank them for their effort and token of friendship.

It is, however, worth noting that the proliferation of such initiatives was sometimes unfortunately based on simplistic and false ideas, born out of secessionist propaganda. Such is the case with the purported marginalization of Anglophones, persecution of the Anglophone minority by the Francophone majority, Government's refusal to engage in dialogue preferring a military solution to the crisis or even ridiculous accusations of genocide.

Talking about dialogue per se, the issue has always been, with whom?

New information and communication technologies, especially social media networks, have unfortunately facilitated the advent of self-proclaimed leaders, extremists of all shades trying to achieve recognition using insult, threat, hate speech, violence and murder.

However, in no country in the world, has the killing of gendarmes or civilians, kidnapping, mutilation, molestation, burning, destruction of public infrastructure, prevention of children from going to school or people from going about their activities in peace ever been a source of legitimacy to represent or speak on behalf of the people, the very victims of such atrocities.

In democracy, only elections confer such legitimacy.

My Dear Compatriots,

The many consultations I have continued to hold on this crisis have enabled me to size up the strong desire of the people of the North-West and South-West Regions to return to a normal life, to be able once again to safely carry out their economic and social activities, to witness the return of refugees and displaced persons, and to see their children return to school. The Prime Minister's recent tour of the two regions has helped to confirm this feeling.

I therefore strongly believe that the time has come to rally all well-thinking and constructive forces in our country and in the diaspora to make this desire come true.

That is why I have decided to convene, from the end of this month, a major national dialogue that will, in line with our Constitution, enable us to seek ways and means of meeting the high aspirations of the people of the North-West and South-West Regions, but also of all the other components of our Nation.

The dialogue in question will mainly concern the situation in the North-West and South-West Regions. Since it will focus on issues of national interest such as national unity, national integration and living together, it is obvious that it will not concern only the population of these two regions.

The dialogue will therefore rally all the sons and daughters of our beloved and beautiful country, Cameroon, to reflect on values that are dear to us, namely: peace, security, national unity and progress.

It will also focus on issues that can address the concerns of the population of the North-West and South-West Regions, as well as those of the other regions of our country

such as bilingualism, cultural diversity and social cohesion, the reconstruction and development of conflict-affected areas, the return of refugees and displaced persons, the education and judicial system, decentralization and local development, the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, the role of the diaspora in the country's development, etc.

The dialogue, which will be chaired by the Prime Minister, Head of Government, will bring together a wide range of personalities: parliamentarians, politicians, opinion leaders, intellectuals, economic operators, traditional authorities, religious authorities, members of the diaspora, etc. Representatives of the Defence and Security Forces, armed groups and victims will also be invited.

Obviously, it will not be possible for everybody to effectively participate in this dialogue, but each person will have the opportunity to make a contribution.

Prior to the effective holding of the dialogue, the Prime Minister, Head of Government, will carry out broad-based consultations to solicit a wide range of views that will serve as a source of inspiration for the conduct of deliberations. In the coming days, delegations will also be dispatched to meet the diaspora to enable them to make their contribution to discussions on the resolution of the crisis.

In this regard, I am appealing to the patriotism and sense of responsibility of all our compatriots in the country and in the diaspora so that everyone, wherever they are, should seize this historic opportunity to help to steer our country on the path of peace, harmony, security and progress.

My Dear Compatriots,

The propaganda of secessionists has tried to present the recent court decisions taken against a number of our compatriots in the context of this crisis as an obstacle to the dialogue envisaged.

That is not the case. I also wish to use this opportunity to stress that respect for the rule of law and the fight against impunity are pillars in the consolidation of a State ruled by law to which we all aspire. Violating the rule of law and granting impunity to some citizens is paving the way for anarchy.

It is therefore crucial, at this stage, to dispel rumours that one can quietly loot, rape, burn, kidnap, maim, murder, in the hope that a possible dialogue will erase all these crimes and provide impunity to their perpetrators.

As shown by the experience of many countries in the world, such way of thinking will only encourage the perpetuation of violence in the crisis regions and even encourage it in crisis-free regions.

Admittedly, however, in the context of a dialogue, a peace process or national reconciliation, the possibility of pardon may be considered, under certain conditions.

It is equally true that in accordance with our Constitution, the Head of State is empowered to exercise the right of pardon.

It was, moreover, on the strength of this authority that I made a peace offer to members of armed groups during my recent swearing-in ceremony.

I wish to solemnly reiterate this offer today. Those who voluntarily lay down their arms and place themselves at the disposal of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Centres have nothing to fear. Their fellow armed group members who are already there can testify to this. Conversely, those who persist in committing criminal acts and violating the laws of the Republic will have to contend with our Defence and Security Forces and will face the full force of those same laws.

The same applies to promoters of hate and violence who, comfortably settled in foreign countries with impunity, continue to incite murder and destruction. Let them know that sooner or later they will have to face justice.

I am appealing to the countries sheltering these extremists to take action against these criminals if they really care about the situation of the people of the North-West and South-West Regions.

Most of them no longer have Cameroonian nationality, but they spend their time raising funds to carry out terrorist acts in Cameroon, masterminding acts of arson, kidnappings and murder, and issuing calls aimed at preventing children from attending school and fellow citizens from going about their business peacefully.

My Dear Compatriots,

The entire national community has high expectations for the dialogue I have just announced and hopes that this will be an opportunity for our brothers and sisters in the North-West and South-West to close this particularly painful chapter, to forget their suffering and to return to normal life. It also hopes that our country will continue resolutely on the path of progress, through fruitful discussions on ways and means of creating

conditions conducive to the optimal exploitation of natural resources and our country's enormous human potential. Therefore, we should all work towards a successful dialogue.

My Dear Compatriots,

Over the years, we have used our linguistic and cultural diversity, the talent of our sons and daughters, and our commendable efforts and sacrifices to build a solid country and a strong Nation. Together we have met many challenges and won uncountable victories. We have proven that united there is no difficulty we cannot overcome and no obstacle we cannot cross. We proved it yesterday. We will prove it again today and tomorrow. The future of our compatriots in the North-West and South-West Regions lies within our Republic.

Cameroon will remain one and indivisible.

Long Live Cameroon!