

MESSAGE OF THE HEAD OF STATE TO THE YOUTH

Yaounde, 10 February 2009

My dear young compatriots,

Last year at the same time, I urged you to wake up to the fundamental changes taking place in the world, changes which will shape the 21st century, and I encouraged you to prepare yourselves for them, in order to seize the opportunities that were bound to arise.

I however added that the complexity of the phenomenon made it difficult to analyze its trend and predict its effects.

I did not realize how right I was.

In fact, a few months later, the crisis rocked the global financial system and soon after affected the real economy all over the world.

As I pointed out recently, although we are affected only moderately, it is obvious that we will not be completely spared.

Should we for this reason scale down our development objectives and particularly those concerning our youth?

I do not believe so. Indeed, I think that we should transcend the crisis and prepare ourselves for the recovery which will inevitably follow. For you, dear young compatriots, there is no other way out, I repeat, than to acquire the best possible qualification in order to compete.

To meet such demand for education, the State pursued and accelerated the reform of our educational system.

Regarding basic education, the resources made available to the ministry have increased significantly. The latter is ranked fourth in terms of budgetary allocations. It can also be noticed that enrolment rates in nursery and primary schools are rising sharply thanks notably to free education. Also, 5 525 new teachers were recruited, raising the number of teachers on contract to nearly 25 000. Some 1 458 new classrooms were built during the 2008 financial year.

Pedagogically, the quality of education has been enhanced through, among others, the development of information and communication technology programmes. These efforts have resulted in an increase in the rate of success in graduation examination to about 80% while the school repeater rate has dropped significantly.

It should also be underscored that private education reform has been completed. It is therefore hoped that more opportunities will henceforth be open to promoters of this sector of education.

Concerning secondary education, the remarkable effort already made was pursued. Let us recall that with CFAF 204 billion, this sector of education has the highest State budget allocation.

One of the priorities in this sector was to expand the school map by setting up 155 new schools in all regions, building many classrooms and transforming 46 existing schools in order to increase the number of technical and bilingual high schools.

To improve the educational service quality, 2 000 new teachers from Advanced Teacher Training Colleges were recruited. Ten thousand other teachers benefited from continuing training programmes and 4 000 were inspected. Multimedia resource centres were installed in six new schools while five others voluntarily experimented with the teaching of national languages and cultures.

At the same time, initiatives were taken to develop partnerships with the private sector. Thus, more than 500 teachers were able to undergo internship in enterprises and nearly 500 private schools received subsidies amounting to about CFAF one billion.

It should be noted that, in general, results in official examinations are improving.

For this year, plans have been made to implement a vast construction and rehabilitation programme particularly in the Bakassi area. Several thousands of teachers and cadres will also be recruited.

Higher education for its part pursued its great transformation methodically. Let me give you a few examples.

At the academic level, as planned, lectures effectively started at the Advanced Teacher Training College of the University of Maroua as well as in the faculties of medicine, pharmacy and bio-medical sciences of the Universities of Dschang and Ngaoundere. Furthermore, studies are under way to open the Higher Institute of the Sahel in the Far North Region.

Also noteworthy is the opening of the technology centre of the National Advanced Polytechnic School of Yaoundé I University to provide students from our various universities with professional training in business creation and management. A free trade zone has been launched in the same school.

Similarly, the university authorities pursued the consolidation of the Bachelor's-Master's-Doctorate system.

It is also important to mention the installation of satellite equipment and servers of two virtual universities at Yaoundé 1, one national and the other sub-regional. Prior to that, the activities of the Information Technology University Centre had been launched.

It should also be pointed out that during the year just ended, 16 private higher education institutions were opened, bringing to 73, the number of institutions in this category operating in Cameroon. Very soon, the Fine Arts Institutes will be opened in the Universities of Douala and Dschang and the Institute of Fisheries Sciences in the economic capital.

Regarding infrastructure, it would be tedious to list the numerous facilities that have been completed or under construction in our universities. These include administrative buildings, laboratories, libraries, amphitheatres, lecture halls.

Similarly, important measures have been taken to improve the living conditions of students. Two University halls of residence are nearing completion at Yaounde 1. Sports complexes are under construction in Douala and Yaounde II as well as University restaurants in several universities.

Within the framework of university corporate governance, an agreement was recently signed with a local insurance company. Over a thousand

lecturers and their families are already covered by this health insurance, which includes evacuation abroad where necessary.

Lastly, several appointments were recently made at the helm of some universities to consolidate the new university governance.

This groundwork in the general domain of education which seeks to ensure equal opportunity for our youth and train various levels of cadre for our country must not make us forget that it is also our duty to prepare them for working and social life and to provide them with moral and civic education as well.

To that end, we need a veritable national youth policy that defines programmes to enable youth to acquire patriotic and democratic values and enter the production system. The Youth Plan on which there was extensive consultation in 2008 is in line with these objectives. It is now finalized and should be implemented once approved by the government.

Mention should also be made of the National Action Plan for Youth Employment which outlines actions to be undertaken to promote youth employment specifically. Prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Employment, it will require financing of about CFA F 165 billion. Its implementation should start during the 2009 fiscal year.

Concerning precisely the socio-economic integration of the youth, several major actions were undertaken last year. The rural and urban youth support programme, which is intended mostly for youth who are not attending or who have dropped out of school, helped to train over a thousand of them in 17 branches of activity, provided a good number with gainful employment and financed several hundreds of micro-businesses and junior enterprises. In the long term, these projects should generate thousands of direct or indirect jobs. Similarly, the youth socio-economic integration through the manufacture of sport equipment project has enabled the creation of 16 cooperatives for the production of this type of equipment.

Strategically, it was deemed necessary to study mechanisms likely to mobilize our youth for the development of our country. In this light, the organic instruments of the National Youth Council have been prepared. They should enable the putting in place of this body during the year.

Similarly, the instruments to set up and organize the National civic service for participation in Development have been finalized. I attach the

utmost importance to this structure which seeks the moral rearmament and social integration of youth. I want to hope that it will see the light of day as soon as possible.

To improve youth guidance for its full participation in development activities, collective brainstorming was undertaken on the role that could be played by associations. In this spirit, there are plans to put in place in 2009, the National Youth and Mass Education Committee which will be responsible for coordinating activities in these two domains.

Extra-curricular training has not been sidelined. The implementation of the programme to construct Multi-purpose Youth Promotion Centres is ongoing. Such centres offer the youth leisure and social integration activities and prepare them to enter working life. The Government's intention is to provide a centre in each administrative unit. There are plans to build thirty of them over the next three years.

My dear young compatriots,

As you can see, the State is making an enormous effort for the youth, be it in the domain of education in the broadest sense or socio- professional integration. The figures are there to testify. It devotes nearly one-fifth of the national budget to youth-oriented activities in all sectors. That is necessary. That is normal.

It would only be normal also that in return for the sacrifices thus made by the Nation, you should be strongly committed to the development of our country.

Beyond your personal ambitions, which by the way are legitimate, you should be asking yourselves what you can do for your country. In this respect, the knowledge and skills you have acquired will be significant contributions to the implementation of strategic projects that will secure Cameroon's future.

I want to believe that every one of you will make a point of contributing to the success of this great national endeavour.

Happy Youth Day to all!

Long live Cameroonian Youth!

Long live Cameroon!