

STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE MRC ON THE CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE DELETERIOUS SOCIAL CLIMATE IN CAMEROON

My dear compatriots,

Since 2018, the government in power had made the organization of the African Cup of Nations (ACN) the ultimate goal of its action. After many ups and downs, the event finally took place last January. But it was marked by a human tragedy without precedent in the history of this continental competition: the death of several people at the Olembe stadium, in circumstances on which all the light has not been shed and the responsibilities established. In my own name and in the name of the militants and sympathizers of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), I send my sincere condolences to the families of the victims, and to the injured a speedy recovery.

ACN 2021/2022 had been thought by the government to be a drug that could make the people forget the misdeeds and multiple defects of the regime and the evils that undermine their daily lives. Unfortunately, the effect of this drug, has been annihilated by the drama of Olembe above recalled by the mixed results of the Indomitable Lions who, stopping in the semi- finals, have not performed better than their elders in 1972, contrary to the boasts of blind support of power. This drama and failure caused a painful social awakening, the day after the hangover.

Thus, while waiting for the financial balance sheet of this event that has bled our country, we can see with the many areas of social tensions that the hoped miracle has turned into a mirage that does not resist the brutal reality of the ordinary life of Cameroonians. Indeed, as soon as the curtain falls on this competition, various more crucial social problems

remind us that they did not disappear with this football tournament, on the contrary they have been exacerbated. Cameroonians are still confronted with the problem of high living costs, which is a consequence of the soaring prices of basic commodities and the decline in purchasing power in a country that has not seen a general increase in salaries for many years; incessant and untimely electricity and water cuts; and the homelessness of education sector personnel, which has led to the ongoing teachers' strike.

To these social problems should be added the persistence of security crises in the Far North region, which is still confronted with attacks, albeit very sporadic, by the Boko Haram sect, in the East, with episodic incursions by Central African rebels, and in the English-speaking regions of the North-West and South-West, where fratricidal warfare continues.

I/ On soaring prices, erosion of purchasing power and the phenomenon of high living costs, aggravated by endemic unemployment

On November 9, 2021, GICAM alerted the government to the urgent need to open a frank dialogue with the private sector, particularly importers, to anticipate the urgent measures to be taken to curb the generalized rise in the price of raw materials and freight. The employers' organization, announced that its members would be unable, beyond January 1, 2022, to continue to conduct their activities if the government did not react promptly to its call for help.

But, in its usual arrogant manner, the government did not see fit to engage in the requested consultation. It decided unilaterally, by an act of the Minister of Finance dated November 16, 2021, to discount 80% of the cost of freight, valid until February 28, 2022 and renewable if necessary. This bureaucratic measure, which was immediately rejected by the employers who found it far below their expectations, quickly proved to be ineffective. Thus, by failing to engage in dialogue with business leaders, who are the first to be affected by price fluctuations on international markets, the government itself created the conditions for widespread price inflation in the country. Companies are not responsible for subsidizing the price of food and goods. It was foreseeable that they would pass on the increased cost of freight and raw materials to the end consumer.

With the surge in prices, some products have become not only excessively expensive, but increasingly extremely rare on the market to the point where we are witnessing some rationing of a staple like oil. The clumsy media staging of the Ministry of Commerce has had no effect on the surge in prices. The weight and price of bread are a perfect illustration of the government's inability and powerlessness to deal with the high cost of living, which is particularly hard on the poorest segments of the population, who are already suffering from structural poverty. Those who work hard, take loans from banks or turn to loan sharks and mortgage their meager possessions to survive or create small-scale activities on which they pay taxes. As for those who have fabricated the siphoning of public funds, notably from line 94 or the famous line 65 of the state budget managed by the Minister of Finance, they swim in indecent opulence and impunity. Some of them showed the extent of their contempt for Cameroonians and their suffering in a VIP room at the Olembe Stadium during the ACN.

The brutal repercussion of the vertiginous rise in the price of raw materials and freight on consumer prices is felt all the more violently since the purchasing power of Cameroonians is currently very low.

According to a study by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) conducted between 2016 and 2021 and released on February 23, 2022, in a context of stable nominal disposable wages, "the general price level has increased by 9.2% in 5 years." In the same period, wages have not changed. The direct consequence of this reality is the significant decline in the purchasing power of households at a time when the institute notes a galloping inflation visible through the rise in prices of food (+12.5%), clothing and footwear (+10.6%), housing, water, gas, electricity and other fuels (+8.4%), restaurants and hotels (+12.8%) and transport (+6.4%).

(<https://www.google.com/.../www.../index.php/gestion-publique/2402-17553-pouvoir-d-achat-en-5-ans-les-prix-augmentent-de-9-25-au-cameroun-alors-que-les-salaires-stagnent-ins/amp>)

The INS study, which is not suspected of being manipulated to destabilize the regime, reveals that in the absence of wage increases, the current purchasing power of Cameroonian households does not allow them to cope with inflation.

This socio-economic situation which demoralizes Cameroonian families is aggravated by the lack of employment, underemployment and endemic unemployment which hit young

people hard, despite the fictitious jobs announced year after year by the President of the Republic in office. In fact, for some time now, he has been announcing the creation of approximately five hundred thousand (500,000) jobs in our country. There is no need for statistical studies to see that this is a deception, as the idleness of our youth is spread out in broad daylight on the sidewalks of our cities and in all places of perdition. The truth is that Mr. Paul BIYA and his government are the only ones who know who, when and in which sectors these jobs are created.

II/ On the frequent, untimely and prolonged cuts of electricity and water

In addition to insecurity due to armed conflict and attacks by terrorist groups, food insecurity threatens our country. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-Cameroon, famine hangs over nearly a million people in the Far North region, which has become a martyrdom region of poverty in our country over the years. Like the other regions facing armed conflict, it has all the problems, and the high cost of living that affects the whole country has increased the extreme vulnerability of the people in this region.

4

Since the early 2000s, Cameroon has been plunged into a serious energy crisis characterized by permanent load shedding on electricity networks throughout the country. Yet Cameroon's energy potential is estimated at around 25,000 MW. The government claims that the country's installed energy capacity is 1500 MW and plans to increase this to 5000 MW by 2030. To achieve this goal, it says it must invest 6,000 billion new CFA francs. However, it has already spent several thousand billion francs on the construction of dams, notably the Mapé reservoir dam, the Mekin hydroelectric dam, the Memve'ele hydroelectric dam and the Mokolo hydroelectric dam, without any convincing results. This is also an opportunity to demand a parliamentary audit - technical, financial and judicial - of all these projects, which there is every reason to believe are in reality nothing but white elephants. As in many other sectors, the government's public energy policies have failed, and the ongoing construction of the Nachtigal dam, which is being presented as the miracle solution to our energy problems, will not significantly change the situation. This is not a value judgement, but rather a statement of fact: despite huge investments, the country remains in the dark. The few households connected to electrical network are fed up with the untimely cuts and the drop in voltage that ruin their lives, damage their small electrical appliances as well as their food bought at a high price and kept in the freezers.

Industries are not rushing into the country because of the lack of available energy in quantity and continuity, and those that are already installed can no longer afford the interruptions of production lines because of the lack of electricity, the most vulnerable being small individual or family businesses that cannot afford the luxury of operating on generators.

Our country has the second largest hydroelectric potential on the African continent. Its geographical position offers opportunities in the exploitation of other energy sources such as solar.

In addition to the serious shortage of electricity, the country, which has a dense hydrographic basin with major rivers running through it, is almost completely without drinking water in both urban and rural areas. In all cities, including the capital, Yaoundé, and the economic metropolis, Douala, the rate of connection to the drinking water network is derisory. The resurgence of waterborne diseases so-called "dirt" diseases such as cholera, which has been raging since the beginning of 2022 in the Littoral region, is a clearer indication of the misdeeds of a government that is indifferent to the fate of the population, which is abandoned to poverty that is worsening year after year. The haphazard and opaque privatization of SNEC, the country's historic water supply and distribution company, has led to a scandal that must be fully investigated and responsibilities established. The water and electricity supply contracts signed by Cameroonian customers of companies providing services in these areas inflict a double penalty on them, because, on the one hand, these supply contracts are transformed into cut-off contracts, and on the other hand, they have become consent to the scam insofar as even in the absence of consumption of water or electricity they must nevertheless pay the bills at the risk of being imposed penalties or simply to note the withdrawal of the meter. As for electricity, the public policy of access to water of the regime in place for forty years is an appalling and revolting failure.

III/ On the teachers' strike

For almost three weeks now, teachers have been on strike in Cameroon, confronted with the permanent cunning of the authorities in the face of their legitimate demand for the respect of their rights by their employer, the State. Having the proof that the leaders of their different unions had compromised, individually and collectively, secondary school

teachers decided to take their destiny into their own hands through the operation "On a Trop Souffert" (OTS). One discovers, dumbfounded, the extent of their psychological and moral sufferings that have been endured in silence for decades, due to the mismanagement of a CPDM regime that has no moral sense nor any inhumanity. The stories of the teachers, some of whom have been working without salaries for more than ten years or have not received any rights to their promotions for twenty-eight years, is simply unbearable. It was known that the strong involvement of teachers in the struggle for the advent of freedom and democracy in Cameroon in the early 1990s had made them the privileged target of the regime which decided to make them homeless. Destroying this category of workers, the foundation of a middle class then emerging, had become an obsession for this regime. One is not far from thinking that the regime in place decided, planned and executed with an assumed cynicism the martyrdom of teachers. Elsewhere, teachers are pampered because of their essential role in the training of Man, the citizen, the worker, the creator of wealth and even of future leaders. One day, Cameroonian students who have reached high positions in society should write admiringly and gratefully to their teachers, secondary school teachers, and even higher education teachers, these words of Albert Camus to his teacher, Louis Germain, after his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957: "I don't make a world of this kind of honor for myself, but this one is at least an opportunity to tell you what you have been and still are for me, and to assure you that your efforts, your work and the generous heart you put into it are still alive in one of your little schoolchildren who, despite age, has not ceased to be your grateful pupil" (Translated by us).

How can it be understood that while teachers withered by suffering and contempt were demonstrating their anger, the government preferred to distribute to the divisional authorities some forty brand new all-terrain vehicles, each of which cost several tens of millions of CFA francs? This clearly shows that the education of Cameroon's youth is not the priority of the government in place. The salaries, promotions and other financial benefits of civil servants and state employees, including teachers of all categories, are included in the state budget each year, so why have arrears of nearly 200 billion been accumulated and teachers have to humiliate themselves, beg, and storm to get what they are due?

Now that the students, aware that their future is at stake in this teachers' strike, have taken to the streets, the "Very High Directives of MR. THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC" remember that one could find "an envelope of 2.7 billion CFA francs that will be used to

pay the arrears due to teachers mobilized for the correction of official examinations organized by the Office of the Baccalaureate of Cameroon for the sessions of June 2020 and 2021. A pinhead has been chosen where it is necessary to attack an elephant. The arrears in question are most of the teachers' problems. There is no mention of those who have been working for 30 years with a number or salary, those who have 60 months of arrears, the numerous unpaid bonuses and allowances, their housing problems, etc.

Mr. HAMIDOU, a teacher at Beka High School, died on March 8 in Jimeta, Nigeria, for lack of means to pay for medical care, because he had no civil service number and had not been paid for ten (10) years. He will remain the emblematic figure of this dehumanized Cameroonian society where one can watch people suffer for many years and die with total indifference on the part of those who are supposed to look after the well-being of all.

If the current government really wants to solve the thorny problem of the teachers' strike, it will have to take it in hand.

It should be remembered, in case the government has missed it, that for the moment the teachers united under the OTS banner are not demanding an increase in their modest salaries or any improvement in their working conditions. They claim, after nearly thirty years for some, simply the payment of their rights, their salaries, advances etc..

On a personal basis and in the name of the militants and sympathizers of the MRC, I can only be in complete solidarity with the legitimate objectives and peaceful modalities of the strike of the striking teachers under the OTS banner.

The CPDM-regime respects only those professional categories that contribute to the terror of the population, so that it can stay in power forever. To the men and women who belong to these professional categories who exercise blind political repression on the citizens in order to benefit selfishly from privileges, I would like to remind them that, if they have forgotten that it is primary school teachers, secondary school teachers and university teachers who made them what they have become today, let them have a moment of lucidity to realize that the future of their children or descendants depends on the respect and recognition that society grants to teachers, to all teachers without exception

This is an opportunity for me to strongly condemn the repressive turn that the regime wants to give to the legitimate and peaceful strike of OTS, and which would not spare the students who have the audacity to worry about their school future. The government will

be held solely responsible for any incident that may occur as a result of the use of force to stifle the legitimate and peaceful demands of teachers, and now also the protests of students.

In view of the release of the primary school teachers' union and the communiqué issued by the higher education teachers' union on Monday, March 7, 2020, there is a general malaise in the education family. All teachers, from primary to higher education, suffer from the lack of consideration and contempt of the CPDM regime. They are the unloved of the Cameroonian public service.

If the government has sunk thousands of billions of CFA francs into the organization of the 2022 African Cup of Nations, it can also make some efforts to liquidate the rights of primary, secondary and higher education teachers. These women and men also have family responsibilities in the same way as the President of the Republic and all the government's top officials, the pantouflagers of the various State institutions and the high-ranking civil servants who accumulate all the advantages and privileges, like the civil servants and other financial personnel.

8

In addition to settling the rights of the teaching staff, the State must urgently convene the “Etats Généraux” of Education, including the council of higher education that we have been waiting for for 40 years, in order to examine in depth the evils that undermine this strategic sector for any modern nation and to define its fundamental orientations.

It is in the government's interest to avoid repeating the mistakes and serious errors observed in its management of the Anglophone crisis, which, if poorly managed, turned into a civil war with lasting consequences.

The National President

Maurice KAMTO

Done in Yaoundé, on March 9, 2022