

**HEAD OF STATE'S END-OF-YEAR 2023 AND NEW
YEAR 2024 MESSAGE TO THE NATION**

Yaounde, 31 December 2023

Fellow Cameroonians,

My Dear Compatriots,

Over the past year which is drawing to an end, our country has been faced with numerous challenges.

Some of them result from an increasingly difficult international context. Others are due to purely domestic issues, most of which are long-standing.

I would like to start by assuring you that in spite of this difficult situation, we continued to cope, together, like the united and close-knit Nation that we have always been, our eyes riveted on a single objective, the only one that matters, namely progress.

As in the past, the said international context weighed heavily on our internal situation.

The lingering war in Eastern Europe continued to disrupt the supply channels of the global consumer products market.

Foodstuff and energy resource prices thus continued to rise as the conditions for accessing external financing tightened.

The resurgence, last October, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict worsened the rifts within the international community and is now monopolizing its attention.

As expected, such a situation adversely impacted our country. It led to a general price hike in consumer products and, consequently, the cost of living. It also resulted in various types of shortages, including a shortage of petroleum products.

My Dear Compatriots,

The difficulties that I have just mentioned in no way dampened my resolve to work for the well-being of our people, who, without any doubt, massively trusted and continue to trust me.

Despite the unfavourable context, the Government, under my authority, continued its action with greater determination.

The laudable efforts made following the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure economic recovery yielded appreciable outcomes. The resilience of our economy was confirmed.

Proof of this, is our growth rate which continued to progress and was estimated at 3.9% in 2023, thanks notably to the performance of the non-oil sector.

The consumption support measures implemented by Government helped to contain and stabilize inflation at about 6.7%.

The implementation of various projects was continued or launched to meet the aspirations of the people and improve their wellbeing.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the most sensitive sectors.

The Project to Supply Drinking Water to the City of Yaounde and its Environs from the River Sanaga is virtually completed. Its imminent commissioning will help to substantially reduce the drinking water deficit in the city of Yaounde.

Studies on the Project to Supply Drinking Water to the City of Douala and its Environs are well advanced. In the long term, the city will be supplied an additional 400 thousand cubic metres of water daily.

Moreover, the Government has embarked on upgrading drinking water production stations in several secondary towns, namely Dschang, Yabassi, Garoua-Boulai, etc.

The requisite efforts will continue to be deployed to rehabilitate and extend the distribution networks of this precious resource in our towns and villages to make it more accessible to households.

Major strides were also made in the electricity sector to reduce our country's energy deficit.

About 44 thousand solar panels have been installed in the three northern regions, covering 40% of electricity needs in the said regions.

The 420-megawatt Nachtigal Dam will be commissioned in the coming days.

The Lom Pangar Dam-toe plant will also be operational in 2024. It will help to increase energy supply in the town of Bertoua and its environs.

Several other hydropower facility projects are also planned or being launched. These include the Kikot, Minkouma, Grand Eweng and Bini à Warak dams.

In the long term, the installed capacity of all these facilities will secure our country's electric energy self-sufficiency. Additionally, it will make us reach the enviable status of electricity-exporting country.

My Dear Compatriots,

I am aware of the extent to which the frequent water and electricity cuts are impacting your daily life and disrupting your activities.

I can assure you that the Government is sparing no effort to improve the situation in these core sectors.

I have instructed my Office to ensure celerity in administrative procedures and in sourcing for related financing by the relevant ministries.

The same instructions have been given with respect to the need to improve the situation of our road infrastructure.

As you must be aware, this problem is at the core of my concerns. The related challenges are multiple, the most acute of them being the inadequacy of financial resources.

However, I am pleased to note that we are also making relentless progress in this sector.

I am therefore satisfied that, during this year ending, over 700 kilometres of roads were asphalted or

rehabilitated nationwide. Several related highway engineering structures were also built in the process.

Construction works on the Lékié loop, as well as the Kumba-Ekondo Titi and Babadjou-Bamenda roads are ongoing and will be continued at a satisfactory pace.

Regarding the Ebolowa-Kribi road, negotiations with donors, which for long were stalled by environmental issues, are finally being concluded. All the requisite measures will be taken to ensure that the construction of this road, so eagerly awaited by the populations concerned, effectively starts in 2024.

I recently issued instructions for the rehabilitation of the Ngaoundere-Garoua road. Negotiations are also ongoing with our financial partners for the completion of construction works on the Mora-Dabanga-Kousseri road and the rehabilitation of the Edea-Kribi and Douala-Bafoussam roads.

The repair of urban road networks is continuing in the towns of Maroua and Ngaoundere. The related programme will extend to other regional headquarters.

Motorway projects will not be left out during the coming year with, particularly, the launching of the construction of the urban section of the Yaounde-Nsimalen motorway and that of Phase 2 of the Yaounde-Douala motorway.

Additionally, faced with the worsening situation, I have instructed the Government to urgently find a lasting solution to the problem of household garbage collection in our cities, in collaboration with Councils and City Councils.

Fellow Cameroonians,

My Dear Compatriots,

Over the past weeks, you were faced with a shortage of petroleum products, suffering many inconveniences as a result. To address this situation, I have instructed the Government to take urgent measures to ensure constant supply of the market.

However, the challenges in the sector are broader and more complex.

You must be aware that to maintain pump prices of fuel at their current levels, which are far below those in neighbouring countries, the State has to make huge financial sacrifices to subsidize petroleum product imports.

The burden of these subsidies weighs heavily on our budget and significantly reduces the much-needed resources to address other problems facing our people.

Last year, the Government increased slightly the pump prices of fuel.

As a result, the subsidy on petroleum products decreased from over 1 000 billion CFA francs in 2022 to around 640 billion CFA francs in 2023.

However, this subsidy continues to weigh heavily on public coffers.

Though we will most certainly have no choice but to reduce it further, we will ensure that the requisite

adjustments do not significantly impact the purchasing power of households.

Ultimately, the rehabilitation of SONARA, which must be expedited as I have instructed, should help to improve the situation in this sector.

My Dear Compatriots,

Despite the Government's goodwill, it is clear that the implementation of various projects to meet our people's aspirations faces a major impediment, namely inadequacy of the required financial resources.

This is why I have repeatedly ordered the Government to streamline public spending and find new ways and means of boosting public resources.

Regarding the reduction of public spending, I have strongly reiterated my previous instructions to the Government to reduce recurrent expenditure.

Actions implemented to combat corruption and misappropriation of public funds are essential for protecting public resources. They will be intensified in the coming year.

The Three-Year Integrated Import Substitution Plan for 2024-2026, which I have instructed the Government to implement, is also part of my effort to enable our country to save on its precious resources.

This plan should help to reduce the negative impact of imports on our trade balance by strengthening our

food sovereignty. Its deficit is estimated at just over 1 500 billion CFA francs per year.

To increase public resources, there is a need to explore new avenues, given the constraints of broadening the tax base and the slump in oil revenue.

In this regard, solid minerals, especially oil, appear to be an excellent niche for financial resources.

Our country is richly endowed with mineral resources that need to be exploited.

I am delighted that the mining projects I announced last year for the development of the Kribi-Lobé, Bipindi-Grand Zambé, and Mbalam-Nabeba iron ore deposits have been launched.

Improving the business climate is clearly a *prerequisite* for attracting foreign investment and creating a robust private sector that should facilitate our transition to emergence through dynamic job and wealth creation.

Trust in the judicial system is inevitable for perception of the business climate. As you are aware, the judiciary is one of the pillars of the rule of law.

Therefore, it is imperative that it should act with complete impartiality and should be impervious to any manner of interference. I would like to assure you that, as guarantor of its independence, I will continue to take all the requisite measures to ensure its proper functioning.

My Dear Compatriots,

Allow me to say a few words about the national education sector. Despite the Government's efforts, calm has not been fully restored therein.

Yet, according to stakeholders, the Government has made commendable efforts in this regard.

In addition to the various types of measures taken by the relevant ministries, more than 72 billion CFA francs was disbursed in 2023 to cover related expenses.

An additional amount of 102 billion CFA francs has also been provided in the State budget for the 2024 financial year to cover residual expenditure.

Therefore, it will be difficult for us to accept that a handful of teachers, who seem to have ulterior motives, should continue to hold our children's education hostage.

Let me be clear on this issue. As much as I am committed to ensuring that teachers practise their noble profession under appropriate conditions, I am equally uncompromising about respect for the right of our young people to education. Strong measures will be taken to ensure that our children do not fall victim to substandard education.

Constructive dialogue will also be pursued with the recognized trade unions to address the aspirations and concerns of teachers in a peaceful manner.

My Dear Compatriots,

Regarding safety, numerous road accidents continue to plunge families into mourning and rob the country of precious human resources.

I want to make it clear that this is unacceptable! Once again, I appeal to the sense of responsibility of drivers and bus service operators. All necessary measures must be taken to ensure the safety of passengers and other road users.

The Government, for its part, will not only step up efforts to improve the state of the road network, but will also rigorously apply the necessary preventive and repressive measures.

My Dear Compatriots,

Thanks to the people's active cooperation with our defence and security forces, the situation in the North-West, South-West and Far-North Regions has improved significantly.

It is now possible to calmly implement the reconstruction and development plans for the said regions.

However, atrocities committed by terrorists have not completely disappeared. Unfortunately, civilians are the main victims.

On 6 November 2023, the town of Mamfe was the scene of a barbaric massacre of some twenty civilians in the middle of the night.

I strongly condemn such atrocities, which defy reason and have no justification whatsoever.

I encourage our fellow citizens in the regions affected by terrorism to continue to cooperate with the defence and security forces, whose courage and professionalism I salute.

I reiterate my appeal to armed groups to lay down their arms and join Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Centres. I am pleased to note that an increasing number of these combatants have responded to this call in recent weeks.

For those who persist in criminal activity, be it terrorism or organized crime, the fate that awaits them is not an enviable one. They must know that our firm determination to ensure the security of our fellow citizens will never falter.

Fellow Cameroonians,

My Dear Compatriots,

In a few weeks, our beloved Indomitable Lions will participate in the 34th Edition of the Africa Cup of Nations in Côte d'Ivoire. On behalf of you all, I would like to encourage and urge them to defend our country's flag with courage and honour, as they have in the past.

I wish you all a Happy New Year, 2024.

Long Live the Republic!

Long live Cameroon!