

56TH EDITION OF THE YOUTH DAY

**HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE
TO THE YOUTH**

Yaounde, 10 February 2022

My Dear Young Compatriots,

I am addressing you barely a few days following the end of the 33rd edition of the Africa Cup of Nations, TotalEnergies AFCON, Cameroon 2021, which our country hosted from 9 January to 6 February 2022.

On the same occasion a year ago, I expressed the wish that TotalEnergies AFCON, Cameroon 2021 would be the most splendid edition of the Africa Cup of Nations ever organized on our continent.

In the end, thanks to the strong mobilization and involvement of all Cameroonians, especially the youth, the sports competition unfolded satisfactorily in several cities of our country, and will certainly be remembered as one of the most successful in the history of African football.

Indeed, there is reason to be satisfied and legitimately proud about TotalEnergies AFCON, Cameroon 2021 as it was unquestionably not only a great moment of communion for all, but also an excellent opportunity and a splendid showcase for Africa and the entire world to appreciate Cameroon's plentiful endowments and, in particular, the legendary hospitality, the vitality and dynamism of its people. The country thus demonstrated its capacity to address major challenges.

Unfortunately, this major sporting event was marked by the death of eight of our compatriots following a stampede at the South entrance to the Olembe Stadium.

I wish, once again, to honour the memory of the deceased. I also wish a speedy recovery to the injured,

for whom I have ordered free comprehensive medical care.

The investigation I ordered and the ensuing measures enabled the reopening of the Olembe Stadium and better traffic flow to the stadium.

Therefore, I can say that this unfortunate incident apart, TotalEnergies AFCON, Cameroon 2021 was a resounding success that brings honour not only to Cameroon, but also to Africa as a whole.

Obviously, our common ambition was to lift the Football Africa Cup of Nations and thus add a sixth trophy to the track record of our Indomitable Lions.

However, fate decided otherwise.

I can understand the disappointment of some, if not, all Cameroonians, especially as the AFCON was hosted on our soil.

Nonetheless, you are also aware that sport has its own realities that we must accept with dignity and fair-play.

Moreover, football lovers know better than anyone else that you can play well and win a match, just as you can play well and lose. That is why I believe what we must remember at the end of this great sporting festival is the delightful saga of the Indomitable Lions who, throughout, did fairly well.

Their fighting spirit and perseverance earned them an honourable third position.

I heartily congratulate and urge them to step up preparations in order to confidently engage in the sporting competitions that await them in the coming months.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

Despite the lingering global economic crisis, compounded by the adverse effects of the Coronavirus pandemic that has spared no country, your problems and aspirations feature among the major priorities of the current seven-year term.

In that regard, our country kept up its development efforts in the course of the year just ended by leveraging the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 and completing the decentralization process, in line with the major thrusts of its resolute progress towards emergence in 2035.

Thanks to the proper management of our economy, we continued to implement the Three-Year Special Youth Plan, which enabled the financing of 8430 projects, 119 economic clusters and 132 second-generation pioneer villages, as well as the creation of close to 22 000 direct jobs.

Additionally, about forty Multipurpose Youth Empowerment Centres were built and the National Youth Observatory was effectively set up.

The maiden field actions of the observatory have led to the production of 50 000 youth Biometric Cards to facilitate access to many basic social products and services at reduced costs.

With the increasingly visible participation of diasporic youth in nation building, the Government has put in place an incentive framework for their entrepreneurial initiatives through the Support Programme for the Return and Integration of Diasporic Youth.

It is worth restating that Cameroon needs all its children, including those from the Diaspora, who wish to participate and engage in the national and republican drive for our country's emergence.

Therefore, in the course of the year, the Government intends to further support the call for projects initiative launched to enable diasporic youth to participate in the development of our country.

This ambitious programme is expected, in the long term, to encourage such youth, who so desire, to return and invest in Cameroon and sustainably form part of the national economic fabric.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

Still concerning employment, substantial efforts are made each year to create jobs and thus enable the youth to join the workforce.

Hence, thanks to the youth employment promotion policy included in the Priority Action Plan 2030, 600 000 jobs are expected to be created annually, with the involvement of Regional and Local Authorities.

Such actions will be intensified with the setting up of the National Employment Council, which is expected to provide new solutions to reverse the unemployment trend and improve the productivity of our enterprises.

However, I am aware that the main obstacle in this regard has always been access to the most common funding for small and medium-size enterprises.

That is why, in the short term, the Government plans to mobilize specific national, bilateral and multilateral funding to support the establishment of a guarantee fund for young entrepreneurs.

The said Fund would provide project initiators and start-ups with the requisite guarantee to raise capital from financial markets or obtain financing from traditional banks.

However, many programmes are already being implemented as part of the day-to-day activities of several ministries with high employment potential. The purpose of all of these actions is to foster and boost youth entrepreneurship.

By the way, I am pleased to note that in 2021 all these programmes and projects were financed to the tune of 190 billion CFA francs.

This, unquestionably, is a significant effort that reflects the critical role small and medium-size enterprises play in our economy.

However, Government intends to mobilize additional resources for SMEs with the support of our development partners.

This is because, definitely, small and medium-size enterprises, notably youth entrepreneurship, can and

should serve as key drivers of our country's economic and social transformation.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

The availability of high quality skills that would address new development needs is one of the major challenges currently facing our country.

To that end, we must expand our training offer to provide all young people with the opportunity to acquire useful and relevant skills that would open up employment opportunities in every sphere.

In this light, I recently decided to create three new State universities in the East, North, and South Regions to provide a framework for higher learning conducive to the training of competent and competitive graduates in each of our regions.

In this regard, as you are aware, today's new global economy is digitally oriented, thus urging us to encourage young people to seize all the opportunities offered by digital communications, through their socio-economic adaptation and application.

I am pleased to note that many of our youth have a remarkable mastery of digital technology, particularly through the creation of numerous start-ups in various fields.

I urge them to be more inventive and creative in the digital economy sector, which has bright prospects for the future.

Yet, while we may commend the rapid adoption of digitalisation by our youth, we condemn the abuses noted in the use of such technological advances, especially on social media where vice, hate speech, and verbal violence abound and are increasingly rife.

Accordingly, I urge our youth to use social media in a responsible, informed, and constructive manner, as their primary role is to provide platforms and opportunities for discussion, information, and communication in a wide range of fields.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

The numerous actions I have just recalled, without being exhaustive, and which, for the most part, are designed to meet your job aspirations and expectations, serve as adequate evidence of the Government of the Republic's constant solicitude for you.

This is certainly in the best interests of each and every one of you, as well as of the entire Nation whose future lies in your hands.

It also underscores the role young people are expected to play in view of the Nation's challenges.

According to credible observers, Cameroon has made remarkable strides in its economic and social development. It is resolutely forging ahead towards emergence by 2035.

Despite a challenging economic context, our country is undergoing rapid transformation, and numerous opportunities are available to you in all fields.

Take advantage of them not only to achieve personal development, but also to contribute to the task of nation building which constitutes a key challenge for all Cameroonians without exception.

I further urge you to strive to preserve our invaluable achievements of peace, national unity, and institutional stability, for it is thanks to them that we have made the remarkable progress of which we are so proud.

Likewise, turn a deaf ear to the clarion calls for destabilisation and antagonism from incorrigible detractors who claim to know everything and take delight in systematic criticism.

You must also reclaim our social and republican values which, regrettably, it must be said, are fading in the mindsets of today's youth.

I am thinking particularly of patriotism, civic mindedness, respect for public property and the general interest, culture of probity, preservation of our customs and traditions, family mindedness, and respect for the elderly, to name but a few of such values that should constantly inspire and guide you.

Furthermore, it is also obvious that the perception of our country is influenced by how some of you portray it, both at home and abroad, which unfortunately, has been at odds with reality in recent times.

In other words, you must be aware of your role of promoting Cameroon's image and influence wherever you may be.

Follow the example of some of your valiant compatriots like Francis NGANNOU, Francis TCHOFFO and Eric Salvador TCHOUYO who recently won titles in their respective disciplines. Their outstanding performances and sense of duty and sacrifice highlighted their great sense of patriotism and did Cameroon proud.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

I cannot conclude this message without reiterating how near and dear to my heart your problems are, and my determination as well as that of the Government to find solutions to them. This is because your future, and consequently that of the entire Nation, depends on it.

I wish you all a Happy Youth Day.