

**SUMMIT OF ECCAS, ECOWAS AND GGC HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
ON MARTIME SECURITY AND SAFETY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA**

OPENING SPEECH BY THE HEAD OF STATE

Yaounde, 24 June 2013

**Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
 Your Excellencies, Heads of Delegation,
 The Representative of the United Nations Secretary General,
 The Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
 Special Envoys from governments of countries friendly to the Gulf of Guinea,
 The President of the Cameroon Senate,
 The President of the Cameroon National Assembly,
 Mr Prime Minister,
 The President of the Supreme Court of Cameroon,
 Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Mission,
 Representatives of International Organizations,
 Distinguished Guests,
 Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to start by wishing each and every one of you, on my personal behalf and on behalf of the Cameroonian people, a warm welcome and a pleasant stay on Cameroonian soil, on the occasion of *the summit on maritime security and safety in the Gulf of Guinea*.

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to welcome so many eminent personalities to Yaounde on this occasion.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Secretariat General of the United Nations, the African Union Commission, the Secretariat General of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, and the Executive Secretariat of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), for their invaluable support in organizing this summit.

**Your Excellencies,
 Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Maritime piracy poses a serious threat to the peace and stability of our States. It undermines the people's development and wellbeing.

How can our countries progress if somehow our waters became too dangerous for the free movement of people and goods?

How would our towns be safe if pirates flood them with drugs and weapons?

How can we navigate the Gulf of Guinea waters in constant fear of being killed or taken hostage?

That is unacceptable, for the Gulf of Guinea would then cease being a safe bosom on Africa's shapely and curvy body, to become a hellhole.

Our response must be firm if we must avert a decline in the volume of goods that transit through our maritime space, and if we do not want to jeopardize our development and global balance.

Indeed, the ocean is not merely a vast expanse of water; it is also an energy source.

The ocean is not merely a maritime route for goods transit, but also a reservoir of mineral, plant and animal resources.

Seas and oceans are wonders for humanity.

From time immemorial, they have enabled people to travel, to trade and to generate wealth.

They have enabled people to share, learn about one another and fraternize.

For all these reasons, our maritime space cannot be left in the hands of unscrupulous individuals of organizations whose agenda is to transform it into a predators' haven.

We will not allow these pirates to wreak havoc in our waters or turn them into a lawless place where seafarers would be in danger.

Failing to respond would be tantamount to accepting that at some point, there would be no more maritime travel.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We must assume our responsibilities to stop Africa as a whole and the Gulf of Guinea in particular from falling prey to pirates, once and for all.

We must respond unfailingly and unflinching, to restore peace and quiet of yesteryear in our waters.

For my part, I am convinced that there can be no development without peace and security. That is all the more so for a region like ours where national economies still depend largely

on the people's capacity to generate wealth; generating wealth also means having full control over our maritime space.

Such is the spirit of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2039 of 29 February 2012, which urges our States to convene this joint summit.

Cameroon is all the more elated as the United Nations shares this concern with it.

The Security Council has prepared the roadmap for this summit, which is as follows: devise a regional anti-piracy strategy in cooperation with the African Union and with the support of regional offices of the United Nations Organization's Secretariat General in West and Central Africa.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you here, in Yaounde, so that together we can brainstorm and find appropriate solutions to this thorny issue.

I am also very pleased to announce that, in the face of the recurrent and destabilizing nature of maritime piracy, the Gulf of Guinea States have not folded their arms, but rather, have taken several initiatives.

In ECCAS, a sub-regional maritime security body has been set up. This is the "Central Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre". A maritime security funding mechanism has also been established.

In ECOWAS, a maritime strategy is being prepared. There is also a programme aptly christened, "*Operation Prosperity*", under which Nigerian and Beninese security forces conduct joint patrols on the coasts of Benin.

I seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the action taken by my brother, President BONI YAYI, and hail the remarkable work accomplished by the Cotonou Preparatory Ministerial Conference, whose conclusions laid the groundwork for the draft regional strategy tabled before us today.

I should also commend various international partners for their capacity building support provided us in the area of maritime security. I am referring in particular to the United States, the People's Republic of China, France, the European Union and Interpol.

In the same vein, I would like to express my satisfaction with Japan's announcement, at TICADV, that it will support efforts to combat insecurity in Africa.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Gulf of Guinea countries are witnessing a boom, with a strong economic growth, a well-educated élite, a young population aware of the stakes. But our determination, our national and regional capacities, as well as our efforts to eradicate piracy seem inadequate to prevent or effectively stamp out the threat. Therefore, collective effort is a must, for us to avoid a situation where, once eliminated in one country or area of the Gulf of Guinea, this scourge would rear its head in another.

While commending the achievements of various maritime military operations conducted here and there, I must underscore the need for a holistic approach to piracy. This would help us come up with innovative solutions, commensurate with the context and scale of this scourge for States of the region and for the international community.

It is thus crucial that the response developed should be security, governance and development oriented.

Failure is not an option to us.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In no distant future, the sea will be the new site for industrialization, when land would have been occupied.

The sea will possibly be the Eldorado where future generations will go and develop new intelligence for humanity.

Definitely, we face a huge challenge, but we cannot and do not want to shy away from it. Together, we decided to meet here to assert our firm determination to muster all our energy against this scourge. In so doing, we would forge, among Gulf of Guinea neighbours, an area of security and prosperity.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Lastly, I would like to say how important it will be for the decisions and recommendations adopted during this summit to be effectively implemented. Our sacrifices will not go in vain. Our efforts will bring peace, stability and prosperity to our countries and serve the interests of our peoples and those of our partners worldwide.

It is with this conviction that I now declare open the summit on *maritime security and safety in the Gulf of Guinea*.

Thank you.