INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY H.E. PAUL BIYA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY

Yaounde, 6 November 2018

- The President of the National Assembly,
- The First-Vice President of the Senate,
- The President of the Constitutional Council,
- The First President of the Supreme Court,
- Honourable Members of the Senate,
- Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- Dear Compatriots,

Allow me, first of all, to thank the President of the National Assembly for his words of welcome and his encouragement as I begin this new term of office.

I also wish, before you, once again, to thank the Cameroonian people for having renewed their trust in me. Such trust will represent an invaluable support to me in the discharge of the weighty responsibilities awaiting me in the years ahead.

The oath I have just taken “before the people”, in accordance with the provisions of Article 7 of our Constitution, in the presence of their representatives, is of a highly symbolic significance on two counts:

- it is an expression of absolute loyalty to the institutions of the Republic from which I cannot derogate; and
- it is an irrevocable personal commitment to performing the duties of Head of State as set forth in our Constitution.

As in the past, these principles will guide my action in serving the Cameroonian people during the seven-year term of “Great Opportunities” beginning today.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before outlining our prospects, I would like us to take a quick look back so that we can take stock of the present situation.

The seven-year term that has just ended was not a bed of roses.

Security wise, we first had to deal with repeated attacks by the terrorist group, Boko Haram, which spread terror and desolation in the far-north of our country. Together with our neighbours, and with the help of our traditional partners, we responded strongly. Our defence and security forces, to whom I once more pay tribute, chased the enemy out of our borders. The situation is now stable, but we remain vigilant and determined.

Then, in the North-West and South-West Regions, negative forces thought they could take advantage of socio-professional grievances to try to roll out a secessionist agenda. This was followed by successive acts of terrorist violence to which the Government responded by taking the necessary measures to ensure public law and order, as well the safety of people and their property.

It is obvious that the secessionist ambition undermines our Constitution which establishes the “indivisible” nature of our Republic.

On the other hand, our population’s repeated desire to be more closely involved in the management of their local affairs prompted us to take necessary measures to fast-track the decentralization process.

These priority tasks did not distract us from the need to work towards improving our economy, adversely impacted by the global economic and financial crisis, as well as falling commodity prices.

To that end, we continued implementing our structural reforms and taking measures to improve our fiscal situation. Our “resilience” was hailed by the IMF with which we concluded, in 2017, an economic and financial

programme backed by an “extended credit facility”. It is clear that these efforts account for our progressive return to growth.

At the same time, while ensuring the sustainability of our external debt, we gave a fresh impetus to our major infrastructure projects regarding power generation, drinking water supply and road construction. This is evident in the many achievements recorded.

Despite the adverse economic situation, many projects were initiated in the health, education and social services sectors. Unquestionably, considerable progress has been achieved in this regard.

Furthermore, we pursued efforts to complete the building of our institutional and democratic edifice with the effective setting up of the Senate and the Constitutional Council.

Against all odds, we have, thus, stayed the course towards emergence.

This quick review, which is far from exhaustive, clearly shows that our country is undergoing transformation and that it is resolutely set on the path of progress.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Overall, during the seven-year term which is starting, we will strive to consolidate our achievements, while exploring new avenues that will enable us to make use of all the opportunities offered by an ever-changing world.

In this light, we will naturally pursue our structural reforms to consolidate our fiscal balance and bolster our debt sustainability. A healthy financial situation is a sine qua non for economic and, hence, investment attractiveness.

In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to ongoing changes taking place on the world scene and which are bound to have an impact on our country.

The decades-old rules which have governed globalization of trade are being challenged. Indeed, protectionist and even isolationist tendencies are

gaining ground. These trends portray the obvious risk of a destabilizing effect on many countries, particularly developing countries like ours. We will increasingly suffer the effects of climate change which will impact the lives of our fellow citizens, notably rural dwellers.

In this regard, I think it is worthwhile for us to strive to develop the sectors of our economy that could significantly reduce our imports of goods and services. Such policy will have the advantage of enabling us to balance our chronic trade deficit.

Moreover, we will stage a veritable “agricultural revolution” by modernizing our production tools and further processing our agricultural products. This should be accompanied by the acquisition of new equipment and the construction of warehouses and access roads. Our status as breadbasket of Central Africa could thus be consolidated.

There can be no modern economy without an efficient industrial sector. We have an Industrialization Master Plan that presents the outline and content of a major project in this area. Its implementation will be among the priority tasks to be performed during the seven-year term.

Industry and agriculture require stable and sufficient power supply. We have been making significant efforts in this sector for some time now. The hydropower dams and plants that we have constructed should enable us, sooner or later, to fully meet the demands of our economy and our population’s energy needs.

However, we will not stop at that. We will continue to exploit all the available sites and rivers in order to transform Cameroon into a major electricity producer on our continent. We will also pay attention to rural areas by progressively providing them with solar energy plants.

Similarly, we will continue to develop our transport infrastructure (roads, ports, airports) to boost our economy and facilitate communication with our neighbours.

Bearing in mind that the ultimate goal of democracy is to provide the greatest number of people with the best living conditions possible and real equal opportunities, I will continue to devote all my efforts to:

- fostering economic growth that creates jobs, particularly for youths, and which can increase purchasing power;
- promoting the role of women in our society;
- facilitating the social integration of youths by further developing our educational system at all levels and focusing on professionalization;
- fighting against exclusion, notably by providing better protection to persons with disabilities;
- improving access to public drinking water and electricity utilities;
- enhancing our health system by building new hospitals and finalizing an efficient social security system;
- developing a worthwhile social housing policy;
- developing our cultural heritage;
- and, lastly, providing the sports sector with the support that it deserves, in the hope that the efforts that we have made to host AFCON 2019 will be rightly rewarded.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,

The major challenges that must be met to ensure the emergence of our economy, which I have mentioned, and the commitments that I have made to improve the quality of life for Cameroonians, require, first of all, the creation of conditions conducive to stability and security. Rest assured that I will see to it that it so happens.

The goal of achieving emergence must become a major national cause rallying all our fellow citizens in order transform Cameroon into a modern and socially advanced country.

Public servants and private sector workers have a vital role to play in this regard. I am aware of their difficulties. I will take the necessary measures to improve their working conditions, in order to enable them contribute more to our country's progress.

Before concluding, I want to stress that I deeply reflected over the frustrations and aspirations of the vast majority of our compatriots in the North-West and South-West Regions. A good number of these concerns and aspirations will be addressed as part of current efforts to accelerate the decentralization process. Measures will be taken as soon as possible to broaden the powers of local authorities in order to provide them with the means for greater autonomy.

Bilingualism and multiculturalism will continue to be promoted by the commission set up to that end.

These actions and others will be undertaken to resolve the many problems that are at the root of the frustrations and dissatisfaction that have been expressed in recent times. It is our hope that this will restore calm that is indispensable for a return to normalcy and usual economic activity. I am deeply convinced that the overwhelming majority of our compatriots in the two regions concerned aspire to a rapid return to peace within the national community.

Unfortunately, as a result of the threats that the secessionists keep brandishing in this part of our country, many of them were unable to exercise their right to vote during the recent presidential election and thereby express their attachment to our national unity. I call on them not to lose hope and to lend all possible support to the action of the authorities aimed at restoring peace. They know, better than anyone, what their life would be like under the yoke of extremists who have been spreading terror and desolation in their regions for some months now.

These war-mongers who are jeopardizing our national unity and preaching secession should know that they will face not only the full force of the law, but also the determination of our defence and security forces. I am calling on them to lay down their arms and get back on the right track. I am appealing particularly to youths who got involved in a futile adventure.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the destiny of our compatriots in the North-West and South-West lies within our Republic. With the support of the Cameroonian people as a whole and convinced that there is an honourable way out in everyone’s interest, I will strive to restore peace and calm in the

two regions concerned, with due respect for the institutions of which I am guarantor.

Turning to my young compatriots now, I would like to ask you not to lose hope. I have understood your deep aspiration for change that will open the door to the future and enable your complete personal fulfilment. I have also understood your desire for greater participation in taking decisions that concern the destiny of our country. I will take this into account bearing in mind that tomorrow's Cameroon will be built with your input.

By staying united and proud of its democratic, economic and social advances, our country will confidently embrace progress and modernity.

That is why, here and now, I am calling on the Cameroonian people, who I know to be patriotic, to help me to continue the task of nation-building in peace.

Long-live the Republic!
Long-live Cameroon!