

72ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(New York, 13 September - 24 December 2017)

General Debate

Theme: **Focusing on People: Striving for
Peace and a Decent Life for All
On a Sustainable Planet.**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. PAUL BIYA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON**

New York, 22 September 2017

**Mr. President,
Heads of State and Government,
The Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization,
Heads of Delegation,**

I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election as chair of this session of the United Nations General Assembly. I do believe you be served by your rich experience in successfully steering our proceedings. You can count on the full cooperation of my delegation.

My congratulations also go to Ambassador Peter THOMSON, your predecessor and key mastermind behind the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, on his outstanding achievements.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate Mr. Antonio GUTERRES on his unanimous election as Secretary-General of our Organization.

Mr. Secretary-General, please rest assured of Cameroon's constant support in the performance of your lofty and delicate duties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This session is being held within a global context marked by multiple hotbeds of tension worldwide, where terrorism continues to affect thousands of people, human activity is causing climate disruptions, and poverty is far from declining. However, it is also taking place in parallel with laudable efforts towards implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda designed for Humanity's fulfilment to ensure that no one is left behind.

Hence the full pertinence of the general debate under the theme, (I quote) "Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet".

Our debates and, especially, our conclusions will constitute a litmus test of our commitment to the ideal of the peoples of the United Nations who, in the preamble to the Charter, state their resolve to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to promote social progress and better standards of life for all peoples.

Mr. President,

For Cameroon and most of our States, peace is the sine qua non for the survival of humanity and for sustainable development. Such peace remains dangerously under threat, notably from terrorism, conflicts, poverty and climate disruptions. Today, I would say, we are all "beggars for peace". And such persistent threats are of utmost concern to us all.

Mr. President,

Today, no continent, no country is spared by the scourge of terrorism, the atrocities of which unfortunately have become part and parcel of daily life. Let me mention a few examples:

- August 2017, attacks in Barcelona and Ouagadougou;
- July 2016, bombing of Baghdad: 292 dead;
- October 2015, crash of a Russian Airbus in the Sinai: 224 dead;
- March 2015, attack of mosques in Sana'a: 142 dead;
- November 2015, attacks in Paris and Saint Denis: 130 dead, ...

When one thinks of Maiduguri, Kolofata, Fotokol ..., nothing but nameless, faceless bodies come to mind... The number of victims of the Boko-Haram terrorist sect in the Lake Chad basin is estimated at 2000. Cameroon and other neighbouring countries are grappling with the sect, which constantly changes its methods and tactics. We appreciate the support of our partners in this fight against barbarism.

The fight against this jihadist sect Boko-Haram requires more widespread mobilization if we really mean to stamp out this threat. It is killing our peoples, our communities, our independence and our democracy. Peace is at stake. In this regard, we look forward to the arrival in the Lake Chad region of the high-level mission mandated by the Security Council to the UN Secretary-General under resolution 2349.

Mr. President,

We condemn continuing conflicts in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, which are causing pain and hardship ... so many dead ... so many refugees and displaced persons ... so many children roaming without a roof over their heads and with an uncertain or even shattered future...

Cameroon, which has hosted and continues to host thousands of refugees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, understands how much they feel hurt, victimized and threatened in their very existence.

Therefore, let us mobilize and, through our policies, behaviours and actions, re-focus on people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace is under threat not only from terrorism and other conflicts, but also from persisting poverty. The Security Council has most appropriately reiterated that poverty is a serious threat. How then can one understand that we have difficulty tackling it accordingly?

The numerous declarations and resolutions, the various United Nations development decades, as well as the plans of action and other agendas adopted by the United Nations are not fully effective. The result is clear: poverty persists and the gap between rich and poor countries is ever widening. This situation is exacerbated by the fall in commodity prices.

Mr. President, let us all mobilize in a strong surge of solidarity to roll back poverty. Let us match our actions with our words. In so doing, we will offer conditions for a decent life to our people..., thus focusing on People!

Mr. President,

We must, for present and future generations, save our planet. We therefore welcome the Paris Climate Agreement, which Cameroon, I recall, was among the first countries to sign and ratify. We are pleased that steps are being taken to implement it effectively.

I would like to take this opportunity to strongly reiterate the legitimate and unanimous wish of developing countries. As we all know, these countries pollute less, and should thus receive from rich countries, which pollute more, multifaceted means to effectively promote the goals of the Paris Agreement at their level.

For Africa, there are two major challenges.

Firstly, ongoing forest degradation in Central Africa. Let us save the Congo Basin, the earth's second lung.

Secondly, the desertification of Lake Chad, which is drying up. This vast body of water, which is essential for the survival of communities and biodiversity, has already lost 90% of its initial surface. Let us save Lake Chad!

By so doing, we will be contributing towards preserving the planet for the greater good of humanity.

Mr. President,

The quest for peace concerns us all. All countries must pool forces to achieve peace.

Therefore, is it not yet time for the voice of poor countries, especially those of Africa, to be heard?

Is it not time, or rather high time, Africa's message to the World were better taken into account?

Is it not high time to restructure our Organization to give more weight to Africa's voice within a revitalized General Assembly, a Security Council that is more receptive and equitable to us?

A world characterized by greater solidarity is the sine qua non for peace on earth.

Mr. President,

Let me now conclude. Peace is our most precious asset. Without peace, we cannot take any sustainable and effective initiative in the interest of our youth and our peoples.

The theme of the debate aptly reminds us of the commitment of the founding fathers of the United Nations, namely to:

- save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; and
- guarantee a decent life for all free from want, through cooperation.

This debate urges us to renew our faith in the ideals and purposes of the United Nations.

Let us together take up the great challenge of world peace and development.

Once again Cameroon, as it did from this very rostrum on 10 September 2000, urges the world to rally together in a great coalition for humanity, placed back at the centre of our policies. For its sake, let us secure peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet.

Thank you, Mr President.