

HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE NATION

On the Eve of the National Day, 20 May 2020

Yaounde, 19 May 2020

- Fellow Cameroonians,
- My dear compatriots,

I usually do not address you on the eve of our National Day. Traditionally, this is an occasion to celebrate, with joy, our national unity as well as our republican and democratic values.

Today, the context is different. Cameroon, like most countries in the world, has been affected by COVID-19. Our health system is mobilized to combat this terrible disease. Various measures have been taken to stem the spread of the disease as announced by the Prime Minister. It is necessary to scrupulously follow all the instructions that have been issued (wearing of face masks, social distancing, frequent hand washing). This is crucial for the health of everyone.

Under these circumstances, it was not possible to maintain the festivities marking the celebration of our National Day due to the gatherings it entails. Of course, it was with some reluctance that I took this decision. However, since my main concern is to preserve the health of my fellow compatriots, there was no room for hesitation.

Most of you have understood that it is necessary to put aside political squabbles and adopt a common front in the face of the insidious danger posed by COVID-19. Some political leaders who do not belong to the ruling majority shared this view. I thank them for that.

We have also had the pleasure of receiving assistance and encouragement from friendly countries, international organizations, national and foreign business leaders, as well as various personalities such as Mr Jack MA of the Alibaba Foundation. I wish to thank them here and now on your behalf.

- My dear compatriots,

The first thing I would like to tell you today is not to panic and not to believe in fake news conveyed especially by social media. Admittedly, this is a daunting challenge. However, we can meet it together as we did in many other circumstances.

I also want you to know that the Government, at my behest, is doing its utmost to bail us out of this serious health crisis.

As I have said, protective measures have already been taken to counter the spread of COVID-19 in our territory.

Despite these efforts, the number of infected persons keeps increasing daily, thus indicating that the fight against this pandemic is complex and difficult. I therefore call on each and every one of you to get involved. Each of us must comply with the measures that have been taken. This is one of the conditions for us to achieve the desired victory against the virus.

I strongly urge all political, religious and opinion leaders, all officials of associations, all traditional rulers and all dignitaries to fully participate in the fight against COVID-19. Of course, this should be done within the framework defined by the Government and in compliance with the laws and regulations of the Republic.

- My dear compatriots,

I would now avail myself of this opportunity to extend my sympathy to the families that have lost loved ones to this terrible disease. I extend my heartfelt encouragement to patients admitted to our hospitals and wish them a speedy recovery. I also call on those who have tested positive to strictly adhere to the rules of confinement.

I also wish to hail the courage of Cameroonian health professionals and those assisting them. With the resources available to us, they are doing the utmost to treat those infected with the disease. Indeed, they are not giving up in the face of the gravity of COVID-19 infection. The Nation, through me, congratulates and urges them to keep it up.

As you are aware, following the outbreak of the pandemic in our country, a Special National Solidarity Fund to Fight the Coronavirus has been set up, in addition to the protective measures I have already mentioned. I have taken measures, within the limits of existing resources, to ensure its initial replenishment with the sum of one billion CFA francs. Additional resources could be provided depending on changing needs on the ground.

I take this opportunity to congratulate our fellow citizens who have already made contributions. I call on those who can, to do same. National solidarity so requires.

In our current struggle, the Government will go to great lengths to combat any manipulation or exploitation of this tragedy for political, economic or social ends.

- My dear compatriots,

I would now like to draw your attention to the economic consequences of this health crisis.

Today, we are facing new challenges resulting from the collapse of stock markets, falling commodity prices and an unexpected sharp decline in trade. The coronavirus pandemic will therefore have a negative impact on the global economy as well as our economy.

Of course, we will have to return subsequently to the path of growth, while ensuring that jobs are preserved as

much as possible during this period of uncertainty and difficulty.

I urge the Government to continue to be mobilized as it has been doing since the outbreak of this health crisis. In an unprecedented social context, it should, in particular, be resourceful and inventive to maintain our financial balances, contain the rate of inflation, ensure the continuity of public service, especially in the education sector, and regulate economic activity so as to safeguard social stability and peace.

On the health front, despite the increase in the number of people tested positive for the coronavirus, the situation can be brought under control. We will therefore spare no effort to check the spread of the virus and reduce the mortality rate resulting from the pandemic.

The global health crisis triggered by COVID-19 will undoubtedly mark a turning point in the functioning of our society. It requires that we continue to strengthen our health facilities, scale up our healthcare services and, above all, update some of our development projects and programmes.

On another note, in the face of this ordeal, our health system must be more efficient. The other diseases affecting Cameroonians just as much must not be neglected. The same should apply to the routine immunization programme. That is why specialized COVID-19 treatment centres have been set up in Yaounde and Douala. Others are being established in regional and divisional headquarters.

- My dear compatriots,

Before concluding, I think it is necessary to briefly review the protective measures put in place to stem the

spread of the coronavirus. Most have already been implemented and are certainly contributing to slowing down the spread of the pandemic.

However, in view of developments in the health situation and the effects of COVID-19 on our economic and social life, it was necessary to make some readjustments. I therefore instructed the Prime Minister, who had already made two statements on the issue, to announce new measures and adapt others already being implemented. This was done on 30 April with all the necessary clarity.

I would like to specify the spirit of the 19 measures taken late last month without revisiting the details. The aim was basically to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on the national economy and the life of the most fragile households. The encouraging lessons learnt from our COVID-19 response strategy enabled us to take relief and support measures for the economic sectors and persons most affected by the pandemic.

These measures seek, among other things, to:

- ease social life and the movement of persons;
- suspend the payment of some taxes, dues and contributions;
- support ailing businesses; and
- increase the amount of family allowances and some retirement benefits.

It goes without saying that these relief measures do not exempt us from complying with “barrier gestures”, particularly the wearing of face masks in public places as well as the ban on public gatherings, aimed at checking the spread of the pandemic.

I therefore call on Cameroonians to have trust in public authorities. The Government is fully aware of the

gravity of the situation and is prepared to take all necessary measures. I can already state that:

- as soon as a treatment is found, steps will be taken to put it at the disposal of our fellow citizens; before that,
- the wearing of face masks in public places will be mandatory until further notice.

To that end, the local industry should continue to engage in the manufacture of face masks and alcohol-based solutions in strict compliance with Government and WHO prescribed standards.

I know I can once again count on your patriotic spirit, your sense of responsibility and your courage to enable us to collectively overcome this scourge that is affecting the entire planet. In this connection, we should avoid stigmatizing those suffering from the disease. Everyone must feel concerned and contribute their quota to the fight against the spread of the virus. We should bear in mind that negligence by a single individual can seriously harm the entire community. We should therefore not be complacent.

- Fellow Cameroonians,
- My dear compatriots,

You have certainly understood that we need to make a lot of efforts to fight COVID-19 that may pose a threat to the stability of our states.

During this difficult period, we must remain a united, supportive and disciplined people.

I therefore appeal for a kind of “united front” of all the vital forces of the Nation against the coronavirus pandemic. In that connection, I commend, once again, the

attitude of virtually all political leaders and religious authorities who have accepted to join in this national struggle. I also encourage all efforts geared towards developing an endogenous cure for COVID-19. Let us channel all our energies towards fighting this common enemy.

Long live the Republic!
Long live Cameroon!