

PRESS RELEASE ON THE “FIRST AUDIT REPORT OF THE AUDIT BENCH ON THE USE OF THE SPECIAL NATIONAL SOLIDARITY FUND FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS”

In a document that has recently appeared in the public arena, the Audit Bench of the Supreme Court presents a summary of what is supposed to be its general audit report “on the use of resources of the national solidarity trust fund for the fight against the coronavirus”. This document is questionable in many respects. Its legal status is far from being established. Not only is it not precisely dated (there is a reference to March 2021), but it is neither signed nor clear as to who commissioned it.

The document does state that an independent audit of the special fund has been provided for in various relevant laws and regulations and that the results of the audit should be made public. However, there is no trace of this document on the websites of the competent public institutions that are entitled to make it public. It was however understood, from the very creation of the Special National Solidarity Fund for the fight against the Coronavirus, that the Audit Bench would carry out an independent audit on the use of the resources of this facility as of the end of the 2020 financial year. In this respect, it is surprising that instead of a complete audit report, a summary of an incomplete report was circulated through curious channels.

One cannot help but wonder about the appropriateness of publishing this summary document, the content of which is not free of political ulterior undertones, particularly in the context of the current restlessness. What is the relevance of publishing conclusions concerning only two ministries out of a total of 21 audited? The Audit Bench says that it favoured, to begin with, the administrations that (supposedly) played a central role in the government's plan to respond to the pandemic and those for which significant budgetary credits were consumed. This would explain the choice of the Ministry of Public Health, recipient of an allocation of more than CFAF 45 billion, and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI). Note is duly taken of that.

An unavoidable question remains: why an audit of the COVID-19 fund and not of the management of activities related to the aborted 2019 AFCON?

This being the case, and despite the few grey areas noted above, the work undertaken by the Audit Bench should, at least in principle, be welcomed. The conclusions, even partial, of its progress report deserve attention, especially as they seem to be based on appropriate evidence. From this point of view, the facts reported by the Audit Bench leave no doubt about the constant insensitivity of the regime in power to the suffering of the Cameroonian people, whose interests are once again sacrificed on the altar of illicit enrichment, even in the context of a global pandemic. In fact, the 180 billion CFA francs that are the subject of this audit were mobilised as a matter of urgency in the face of the humanitarian disaster that

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continues to rage, threatening to destroy more lives. It is literally a crime against humanity when funds intended to address a global health emergency are diverted in this way.

The misuse of the systems of derogation, particularly the use of “special contracts”, is a strategy widely used by members of the government and their agents for the purpose of personal enrichment. With impunity maintained and encouraged, it is not surprising that the practices validated in the context of the fraudulent 2019 AFCON contracts are now a constant “jurisprudence” under the so-called “New Deal” regime. The diversion of public wealth through various criminal processes, including overbilling and overspending, has become normalised. Apart from the 2019 African Cup of Nations, infrastructure contracts are a good example of these criminal practices, as is the constant potential for conflicts of interest due to the relationship between the recipients of many contracts and the relevant political or administrative officials.

It is deplorable that many members of the government did not respond to requests for information from the Audit Bench in the framework of this audit, thus casting legitimate suspicion on the conditions under which many contracts under their authority were awarded. It is equally regrettable that this unacceptable disregard of the Supreme Court of Cameroon, the highest judicial institution in the country, which constitutes a clear violation of the law by the ministers concerned, is not qualified as such by the Bench in its report.

With less than 534,604,955 CFA francs, Survie - Cameroon Survival Initiative (SCSI) has provided more effective support to the Cameroonian population in the fight against Covid-19, despite the hostility shown by the government authorities who tried in vain to block the distribution of products needed to reinforce the barrier measures, notably through brutal and arbitrary arrests of volunteers, and have refused to receive protective equipment for the care-givers and the management of Covid-19 patients, which are absent in many health facilities in the country, etc. To date, the Orange Money and Mobile Money accounts in which Cameroonians have made donations to their compatriots within the framework of the SCSI humanitarian operation remain blocked due to the same government authorities targeted by the audit of the Supreme Court Audit Bench.

It is hoped that the Audit Bench will produce its exhaustive report and make it public as soon as possible, in its entirety and in accordance with the provisions of the law on the Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management. It is imperative that the Bench follows up on the thirty recommendations it has made, as it is obliged to do, and that it regularly makes the results known to the public.

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In view of the magnitude of the misappropriation of public funds denounced for years by political actors and brought to light by the audit of the Audit Bench, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement demands:

1- That a truly independent audit be carried out on the management of all public funds mobilised in the fight against Covid-19 in Cameroon. This truly independent audit should shed light on this other vast governmental financial scandal, which is all the more revolting as it concerns funds intended to save Cameroon's populations in mortal danger.

2- That all governmental and administrative officials implicated in the scandal of the management of the Covid-19 funds in our country be discharged from their functions, in order to answer for their actions before justice, and to avoid possible manipulation of evidence.

3- That the Audit Bench as well as all State institutions in charge of controlling the management of public wealth be given the power to refer directly to the courts cases of irregularities brought to light by their controls.

Done on 25 May 2021