

OPENING SPEECH
BY
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SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF CAMEROON

November 2015

- **Mr President of the Senate;**
- **Mr Prime Minister, Head of Government;**
- **Members of Government;**
- **The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;**
- **The Attorney General of the Supreme Court;**
- **Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
and Representatives of International
Organizations;**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament and Dear
Colleagues;**
- **Distinguished Members of the Civil Society;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

After about four months of recess, we have again assembled in this Chamber for the opening of the proceedings of the November 2015 ordinary session, the 8th session in this five-year legislative period. Before I proceed, I want to state that this session is devoted mainly to the scrutiny of the 2016 finance bill which lays down the legislative and financial framework for the economic and social development of our country.

Far from being a mere formality and even a tradition, your presence, Mr Senat President, Mr Prime Minister, Head of Government, The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a sign of esteem and consideration towards the Nation's Representatives and a joint commitment to work together, in synergy, for the welfare of the people.

Permit me also to discharge the pleasant duty of wishing all and sundry a warm and cordial welcome to this Chamber and a most pleasant stay for the entire period that we will commune together in these premises.

As I stated earlier, this session is devoted to the scrutiny and adoption of the State's finance bill. It is taking place in the wake of important decisions by the President of the Republic amongst which is Decree No 2015/434 of 2 October 2015 reorganizing the Government.

Following this cabinet reshuffle, a new crop of ministers have made their entry into the Government to boost those maintained so as to speed up the major overarching projects outlined by His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic, Head of State.

This ceremony very aptly affords me the opportunity to extend on behalf of the Nation's Representatives and my humble self our sincere congratulations to all the members of this new team in which the President of the Republic, Head of State and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces has bestowed confidence to assuredly execute the major anchor projects, some of which were launched some years ago and others a few months ago.

I wish to particularly highlight the Head of State's gesture towards Prime Minister Philemon YANG who has been maintained at the helm of the new Government of 2 October 2015. Mr Prime Minister, I join all the Members of the National Assembly in extending to you our warm congratulations.

Mr Prime Minister, Ministers, we need not belabour the importance and delicate nature of the missions which have henceforth been entrusted to you.

During the 15 October 2015 Council of Ministers, the Head of State declared and I quote **"It is an honour to serve one's country as a Member of Government. But it is also, and above all, a responsibility, a huge responsibility"** unquote.

May this powerful statement stick in your hearts and set the pace and marker for your respective roadmaps. In choosing you, the Head of State, His Excellency Paul Biya hopes that each of you will use their experience and all their expertise to meet the expectations of the Cameroonian people whom we

Members of the National Assembly have the awesome task of representing them.

Socio-political and economic challenges and stakes are numerous, just as urgent as the priority files. I am alluding here to the emergency plan and the organisation of the 2016 and 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) which are the priorities of the Government of the Republic.

Furthermore, Mr Prime Minister and Ministers, I wish to assure you of the availability of Members of the National Assembly, the People's Representatives, to help you accomplish the tasks that the President of the Republic has entrusted you with.

Besides, it can't be otherwise given that Parliament is an institution of the Republic which neither opposes the Government nor competes with it.

Hence, I am exhorting ministers and Members of the National Assembly to work hand in glove, in synergy, to achieve Cameroon's emergence by 2035.

Mr President of the Senat,

Mr Prime Minister, Head of Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of us has not answered present as we open our deliberations. While we had hoped to be all present on this opening day, the cold hands of death have unfortunately snatched one of us.

As a matter fact, Hon. VICHE TAGA of blessed memory, MP for Mayo-Tsanaga North in the Far North Region passed on forever on 21 August 2015 as a result of sickness, thereby shelving his sash in the cupboard of history.

Our dear colleague died just like the pilgrims who lost their lives following the stampede that occurred on 24 September 2015 in Mina in Saoudi Arabia, like the brave Cameroonian soldiers who have fallen at the battle front in the war that our country is waging against the cynical terrorist sect Boko Haram, lastly, like the peaceful citizens killed in the criminal acts masterminded by suicide bombers who unfortunately continue to wreak havoc in our villages in the western part of the Far North Region.

Cameroonians have rightly appreciated the special assistance from the Head of State to the wounded persons and the family members of the victims of the horrible tragedy in Mecca. Moreover, the national day of mourning which was decreed by the Head of State on 16 October following this sad event, was appreciated by all Cameroonians.

To the bereaved families of all these tragedies including that of our illustrious departed colleague VICHE TAGA, on behalf of the Nation's Representatives, I extend our sincere condolences.

I now invite you to kindly rise for a minute of silence in memory of all these illustrious ones who have gone to the world beyond.

SILENCE

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The security situation at the western borders of the Far North Region and in the East Region of our beloved and beautiful

country remains disturbing in spite of relentless efforts of the Government of the Republic.

In the northern part and more specifically in the Far North Region, the Boko Haram sect through suicide attacks, which are the group's new modus operandi, abductions of persons, destruction of property, assassinations and summary execution, continues to instil horror, terror and fear.

The execution worth deploring is that of the son of the 2nd class Traditional Ruler of KOSSA in the Mayo-Sava division, who was slaughtered like an animal barely two days ago by the Boko Haram terrorists.

Sixteen attacks with invaluable material and human consequences, the latest of which occurred in Fotokol three days ago, were carried out during the past six months.

As a result of these acts of violence, many people are fleeing from the border areas to urban zones which are relatively secured or to towns situated further hinterland, exposing themselves and their host communities to all sorts of danger and other forms of disaster.

Farm work and businesses have been slowed down, thereby plunging several villages into misery, shortages and other existential difficulties.

The abundant rains this year in the divisions of Logone and Chari, Mayo-Sava and Mayo-Tsanaga, highly coupled with the actions of the Boko Haram sect, were, unfortunately, not useful to the farmers of these zones who, for fear of incursions and atrocities of the barbaric terrorists did not dare to carry out their agro-pastoral activities.

Suddenly, with the influx of thousands of immigrants from neighbouring Nigeria, the already precarious food situation was worsened by the looming threat of a serious food crisis.

Hence, I wish to seize this opportunity to still count on the hospitality of all and sundry by appealing to the national and international community to further manifest their high sense of solidarity in order to check the looming food crisis quickly.

Mr Senate President,
Mr Prime Minister,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The alarming proportions that the aforementioned food crises is taking would have been further compounded were it not for the constant and renewed attention of the presidential couple to the population affected by terrorist activities, trans-border crime and natural disasters in the northern region of the country and in the East Region.

The presidential couple's constant attention was further evidenced in Maroua where a few days ago a special consignment of 1250 tonnes of foodstuffs and 16500 bags of cattle cake estimated at 2 billion 227 million CFA francs was received.

Therefore, on behalf of the Nation's representatives and myself, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the President of the Republic and his wife, our highly respected First Lady, Mrs Chantal BIYA, for their compassionate, generous and legendary magnanimity which they constantly manifest whenever any part of the country, especially the Far North Region is hit by disaster.

I also wish to express my gratitude by fully commending the substantial and valuable humanitarian gestures of international organizations and those benign men and women who through their humanism and solidarity relieved and alleviated the suffering of our compatriots who were affected by disaster.

I wish to equally express the gratitude of all the Nation's representatives to them.

At this juncture, I would like to salute and commend the bravery, the sense of duty and abnegation exhibited by our defense forces and elements of public security.

They are indefatigable, fearless, and courageous combatants imbued with patriotism and who are prepared to risk their lives to effectively defend and protect the population in localities that are frequently bombed by members of the Boko Haram sect. All the Nation's representatives are hereby extending their words of encouragement to our valiant soldiers.

Last but not the least, I am delighted with the close and fruitful collaboration of the local population, especially as they are the real target of the terrorists. The work of the vigilant groups created by the local population some of whom are members of such groups has so far satisfied all Cameroonians and those in charge of defence and security issues.

The collaboration between the local population and these vigilant groups which have understood that issues of national defense should be everybody's concern has made it possible to keep many suspects at bay and thus prevent them from carrying out the diabolic plans devised by the enemies of our country. In this way, they have prevented our country from becoming an undesirable battle ground with loss of lives.

It is worthy to note that if the Boko Haram sect has now changed its tactics, it is undoubtedly because Boko Haram is unable to withstand our strong army in a conventional warfare. The use of suicide bombers, mines and other explosives buried along the road used by our defence forces on patrol is eloquent proof that the enemy is, in many respects, in great difficulty, nay running out of steam.

I wish to stress that the change in tactics and in the modus operandi of the Boko Haram sect is an indication that our defence and security forces need to diversify their combat strategies, because new challenges call for new strategies to strike back.

The back of Boko Haram is already on the wall and, frankly speaking, the Boko Haram sect will be annihilated and driven

out of our national territory. Boko Haram will be kicked out of our national territory by all means.

To this end, we hope that the consolidation of military cooperation, especially through the donation of military equipment, technical and logistic support by the European Union and friendly countries across the globe to Cameroon and more recently the 300-man American military personnel dispatched to the regional capital of the North Region will significantly contribute stultify the deadly activities of an invisible and yet a real enemy.

The foregoing once more brings to the limelight the vitality of Cameroon's diplomacy- an effective diplomatic policy pursued with resounding and great successes under the stewardship of His Excellency Paul BIYA, President of the Republic and Head of State.

I cannot end my statement on Boko Haram without drawing the attention of Government and specialized agencies to the increasing use of female folks for diabolic ends by theses lawless individuals who have transformed little girls into suicide bombers for their obscurantist, diabolic and ignoble pursuits.

Faced with such increasingly recurrent practices, the House of the People's representatives urges Government and especially the ministries in charge of the training and education of the youths, women and the family, as well as the ministry of Social Affairs, to be vigilant and seek efficient strategies to enhance the civic, moral, ethical and professional mentorship of the youths, backbone of our nation who have unfortunately become the target and instrument of islamist terrorist groups.

Let us now talk about delight issues. I commend, and with me all Members of the National Assembly, a number of measures taken by Government in recent months for the welfare of the people notably:

- The effective establishment of the Bank for Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SME) and the Agency for the promotion of SME which marks a real turning point in the support of young entrepreneurs whose enterprises are the bedrock of our economy;
- The setting up of the National Electricity Transport Company (SONATREL), pursuant to the framework law on the electricity sector adopted by parliament in 2014. This bold measure shall improve the quality of public service in this domain and also solve the rampant energy crisis;

- The launching of the migration programme to the Digital Terrestrial Television and the recent restructuring of the CRTV which, we hope, will improve the production and the quality of our national public service television channel. This digital migration is an appreciable quantum leap that would revolutionize the national audiovisual landscape.

Honourable colleagues,

Ladies Gentlemen,

The scrutiny of the Finance Law for the 2016 fiscal year, which is the crucible of this ordinary session, takes place against a national socio-economic background characterized by a shrink in oil prices and raw materials, the war against the terrorist sect Boko Haram and border insecurity as I outlined above.

It is worthy to underscore and commend the laudable performance in tax collection within the sector of domestic taxation which brought in huge resources thereby paving the way for the state to meet its financial obligations.

In reality, such a context is not suitable for the race initiated by our country on the search for prosperity and development.

However, while examining the 2016 Finance bill, we must keep in mind the performance imperative in the perspective of achieving the major objective and priority of Government which is the acceleration of economic growth.

In this regard, it is our responsibility to ensure that the guideline given by the President of the Republic for the fruition of our development goals and the circular on the preparation of the 2016 budget are actually taken into account during deliberations on this finance bill.

We should understand that we need to step up budgetary discipline, consolidate the progress made in decentralization, conduct general census in agriculture and livestock, bedrock of our economy, improve business climate, ensure the effective granting of investment incentives adopted by parliament, improve the output of para-fiscal levies so that generate resources should actually be used to promote vital sectors and not on operating expenses. It is also about strengthening the professionalization of teaching and public governance.

As regards the latter aspect, that is, public governance, the National Assembly shall during this session proceed with its capacity building programmes to enable parliamentarians to

fully accomplish their mission of parliamentary oversight of public finances as provided in the fiscal regime of the State.

I am pleased to disclose here that the guiding instruments of these missions are under completion. The Code of conduct and ethics applicable to parliamentary oversight of public finance is now complete and its procedural manual is being studied.

On another score, let me mention that our period of recess which ends today was marked by a number of activities. This is proof, if necessary, that our Chamber was not dormant.

On the contrary, in line with our policy of building the capacity of MPs and staff, whose primary objective is to have qualified and competent human resources, many seminars and activities were organized to that effect. We can cite:

- The capacity building seminar for MPs who are members of Finance and Budget Committee, the key persons of this session; as well as that of the members of the technical support unit to the said Committee;
- Capacity building seminars for staff of the National Assembly, jointly organized by the National School of Administration (ENA) of Paris and the Training Centre for Parliamentary Administration (CEFAP) within the

framework partnership between *ENA de Paris* and the National Assembly of Cameroon;

- The seminar organized in Kribi for staff of the parliamentary administration which focused on the computerization of the financial services and human resources of the National Assembly.

Simultaneously to all these training sessions, mention should be made of the remarkable activities of parliamentary networks that made field trips during recess in a bid to reach out to the local population and create a continuum of parliamentary work.

I would like to buttress my statements by making allusions to three activities organized within that framework. They include:

- the training seminar on leadership and entrepreneurship and information on youth-opportunities, organized for 150 youths officials of the National Youth Council of Mfoundi by the Parliamentary Network "*espérance jeunes*" (REJE);
- the workshop organized by the Parliamentary Network for the Sustainable Management of the Central Africa Forest Ecosystems (REPAR) on 30th July which focused on the distribution of annual forestry royalties;

- the commemoration of the International Day of Peace on 21st September 2015 by the Parliamentary Network for Peace and Conflict Resolution; and finally
- the celebration of the International Day of Democracy within the context of annual activities of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU).

Still within the same vein of activities carried out during recess, mention should be made of the participation of delegations of Cameroonian parliamentarians in several international forums which include:

- The 133rd Assembly of the Inter-parliamentary Union (UIP) held from the 17th to the 21st October 2015, in Geneva, Switzerland;
- The General Assembly of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Africa Region held from the 9th to the 15th August, in Nairobi, Kenya;
- The Executive Committee Meeting of the CPA General Assembly on 8th October 2015, in London;
- The meeting of Speakers of Parliament members of the CPA in Accra from the 1st to the 7th November **2015**.

Also, it is in fact my pleasure to close this speech by pointing out the intense diplomatic activities carried out by our House which should not be ignored.

About fifteen colourful audiences were granted during recess. The most recent was that granted to the Bundestag Parliamentary Delegation, led by Mr. UWE KEKERITZ, Member of the German Federal Parliament, and President of the Parliamentary Friendship Group for West and Central Africa. These various audiences enabled us to strengthen our Parliamentary Diplomacy with its recent accomplishments at the international level being a proof of its vitality and effectiveness.

**Mr. President of the Senate,
Mr. Prime Minister, Head of Government,
The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of International Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

While reiterating my welcome wishes to our August House, I would like to urge my colleagues, the Honourable Members of Parliament, to remain focused on what justifies our presence in this Hemicycle, in this Month of November and to pay keen

attention so that the outcome of our debates shall honour the people of Cameroon that we represent.

I do count on your usual sense of responsibility and patriotism. In that regard and while wishing success in our deliberations, I declare open the proceedings of the third ordinary session of our House for the 2015 Legislative year.

Long Live the National Assembly!

Long Live His Excellency Paul BIYA, President of the Republic, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces!

Long Live Cameroon!

Thank You.