

58TH EDITION OF THE YOUTH DAY

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

Yaounde, 10 February 2024

My Dear Young Compatriots,

I always have the same pleasure and the same emotion in addressing you, as is the tradition, on the eve of Youth Day celebration.

It has always been a great and special opportunity for me, an ideal moment for you and me to reflect on issues that are at the centre of your concerns and your aspirations.

As with other youths the world over, the issues concern your education, your integration into the job market, your participation in nation building and, simply put, your future.

I can assure you that these issues have always been and will continue to be at the core of my priorities and, hence, of Government action.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

Before addressing these structural issues, I would like to mention two recent events which, I am aware, are particularly dear to your hearts.

Like me, you were certainly disappointed by the early elimination of our Indomitable Lions from the ongoing Africa Cup Nations in Côte d'Ivoire.

I congratulate you for demonstrating dignity in defeat as you have done in victory so many times before.

Rest assured that we will keep up the fight and that we will win again. After all, as you so aptly put it using a term the secret of which you alone have, we are the Continent.

However, victory does not happen by chance. It requires not only talent, but also courage, discipline, organization and hard work.

That is definitely the secret of our compatriot, Francis Ngannou, who marvelled the entire world in his maiden boxing fight.

I am aware of the importance of football to you. In our difficult context, the State is making enormous financial sacrifices in that connection, and is therefore entitled to require better organization and results.

We will see to it. The Government and particularly the Ministry in charge of sports have received clear instructions in that regard.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

I am aware that, like your parents, you are concerned about the recent hike in fuel pump prices. You are also worried about the impact that it could have on your living conditions.

I wish to assure you that the requisite efforts have been made to maintain the adjustment at a reasonable level. I have also instructed the freezing of the prices of cooking gas and kerosene in order to preserve household purchasing power.

You should know that this operation was inevitable, owing to the current budget constraints and our desire to avert shortages.

Apart from the various support measures decided by me, constructive discussions are ongoing between the Government and its social partners. They seek to preserve the viability of the activities of the relevant sectors and the interests of users and consumers.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

For many years now, the bulk of the State budget has been devoted to the education sector. This reflects the importance the authorities attach to your education.

Over the years, and at all levels of our educational system, new infrastructures have been built and more teachers trained and deployed.

Curricula are regularly reviewed in order to evermore progress in professionalizing teaching, our goal being to improve education-job matching.

In this connection, I have instructed the Government to set up a competitive skills development mechanism.

Such is the idea behind the Secondary Education and Skills Development Support Project for Growth and Employment.

It helps to finance initial and continuing worker training. It also seeks to build the capacity of stakeholders in the social economy and the informal sector where many young people operate.

I have also prescribed the reduction of school fees in vocational training centres of excellence from 500 thousand CFA francs to 50 thousand CFA francs to enable the greatest number of youths to access quality training.

Besides the commissioning of the new National Trainer Training and Programmes Development Centre, I am pleased to mention the commissioning of the Maroua, Ngaoundere, Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda and Bafoussam Vocational Information and Counselling Centres, from where youths can now obtain information on various opportunities in the job market.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

In addition to recruiting a significant number of youths in the Public Service each year, the State is increasing initiatives to boost job creation in the private sector, and to encourage self-employment.

This cannot be overemphasized. Self-employment is one of the best ways to achieve socio-professional integration, as neither the State nor the private sector can absorb the growing number of young people entering the labour market each year.

This approach is consistent with the Special Three-Year Youth Plan launched in 2016. It has already funded thousands of youth-focused projects.

Similarly, the Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme contributed to the establishment of over 12 000 new businesses in 2023, creating nearly 22 000 direct jobs.

While these strides are definitely encouraging, I am fully aware that they remain inadequate considering the number of young job-seekers.

That is why I urge you to seize the opportunities offered by the implementation of the Three-Year Integrated Import Substitution Plan 2024-2026 to

engage in productive activities. It will enable you not only to make yourselves useful to your country, but also to find the wherewithal to fend for yourselves.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

I would like to take this opportunity to hail the work of the various bodies set up to facilitate the social integration of youths.

Such is the case of the National Youth Council which currently comprises 14 000 youth organizations and decentralized bodies.

The same is true of municipal and regional youth councils. They have enabled nearly 8 000 youths to voluntarily commit to learning how to manage public affairs and development projects in their communities.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

Addressing the concerns of the youths has remained at the heart of my political commitment. Under my stewardship, the Government has worked relentlessly and resolutely towards this goal.

However, I believe that our youths will be unable to leverage the opportunities available to them unless they fully embrace the civic and moral values that are the foundation of social life.

These include hard work, integrity, patriotism, tolerance, civic mindedness, compliance with the law and respect of the common good.

Today, we are all witnesses of the gradual dissolution of these values in our society and, unfortunately, among the youths as well.

Moral decay, irresponsible and deviant behaviour, violence, indiscipline, alcohol and drug abuse and intolerance are on the rise in our society. Schools are no exception. Social media, now the preferred means of expression for young people, is being abused and is becoming the stage for various forms of extremism.

Once again, I urge you to be fully aware of this situation. I also encourage parents and more generally all educators to fully assume their responsibility.

Although attitudes and behaviours are changing inexorably, they should not relent in their efforts to continue educating and mentoring our youths. They should continue to instil in them values that will enable them to overcome life's challenges.

My Dear Young Compatriots,

The growing desire of a fringe of our youths to emigrate to other climes is increasingly a cause for concern, especially when it becomes an obsession and even affects people who are well integrated into their local communities.

Obviously, our country, like many others around the world, is facing difficulties. However, leaving is not always the solution.

Emigrate? Yes, but not at all costs. Moreover, you should know that while you yearn to leave, many foreigners are trying to settle in Cameroon, thereby

confirming that ours is a hospitable country and a land of opportunities.

Having said this, I have not lost sight of your legitimate aspirations. Not to mention the anxieties of all youths of your generation, wherever they are.

However, it is my responsibility to remind you, year in year out, of the illusions and perils of emigration at all costs.

Most importantly, my dear young compatriots, remember that you are Cameroon's present and future. It is your lofty task to persevere, with faith and determination, in the exalting task of building this strong and prosperous nation. You know you can always count on me.

I also know that I can count on you, as you have proven in the past and are proving now. I know that you will do so in the future.

Your vitality, your ingenuity and your maturity enable you to make a valuable contribution to efforts towards securing a bright future for our country.

Happy Youth Day to you all.

Thank you.