

PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION FOR PEACE AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DIALOGUE IN DIVERSITY

By Hon. Martin OYONO

Introductory speech

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Members of the press,

Dear participants,

I warmly appreciate your presence in this meeting following the invitations that I sent to you.

This initiative that I took to address the press today is a citizen's contribution with regard to the severe crisis, as you can imagine, that is affecting two Regions in Cameroon at this end of year: the North West and South West Regions. Two Regions which present the typical history of the English speaking people and the Anglo-saxon culture.

Some of our compatriots from this part of Cameroon have exercised their legitimate right to corporatist claims, put forward by Lawyers, then, by teachers' syndicates and lastly by University students. These grievances have been expressed through public demonstrations organized for diverse reasons for which, some were genuine and others not. Unfortunately, these demonstrations were destructive, disastrous and regrettable. The violence that ensued plunged the entire country into confusion, consternation and indignation.

Before I continue my speech, I would like to express my heartfelt condolence to the bereaved families during these unfortunate events and to the injured; I wish them a speedy recovery. I also express my sincere regrets to those who witnessed material losses. I strongly support the Forces of Law and Order who mobilized to safeguard persons and goods and reinstate peace and tranquility. I therefore urge everyone to respect laws and regulations in this regard.

I strongly condemn all atrocities committed here and there. Physical attacks, acts of torture and humiliation are unacceptable in a democracy like ours desired by His Excellency the President of the Republic and the entire nation. The desecration of the emblem, our flag; common symbolic figure which brings together our differences and represents our belonging to the same nation, is appalling and unjustifiable. The burning of public or private buildings, public or private cars, are acts of vandalism that cannot be justified by any claim.

This is an opportunity to reiterate, the abstract principles that govern Cameroon.

Our country is a Rule of Law. That is, a State governed by law and justice. This therefore excludes at all times and in all circumstances, anarchy, arbitrariness and the temptation for self justice. The use of republican justice, which is based on national laws and other international commitments, should be the rule and the only means of claiming one's rights.

Our country, according to Section 1 (2) of the Constitution in force, that is the Constitution of 18 January 1996, is a decentralized Unitary State. Until the fundamental law is reviewed by the mechanisms envisaged for this purpose, the consolidation and improvement of unitary and

decentralized aspects of our State should be a concern at all times. In case this reality is denied or this dynamic is contested, be it at the level of the Government, administratively or through advocacy, such acts will be instantly condemned by the national community because Cameroonians are proud of their unity and envious of their togetherness.

Our country, according to Section 1 (3) of the Constitution, has adopted “English and French as the official languages of equal value”. And it is not by chance that English comes before French in the constitutional numbering order. The reversal of such constitutional precedence in practice or the premeditated or unconscious minimizing of a language for the benefit of the other, can lead to legitimate frustrations that give room to social claims.

Our country is peaceful and democratic. Nothing has indeed been definitely achieved but, the strong desire of Cameroonians is to establish lasting peace and an exemplary democracy. The preservation of these important achievements has to, in all circumstances, lead to an attitude of respect of specificities, tolerance of differences and frank and sincere dialogue.

Candidly, Cameroon is wrought with many challenges, problems and serious issues that Francophones and Anglophones share in common. The scrupulous non compliance with the constitutional imperative of the promotion of bilingualism, the poor and unusual implementation of decentralization, the lack of follow-up on policies adopted by the Head of State on mass unemployment, isolation, corruption, administrative predation, condescendence of some leading elite, monopolizing of common goods by some people; are the disturbing issues that can only

be justified through inertia, the lack of careful planning, incompetence, the lack of consideration for the general interest and lack of patriotism.

The consequences of these defects do not spare any region. The perpetrators of this jostling come from all regions. The solution to overcome this cannot be avoidance, stigmatization of some by others, or even less splitting the country.

Let's make a stop at the so-called peculiar Anglophone problem. Yes! There is actually an Anglophone problem. The problem is confusion. Confusion maintained for reasons that would be unnecessary to dwell on here and now. The Anglophone problem in our opinion is two-faceted: firstly a linguistic problem and secondly a cultural problem.

Firstly, it is simply the failure to take into consideration the constitutional provisions of the equal weight of English and French. Whereas all government services in Cameroon, from top to bottom, have translation services and staff deemed competent, nothing justifies the fact that legislative and regulatory texts are not concomitantly delivered in the two official languages. And contrary to popular belief, the publication of documents in both languages benefits but the Anglophones. It is an omission which certainly seems to affect our Anglophone compatriots, but which seriously hinders the promotion of English. And as a consequence leads the whole country to unfortunate sequels. Considering the current policy of attracting foreign investors how is it possible that translated documents are not made available in the language of international business? And when our plenipotentiaries go to attend international meetings where English is the only medium of expression, would it not be wise to go to such meetings with national documents in English?

Secondly, that is, the cultural facet, it is needless denying the fact that our Anglophone compatriots have had an Anglo-Saxon cultural influence of which just the language is the apparent vector. They have a peculiar life style, specific social codes. A relationship to the singular State, the school and university system is different. Otherwise how do you explain, for instance, the absence of the probatoire exam in the

Anglophone sub-system? However, this difference, far from being an impediment is an asset to be jealously guarded and developed and far from weakening national unity it should rather reinforce it, for it makes Cameroon peculiar in the world. It is moreover established that some significant reforms in our country today are Anglo-Saxon inspired. Such as the BMP system in our universities, the new Criminal Procedure Code drawn from the Common Law system, the programme budgeting, etc...

What the national community must attend to is the integration of both cultures; it is the living together with our differences. It should not be the attitude of withdrawal, closure, rejection, stigmatization, scorn, assimilation or willful unconscious absorption of the other which no longer have a place in a society where inter-community marriages are clearly on the rise. It is a question of mutual respect. We must take cognizance of our common wealth which is our dual culture beyond our cultural diversity. Indeed, our country is a cultural mosaic of which preservation within the two linguistic blocks imposed by history is firstly a constitutional imperative.

In order to achieve this, a back cycling dictated by the denial of the historic compromise seems less relevant and irresponsible.

On the contrary, it seems imperative, to implement real and effective decentralization, implemented according to the constitution which stipulates in Section 55(2) that:

“Regional and local authorities shall be public law corporate bodies. They shall have administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local interests. They shall be freely administered by councils elected under conditions laid down by law.

The duty of the councils of regional and local authorities shall be to promote the economic, social, health, educational, cultural and sports development of the said authorities”.

This hyper centralization which still characterizes Cameroon is obviously anachronistic and impoverishing. It is therefore urgent for the State to take concrete steps to implement the law on decentralization.

The devolution of powers which is currently in force should be accelerated and improved in order to comply with Section 7 of the Law of 2004 on decentralization which stipulates that **“Any** devolution of power to a regional or local authority shall be accompanied by the transfer by the State to the former, of the necessary resources and means for the normal exercise of the power so devolved.” Moreover, the same Orientation Law of 2004 provides in its Section 2(2) that **“Decentralization shall constitute the basic driving force for promotion of development, democracy and good governance at the local level.”**

There is therefore no justification to the fact that till date regional councils only remain in the spirit of the constitution. We believe that if nothing is done in this direction, the so-called anglophone crisis, which followed regional memoranda, will resurface sooner or later. Moreover, the current immobility unfortunately fosters appeals for secession, which are only backed by some because the policy on decentralization has not been fully implemented and sustained.

It is more than ever before urgent to bring Cameroon into good decentralized governance, with its imperative foundations which include democracy, citizenship, civility, totality, right balance and its constituent foundations such as credibility, dialogue, effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

Dear journalists and participants, this is the contribution I wanted to share with you because the Parliamentary Institution, to which I belong, after the Presidency, remains the voice of the People who elected us all and gave us this mandate. As for me, I have always appropriated this maxim “Evil prospers because good people are inactive”.

Before answering your questions, allow me to also share with you a wonderful experience that I just had when I took part in the last COP 13 on biodiversity in Cancun, Mexico. Thanks to the bilingualism of my Country. I was designated Vice President of the African chapter of the Global Legislators Organization which I have been representing in the Cameroonian Parliament since November 2014.

Thank you for your kind attention